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**ANXIOUS ASSUMPTIONS:
ANXIETY, EXPERIENCE, AND LITERARY
REPRESENTATION IN MODERNITY**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LITERATURE

by

Brian Clack

March 2017

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Section One The Etiology of Modernity's Anxiety	9
Section Two The Experience of Modernity, its Metaphors, and the Site of Anxiety	37
Section Three Zola's Volatile Representations and Engagement with Empty(ied) Space	83
Bibliography	121

ABSTRACT

Brian Clack

Anxious Assumptions: Anxiety, Experience, and Literary Representation in Modernity

This thesis explores the intersections of anxiety, experience, and literary representation in modernity, with a focus on the late nineteenth century. Anxiety is traditionally thought to be the catalyst for and subject of modern literature. This assumption is frequently made with minimal consideration for the nature of anxiety or the material experience that gives rise to it. This thesis explores the etiology of anxiety and resituates its unique presence in modernity within a dialectical framework. I use this framework to reconsider political and economic experience in Europe during the nineteenth century and its relationship with anxiety. I argue for a new conception, volatility of experience, which better captures the plurality of movement during this time. In section three, I use this conceptualization to consider two works of Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* and how these texts represent volatility while attempting to manage its resulting anxiety through the incorporation of colonial space.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety animates the modern fictional narrative. It is both the catalyst for and primary subject of a wide variety of literary output. In *Useful Fictions*, Michael Austin makes this connection simply: “humans think largely in narratives... so our anxiety always has a narrative component. Therefore, so must its resolution” (xv). In his work on mythic literary structures, Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that the purpose of ancient myth was to provide “a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)” – another form of anxiety management to be sure (229). While structurally different from myth, the modern novel has taken up myth’s underlying project in more complex and comprehensive ways. This effort is timely because modernity is thought to be the most anxious epoch in human history – as the title of W.H. Auden’s famous eclogue makes clear, modernity is nothing less than *the age of anxiety*.

The novel’s apprehensions of anxiety are vast and varied. Narrative structures can engage with human experience in more or less direct ways, but in every instance some level of engagement with human experience is present in the text. Jonathan Culler comments: “literature takes as its subject all human experience, and particularly the ordering, interpreting, and articulating of experience...” (10). In other words, the fictional text is derived from experience while also taking an active role in shaping that experience. Similar to other social discourses of modernity, the modern novel participates in an accelerating process of reflexivity, to use Anthony

Giddens' term.¹ Despite this dialectical relationship, contemporary literary critique too often begins and ends with the aesthetic object. Interpretations of fiction that lay claim to the representation of human experience are informed by unexplained (and possibly unexamined) assumptions specific to the theorist or to the field of literary criticism more generally. In these instances, the text becomes a means to represent experience without sufficiently accounting for the experiential foundation critical to the very representations the text may explore. I find this approach to be particularly problematic in the assessments of many late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature texts. These texts are pre-diagnosed by the literary critic – modern anxiety is assumed to animate them without a corresponding inquiry into the nature of collective social anxiety and the historical experience that may have given rise to their creation.

This thesis attempts to avoid this pitfall. I will engage with certain literary texts of the late nineteenth century only after an exploration of the etiological basis for social anxiety and the changing nature of experience concurrent with their production. My intention is not to tear down or deconstruct the trope of modern anxiety, so much as to reconstruct the basis for its existence in a way that might lead to fresh insights. The following questions will serve as a guide: How should collective social anxiety be defined and what temporal framework is best suited for understanding its etiology? Have certain forms of social commentary about anxiety, particularly those focusing

¹ Giddens defines reflexivity as a process in which thought and action are refracted back upon one another. For Giddens, the speed of this process is constantly increasing in modernity and the limitations on possibilities of experience inscribed by past traditions are increasingly weakened. See *The Consequences of Modernity* (36-9).

exclusively on the loss of a particular object, limited our ability to comprehend its past and present affect? How should the changing nature of material experience in late nineteenth century Europe be conceptualized so as to best understand its implications on social expectations for the future? In what ways have certain iconic metaphors of modernity served to limit contemporary understandings of the affect of experience during the late nineteenth century? How effectively are expectations for the future understood and managed by collective identity and the social institutions that represent them? These questions form the basis for the first two sections of this thesis. In the third and final section, I will apply conceptualizations of anxiety and modern experience developed in the first two sections to several works of Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*.

In section one, I explore the etiological basis for the affect of anxiety and attempt to create a framework through which modern experience might be better understood. Despite a multiplicity of contemporary and historical meanings, no affective aspect of modernity is spoken of more apodictically than anxiety. Modern anxiety might be something akin to cosmology's dark matter – invisible and un-measurable but of whose existence we have no doubt. An exploration of psychoanalytic inquiries into anxiety does provide some consistency regarding anxiety's temporal and relational nature. The affect of anxiety resides in the present, but it is generated by presumptions of a threatening future.² Despite this consistency, anxiety in social

² Given contemporary debates regarding the meaning of affect (as opposed to emotion), I should note that I use the term affect in this thesis to indicate bodily or collective social feelings that are lacking a

commentary is too often fixated on the loss of a particular object or way of life (often described as a loss of intrinsic meaning or realness). Commentary like this is typically followed by a call for a return to the past as a solution to present anxieties. These reclamation projects are often flawed given their failure to consider the particular ways in which this lost way of life informed a social identity effective at managing future expectations at that time. In other words, the dialectical relationship between social identity and collective expectations for future experience is critical to the understanding of collective social anxiety.

In section two, I consider material experience in nineteenth century Europe and how we represent this experience in contemporary discourse. I approach my evaluation through the lens developed in section one, which I also supplement with the work of Reinhart Koselleck. His belief that the affect of time “is bound up with social and political actions” makes his theorizations particularly useful to my temporal framework for anxiety. When we consider a number of theoretical assessments of the nature of experience in modernity, two themes emerge: the initiation of change and the acceleration of experience. For the theorists who advance these assessments, modernity represents the moment in which the shackles of tradition are broken and the principles of *historia magistra vitae* become ineffective. Once initiated, the rate of change is thought to be in a constant state of acceleration.

specific underlying object. In this regard, I broadly follow the work of Fredric Jameson and Rei Terada – see Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism* (32).

These themes are often communicated in contemporary discourse in figurative ways that obscure the full nature of modern experience. I identify two metaphors that have had a disproportionate effect, both having risen to the status of privileged signifier: modernity as a new state of matter (based in part on Marx's famous comment in *The Communist Manifesto* that "all that is solid melts into air"); and modernity as that technological icon of the nineteenth century, the railway train. These metaphors are useful, but, as I will argue, their resulting visualizations are also problematic. A review of certain political and economic experiences of nineteenth century Europe, France in particular, suggests an environment whose affects (i.e., what life feels like at this time) are largely inconsistent with the visualizations generated by these metaphors. Instead of the linear movement implied by these metaphors and generalized notions of progress, we find experience to be subject to extreme fluctuation – constantly shifting political winds and a series of economic expansions and crises, both large and small.

I will argue that a new conceptualization of movement in modernity is necessary. I term this the *volatility of experience*. Volatility captures both increasing overall speed as well as the fluctuations (the ups and downs, the starts and stops, the accelerations and decelerations) inherent to the experience of modernity. This latter movement is often obscured in narratives of modern progress or through metaphors such as the railway train that imply a form of telic linear motion. In considering implications for anxiety, volatility's effects are twofold: it expands collective expectations for the future while complicating the reformulation of social institutions

and identities capable of assimilating these expanded possibilities. The increasing volatility of modern experience is critical to understanding modern anxiety.

In section three, I turn to the literary artifact of the late nineteenth century. Increasing volatility and its anxious effects are particularly relevant for the fiction writer of this time. Émile Zola (my primary focus in this section) states in his treatise on literary naturalism, *The Experimental Novel*: “for the naturalist novelist... all their work is the offspring of the doubt which seizes them in the presence of truths little known and phenomenon unexplained” (*Experimental* 19). For Zola and his naturalist contemporaries, the anxiety generated by modern experience had risen to a debilitating level. For Zola, this was an issue that could be managed through his fiction and whose “goal is plain – to know the determinism of phenomena and to make ourselves master of these phenomena” (*Experimental* 19). Zola’s objectives feel overly ambitious, if not quixotic, given the increasingly volatile nature of experience of his time. And yet for much of the twentieth century, literary critics frequently ascribed to Zola a strange kind of success – one in which his mode of descriptive naturalism generated fictional texts that were *too* stable and *too* predictable. Georg Lukács goes so far as to suggest that life in Zola’s texts “develops almost without movement or change” (123). For Lukács, Zola represents life as a form of permanent stasis lacking any aspect of volatility beyond the catastrophic.

Newer generations of critics have approached Zola differently, and I believe the concepts of anxiety and volatility can further their efforts in productive ways. In the final section of this thesis, I will argue that volatility is a constant and increasing

presence in two of Zola's more economically focused narratives of the *Rougon-Macquart* (*La Curée* and *L'Argent*) in ways that complicate historical criticisms of his work. In addition, I will use the concepts of anxiety and volatility to make visible the ways in which Zola attempts to manage the social anxieties of his time. In the case of *L'Argent*, I will argue that these attempts involve an aggressive push into colonial space whose abstracted representation can be read both as an attempt to represent the interconnectedness of space (a critical reason for modernity's volatility) and as a manipulation of that same colonial space so as to enhance its anxiety reducing effects.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that a primary objective for this thesis is to unglue modernity from the anxiety that has become its twin in contemporary discourse. I do so in the hopes that a reformulated concept of anxiety might serve as an effective tool with which to interrogate certain ossified notions of what it means to be modern. To do this effectively, though, a simultaneous exploration of changes in the material experiences of modernity is critical. For this reason, the sections that follow operate in two distinct registers – one affective (anxiety, temporality) and one material (economic, political, social). I do this based on a belief that these two registers are inextricably linked and that any genuine interrogation of one must inevitably involve the other. The concepts *site of anxiety* and *volatility of experience* form the basis of a framework that attempts to engage with both of these registers. In the case of Zola, they make visible the ways in which his fiction does not fit in the box traditionally assigned to French naturalism while simultaneously drawing out other limitations of his fiction that have received less attention. It is my hope that

these concepts might be more broadly applied in the future, including to our understandings of the experiences and anxieties of our own time.

SECTION ONE

The Etiology of Modernity's Anxiety

Descriptions of modernity are rarely universally accepted save one: modern times are anxious times, more so than any previous time in history. A diverse range of intellectual fields all have supported this representation including history, sociology, literary studies, and, of course, medicine. This is in spite of the fact that measuring levels of anxiety quantitatively, particularly across different time frames and varying geographies and cultures, is challenging, if not impossible. In his study of nineteenth century bourgeois experience in Western Europe, Peter Gay comments that “more than any of its predecessors, [the nineteenth century] was a time of unexampled hopes and unfamiliar anxieties. It was, as Gladstone said, ‘an agitated and expectant age’.” (45). Across the Atlantic, Dr. George Miller Beard commented in 1881 on the pervasiveness of “American nervousness,” and noted that the anxieties of the nineteenth century were “modern, and originally American; and no age, no country, and no form of civilization, not Greece, not Rome, not Spain, nor the Netherlands, in their days of glory possessed such maladies” (Stossel 295, 297). In Jackson Spielvogel’s sprawling history of Western civilization, the chapter on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is entitled “An Age of Modernity, Anxiety, and Imperialism.” Anxiety is not merely one affect of modernity among many – it has come to be *the* defining affect of the age.

Frank Kermode observes in *The Sense of an Ending* that “it seems to be a condition attaching to the exercise of thinking about the future that one should assume one’s own time to stand in extraordinary relation to it... We think our own crisis as pre-eminent, more worrying, more interesting than other crises” (94). Is it possible then that feelings regarding the intensity of modernity’s anxiety, typically characterized in apodictic and unequivocal ways, are merely a product of our temporal proximity to this era, an era that we are very much still living in? Possibly, and yet the sense that modernity’s anxieties are of a different sort in some intrinsic way remains, even if their intensity relative to other epochs is not measureable quantitatively. To characterize, as Gay does, the anxieties of modernity as “unfamiliar” (as opposed to collectively greater or less) relative to the anxieties of other times may be more productive, and this is how I will approach the subject. I believe that to understand the basis for the changing experience of anxiety in modernity, one must first understand the etiological basis for anxiety and then ask: what is it about the social or institutional aspects of modernity that has led to this new sense of unfamiliar and overwhelming anxiety? By better understanding anxiety’s etiology, we may also better recognize the shortcomings of certain characterizations of anxiety that are based exclusively on the loss of an object.

Before considering these questions, a working definition of anxiety is necessary. Conceptions of individual anxiety have been and continue to be fairly broad both in terms of anxiety’s presumed causes as well as the symptoms anxiety may produce. Scott Stossel points out that “the species of unpleasant emotion that twenty-five

hundred years ago was associated with *melaina chole* (ancient Greek for ‘black bile’) has since also been described, in sometimes overlapping succession, as ‘melancholy,’ ‘angst,’ ‘hypochondria,’ ‘hysteria,’ ‘vapors,’ ‘spleen,’ ‘neurasthenia,’ ‘neurosis,’ ‘psychoneurosis,’ ‘depression,’ ‘phobia,’ ‘anxiety,’ and ‘anxiety disorder,’” not to mention a longer list of colloquial terms that incorporate some notion of anxiety (34). It has only been over the last sixty years that anxiety as a disorder has been formally recognized in the manner we think of it today.³ Since then, a number of anxiety related disorders have been more specifically defined, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), social anxiety disorder, agora and other phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder. To speak of a disorder regarding collective social anxiety might seem unnecessary – disorder implies some level of deviation from normativity (the order against which disorder may be recognized) while the collective social experience of anxiety is what defines normativity itself.⁴ Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that in spite of the broad historical conceptions of anxiety, some level of consistency may be found in contemporary psychoanalytic definitions of anxiety and its related disorders that will

³ Stossel states that “In 1948, ‘psychoneurosis’ was the American Psychiatric Association’s term for what the organization would, with the introduction in 1968 of the second edition of psychiatry’s bible, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-II)*, officially designate simply as ‘neurosis’ and what it has, since the introduction of the third edition (DSM-III) in 1980, called ‘anxiety disorder’” (34).

⁴ One could argue that modernity’s collective social anxiety, relative to other specific time periods, constitutes a form of anxiety disorder (thus assessing levels of anxiety diachronically). As I have stated though, I do not intend to make an assessment of levels of anxiety relative to those of other time periods and have treated the period of modernity synchronically. Instead of a comparison to other time periods, I have tried to understand what it is about the social and institutional workings of modernity that create anxiety whose sensation is thought to be “unfamiliar.”

help to provide a better understanding of the basis for the collective experience of anxiety in modernity.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud makes a distinction between states of anxiety, fear, and fright, commenting that anxiety “describes a particular state of expecting [a] danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one” while fear “requires a definite object of which to be afraid” (11). Fright is the “name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it” and there is “something about anxiety that protects its subject against fright” (11). The distinction between fear and anxiety has remained largely intact and is generally accepted in most psychoanalytic descriptions of anxiety and its related disorders. The most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association defines anxiety disorders as follows:

Anxiety disorders include disorders that share features of excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioral disturbances. Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas *anxiety is anticipation of future threat*. Obviously, these two states overlap, but they also differ, with fear more often associated with surges of autonomic arousal necessary for fight or flight, thoughts of immediate danger, and escape behaviors, *and anxiety more often associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and cautious or avoidant behaviors*. (189, emphasis mine)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines anxiety as “the quality or state of being anxious; uneasiness or trouble of mind about some uncertain event; solicitude; concern.” While the definitions vary in terms of the mental and somatic symptoms of anxiety (i.e., “muscle tension,” “uneasiness or trouble of mind,” “inner turmoil”), each is consistent in suggesting that anxiety is rooted in a concern, legitimate or

otherwise, about some future event or events and an impending danger, whether real or perceived. Anxiety reaches beyond the present and into the realm of the unknown and the unknowable. But more precisely, it might be said that anxiety is rooted somewhere in the relationship between the present (where the affect of anxiety resides) and its relationship with a presumably dangerous future that is thought to be threatening. Robert Jay Lifton, the noted twentieth century psychiatrist, effectively captures this relationship by defining anxiety as “a sense of foreboding stemming from a threat to the vitality of the self, or, more severely, from the anticipation of the fragmentation of the self” (Stossel 36).

Despite the relative consistency regarding the role that one’s sense of the future plays in the generation of anxiety, there is a tendency in social commentary (both political and literary, and from those with conservative as well as progressive political leanings) to overemphasize the loss of an object, often that of a past way of life, a custom, or a tradition, as the reason for increasing social anxieties. This focus on the lost object frequently fails to consider the ways in which that particular object was at the center of a dialectical relationship between a past social identity (defined in part by the object in question) *and* a set of collective future expectations (also defined in part by the object in question). Overemphasis on the loss of the object thus obscures a more nuanced understanding of its historical place. The result is an essentialized object (as opposed to an understanding of its role in social relationships at a prior time) that the critic then uses to generate a desire for its reclamation – the desire to bring the object out of the past and restore it to the present in all its presumed former

glory. The object's efficacy in reducing present social anxiety given contemporary social structures is often not considered. Frequently, these longings for a past portray the object in question as representing a "real" or "intrinsic" nature that has somehow been lost or forgotten. Interrogations of past social life are critical for present understanding, but we must seek to avoid these nostalgic readings of history that fetishize specific aspects of past social life and elevate them to the status of contemporary cure-all. To expand on this, let me review two essays on modern life that exhibit tones of nostalgic loss in reference to two critical social areas: how we work and how we consume. I will further compare these essays to other theorizations that better situate these same areas of social life within a temporal dialectic.

In Rollo May's 1950 book, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, he makes the frequently quoted argument that in modern life "competitive individualism militates against the experience of community, and that lack of community is a centrally important factor in contemporaneous anxiety" (191). His argument regarding the cultural aspects of anxiety (which is largely sourced from the work of the English economic historian and social critic Richard Tawney) is based, in part, on his belief that industrialized work for the majority of people in the nineteenth century had "lost its intrinsic meaning" (188); a meaning that was previously based on the creative satisfaction work provided as opposed to an exclusive focus on its wealth creating potential. There is validity to arguments such as these regarding the nature of work in the nineteenth century, but to only suggest a loss of "intrinsic meaning" is to mischaracterize the causes of modern anxiety.

Émile Durkheim also approaches questions of the nature of work in his influential text *On Suicide* (1897), but he does so in a manner that is more reflective of the ways in which work impacts desire and future expectation while also defining a present social identity that interacts with perceived possibilities of the future. In this text, Durkheim interrogates traditional explanations regarding the act of suicide – an act that had previously been thought to be an exclusively individual act, one in which despair or mental illness were the only possible causes. For Durkheim, these reasons could not explain the overall increase in the rate of suicide during the nineteenth century or the differing rates of suicide among European nations during this time. He turns to an analysis of structural differences in social organization to better explain the differing rates of suicide believing that “society... is not only an object that draws towards itself the feelings and the actions of individuals, with more or less intensity. It is also a force that directs them” (262). Durkheim believes that work, among other social acts, creates a collective social conscience which then regulates the individual and his desires – “at every moment of history, there is a vague feeling in the moral conscience of societies about what is the respective worth of the different social services, the relative remuneration due to each of them and consequently what is the degree of comfort appropriate to the average worker in every profession” (272). While Durkheim outlines three socially based categories in evaluating acts of suicide (the egotistical, the altruistic, and the anomic), I want to focus on the category he

most closely associates with changes to the manner of work during the nineteenth century: anomic suicide.⁵

Durkheim recognizes both the great economic prosperity that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as the economic disturbances (financial crises, bankruptcies, etc.) that accompanied this expansion. Interestingly, Durkheim finds that the rate of suicide is not exclusively associated with increasing instances of poverty but rather with extreme economic changes more generally, both positive and negative.⁶ Durkheim comments on the sociological impact (what he terms the “regulatory” impact) of improved economic conditions on social consciousness:

...the spectacle of its greater fortune awakes all sorts of longings around and below it. Opinion is disoriented and no longer curbs appetites, while these in turn no longer know the bounds at which they should stop. In any event, they are at the same moment in a state of natural erethism for the sole reason that the general vitality is more intense. *Because prosperity has grown, desires are higher.* The richer prey that is offered to them stimulates them and makes them more demanding, at the very moment when traditional rules have lost some of their authority. *The state of disorganization, or anomie, is thus reinforced by the fact that passions are less disciplined at the very time when they need a stronger discipline.* (277, emphasis mine)

Durkheim highlights the manner in which prosperity fuels desire and increases collective expectation while simultaneously loosening the past rules by which society evaluates future possibilities. It is the resulting imbalance between social identity (defined both in past and present experience) and expectations for the future (based

⁵ While a greater incidence of suicide is not necessarily perfectly correlated with increased collective feelings of anxiety, I believe it is logical to assume some level of positive correlation. Durkheim notes individuals committing anomic suicide often have feelings of “exasperated weariness,” “violent irritation,” and “exaggerated depression” (314, 359).

⁶ “So little is it the case that a rise in poverty leads to a rise in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is rapidly to increase a country’s prosperity, act on suicide in the same way as economic disasters” (264).

on present experience) that creates a “state of disorganization,” a state that leads to social discomfort and greater numbers of anomic suicide. For Durkheim, the nature of work and economic prosperity cannot be judged in any kind of absolute way – they must be considered in terms of how they effect social identity and collective future expectation. States of disorganization are the result of disproportionate effects on identity and expectation and the resulting imbalance between these two temporally oriented categories (as opposed to differences between a present nature of work and some natural or ideal form that has been lost).

Narratives of loss persist in contemporary discourse, particularly as they pertain to the material product of work under capitalism, or the commodity. Let us consider Kalle Lasn’s popular “Culture Jamming” (1999) in which he argues for a commitment to “the pursuit of small, spontaneous movements of truth” as a form of revolt against a postmodern existence awash in the mediatory nature of the commodity spectacle (414). To combat the ubiquitous presence of corporate marketing and branding (i.e., making certain commodities appear to be “cool”), Lasn offers a number of “demarketing” and “uncooling” acts that might lessen the spectacle of some commodities, including cars, jeans, and fast food. These acts are designed to be “daily leaps of faith, or of courage – acts that take [consumers] outside market-structured consciousness – long enough to get a taste of real living” (419). Lasn’s brand of revolution is rooted in a number of historical movements, but the work of Guy DeBord and the Situationists of the 1950s is particularly influential for him. He summarizes their work as follows:

Everything human beings once *experienced directly* had been turned into a representation, a show put on by someone else. *Real living* had been replaced by pre-packaged experiences and media-created events. *Immediacy* was gone. Now there was only “mediacy” – life as mediated through other instruments, life as a media creation. The Situationists used the term “kidnapped”: the spectacle had “kidnapped” our real lives, co-opting whatever *authenticity* we once had. (416, emphasis mine)

For the Situationists and Lasn, modern media and commodity culture “slowly corrodes the human psyche” limiting one’s ability to live in an “authentic” manner (415). While the Situationists and Lasn are committed to living in a present with greater freedom (i.e., more directly, immediately, and authentically), this freedom is typically portrayed as being available to individuals or society only through a process of reclamation or a return to the past. As an example, a key trope for the Situationists that Lasn relies upon is that of “*détournement*.” Lasn describes *détournement* as a way “to take back the spectacle that kidnapped their lives. Literally a ‘diversion’ or ‘hijacking,’ *détournement* involved rerouting spectacular images, environments, ambiances and events to reverse or subvert their meaning, thus reclaiming them” (417). As with May’s theory on the lost intrinsic meaning of work, Lasn’s critique of commodity culture is heavily inflected with a narrative of loss and a desire to reclaim a nature of living that has been “kidnapped” from society.

Any discussion of commodity culture within capitalism is inevitably informed by Marx’s famous fourth part to chapter one of *Capital Volume I* – “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.” A detailed assessment of this section of *Capital Volume I* and its (mis)readings and (mis)use in economic, sociological, and psychoanalytic theorizations is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is important to note for this

discussion is that Marx's critique of the commodity is explained in the context of temporal movement; that of material history (of course) moving from a past to a present – one in which society has transitioned from a feudal age of slavery and serfdom to that of capitalism; the constitution of the commodity has changed from one of primarily use-value to a combination of use-value and value; degrees of abstraction have increased substantially through the ubiquity of the money form. Marx then, in his theory of the fetish, highlights the manner in which certain elements of modern existence become obscured or even “secret” in the practice of everyday life: the presence and movement of commodities obscure underlying social relations; the value of commodities obscures their underlying use-value; the abstractness of money obscures its connection with the material.

Critical to note in each of these cases is that the element obscured by the fetish can be found in its manifest form at a prior point in time: social relations are manifest in pre-capitalist societies; use-value and our connection to the material maintain their primacy in earlier stages of capitalist societies. While Marx is not advocating a return to the past in his theory of the fetish, the symmetry I have outlined here, one in which obscured elements of present social existence can be better located in their manifest forms at prior points in history, can at times prove too tempting to resist in social consciousness. Moishe Postone, the Marxist cultural theorist, has written about how the fetish can inspire readings of modern existence in which certain elements, typically those more “organically rooted” in a past existence, can be privileged in potentially dangerous ways. In his essay “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism,”

Postone notes that “most critical analyses of fetishized thought have concentrated on that strand of the antinomy which hypostatizes the abstract as transhistorical, so-called positive bourgeois thought,” but he also argues that there are other critical analyses that are “forms of Romanticism and revolt which, in terms of their own self-understandings, are anti-bourgeois, but which in fact hypostatize the concrete and thereby remain bound within the antinomy of capitalist social relations” (109). It is this latter form of critique, ones of “Romanticism and revolt” (Lasn’s “Culture Jamming” being a prime example), in which the obscured element of fetishized thought is privileged and a desire for its recovery initiated. For Postone, the fetishization of concrete labor in pre-war Germany supported a social consciousness in which “industrial capital... appears as the linear descendent of ‘natural’ or artisanal labor, in opposition to ‘parasitic’ finance capital. Whereas the former appears ‘organically rooted,’ the latter does not” (110). The apotheosis of the concrete in the form of industrial capital combined with an association of the Jew with parasitic finance capital provided the basis for a national imperative in which the extermination of European Jewry appeared to be a logical and necessary outcome. As Postone makes clear, these misplaced claims on the past are not only an ineffective means of containing present worries but can also be socially dangerous.

The critique of commodity culture is but one in which we find this desire to reach into the past for solutions to present social challenges and their resulting anxieties.

We are anxious because we are not what we once were – whether because of a loss of community, family, social relations, values, moral fabric, or some other prior way of

living. Why does social commentary exhibit these nostalgic tendencies linking anxiety to a loss of an object, a loss of what we assumed we had? A further genealogy of the concept of anxiety will help shed some additional light on this. In *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud referred to anxiety as a “nodal point” of psychoanalytic research, one representing a “riddle whose solution would be bound to throw a flood of light on our whole mental existence” (Stossel 3). It is clear that for Freud anxiety represented a mental function of the utmost importance in understanding the wider functioning of the human psyche but was also one of the functions of the mind most difficult to grasp. One can feel Freud struggling, particularly in his later writings, as he grapples with certain aspects of anxiety.⁷

Freud makes an important transition with respect to the basis of human anxiety during his career. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud asserts his belief that “neurotic anxiety is derived from sexual life and corresponds to libido which has been diverted from its purpose and has found no employment” (185). This is a view that he never fully relinquished and is one he will extend to society more generally in his later writings. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, written in 1930, Freud comments that he “cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual” and that “it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other

⁷ In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud comments with respect to anxiety that “It is almost humiliating that, after working so long, we should still be having difficulty in understanding the most fundamental facts” (83).

means?) of powerful instincts.” The affective manifestation of this collective process of suppression or repression is the “discontent” of the text’s title which Freud will also refer to as “unhappiness,” “discomfort,” “disappointment,” “suffering,” and “cultural frustration.”⁸ Freud does not use the term “anxiety” in describing the manifestations of society’s repressed instincts, but his connection of this process with that of the individual’s repression of libidinal instinct makes it possible to assume that some form of anxiety is, at least in part, an accompanying aspect of social discontent.

Even if we assume that anxiety (and discontent more generally) are the result of the social limitation on individual instincts, this theory still falls short in explaining the increasingly anxious state of modern humans. The limitations placed by society on sexual or other instinctual desires pre-dates any generally considered transition to modernity. So society may be angst ridden due to a sublimation of individual instincts, but what is it about modernity that has seemingly resulted in a fundamental change to the nature of anxiety relative to pre-modern times? Freud’s later writing on anxiety, particularly as outlined in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926), may be more helpful in considering this question. In this text, Freud outlines a theory of anxiety that places the source of its affect as a proactive function of the ego in dealing with real or perceived threats to its existence. In other words, anxiety becomes the means by which the psyche indicates and attempts to avoid particular threats as opposed to the mere result of repressed desire:

⁸ Freud’s initial suggestion for the English title of this work was “Man’s Discomfort in Civilization.” See Christopher’s Hitchens’ introduction to the text for an interesting discussion of the title’s translation and his belief that “discomfort” would have better captured the “important implication of a human restlessness with the very idea of being civilized” (14).

Anxiety is a reaction to a situation of danger. It is obviated by the ego's doing something to avoid that situation or to withdraw from it. It might be said that symptoms are created so as to prevent anxiety from emerging. It would be truer to say that *symptoms are created so as to avoid a danger-situation whose approach has been signaled by the emergence of anxiety*. (91, emphasis mine)

The spatial and temporal connotations of the “approach” of a danger situation are important to note. The danger addressed by anxiety is outside of the here and now of the ego – to the extent that a danger enters the here and now, the affect may be more appropriately described as fear. It is for this reason that the danger of anxiety often has a diffuse and intangible quality. It is that thing that one perceives to be already real, or has the overwhelming possibility of becoming real, but is not fully within the mental grasp of the individual ego and yet seemingly is a threat to the individual's identity and psychological unity.

Freud's expanded conception of anxiety is based largely on the experiences of childhood and, in particular, the child's relation to the mother. For Freud, psychosomatic development for young humans is particularly important given the longer period that humans are “in a condition of helplessness and dependence” relative to other animal species, making “the dangers of the outer world have a greater importance for it” (*Inhibitions* 139). Thus, the mother-child bond for human beings is particularly strong and the anxiety experienced in childhood lays the structural groundwork upon which future anxiety may occur. Freud puts this succinctly, suggesting that “the first anxiety is the loss of the object in the form of maternal care; after infancy and throughout the rest of life loss of love... becomes a

new and far more abiding danger and occasion for anxiety” (*Inhibitions* 106).⁹ But what exactly is the nature of the lost “object” that is at the heart of these childhood anxieties? In discussing the specific nature of the anxiety found in children missing a loved and longed-for person, Freud comments:

The child’s memory picture of the person longed-for is no doubt intensely cathected, probably in a hallucinatory way at first. But this has no effect; and now it seems as though the longing turns into anxiety. This anxiety has all the appearance of being an expression of not knowing what to do, as though in its still undeveloped state it did not know how to deal with the cathexis of longing... *But our next reflection takes us a step beyond this question of loss of object.* The reason why the infant in arms wants to perceive the presence of its mother is only because it already knows by experience that she gratifies all its needs without delay. *The situation, then, that it regards as a ‘danger’ and against which it wants to be safeguarded is one of non-gratification, of a growing tension due to need, against which it is helpless.* I think that if we adopt this view all the facts fall into place. (*Inhibitions* 106-7, emphasis mine)

Thus, the nature of the anxiety felt by the child in this instance is twofold: one based in the present loss of the object but also one based in a future laden with the possibility of non-gratification, or what Freud later refers to in the aggregate as the “economic situation.”¹⁰ The child through its own life experience comes to find the danger of economic insufficiency eliminated by the mother figure and thus “the nature of the danger it fears is displaced from the economic situation on to the condition which determined that situation, viz. the loss of the object” (*Inhibitions* 108). I draw attention to these passages not to suggest that the mother’s bond with

⁹ The new direction in Freud’s thinking regarding anxiety will become the basis for what will later be termed “object relations theory,” pursued most notably by the psychiatrist John Bowlby.

¹⁰ Freud’s use of economic terminology here is informative and a connection to the economic nature of social relations that inspire narratives of nostalgic loss already referenced in this thesis (work and consumption) should be noted. I will return to the basis for this connection in section two where I consider more specifically the unique aspects of modern experience.

the child is merely economic or easily replaceable, but to highlight the temporal span at the heart of childhood separation anxiety – a span that encompasses a present moment as well as a variety of possible future ones.

To better illustrate anxiety's temporal span, let us turn briefly to that literary exemplar of modernity, temporality and anxiety: Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In the summers of his childhood, Proust's narrator wallows in self-pity regarding his weak will and delicate health and the "uncertainty they cast on my future" (13). He finds his primary remedy to these anxieties in the good night kiss proffered nightly by his mother. The narrator is largely separated from his mother during these summer days and her good night kiss functions as his "sole consolation" to his perpetually nervous and anxious existence. For the narrator, his mother is largely absent to him during these months and the fleeting moment of her good night kisses function as his primary source of comfort and stability and are thus of paramount importance to him. But what is it about these fleeting moments with his mother that the narrator craves so acutely? The presence of his mother has, in effect, been concentrated in these brief moments of physical contact before the narrator is suspended in darkness and uncertainty before sleeping. So while far from the ideal of perpetual presence, they are what the narrator has and he must make due. On the evenings when the family friend Charles Swann visits and Marcel's routine is disturbed, we understand better what is at the heart of his mother's nightly visits and how they stabilize the narrator's anxious existence:

...the precious and fragile kiss that Mama usually entrusted to me in my bed when I was going to sleep I would have to convey from the dining room to my bedroom and protect during the whole time I undressed, so that its sweetness would not shatter, so that its volatile essence would not disperse and evaporate, and on those evenings when I needed to receive it with more care, I had to take it, I had to snatch it brusquely, publicly, without even having the time and the freedom of mind necessary to bring to what I was doing the attention of those individuals controlled by some mania, who do their utmost not to think of anything else while they are shutting a door, *so as to be able, when the moribund uncertainty returns to them, to confront it victoriously* with the memory of the moment when they did shut the door. (23, emphasis mine)

It is in this moment of potential absence and impending separation that Proust's narrator most clearly expresses the underlying reason for his seemingly irrational desire for his mother's embrace. It is not in the kiss itself or in the present moment of the kiss that the narrator recognizes his greatest need. In fact, the moment immediately preceding the kiss itself only portends the impending absence of his mother and was for the narrator a "painful moment" that "ushered in the moment that would follow, in which she would have left me" (13). It is in future moments of "moribund uncertainty" – moments of potential danger that must be confronted – that the narrator recognizes the inherent value of his mother's embrace. These nightly bonding moments function both as a kind of memory reserve, one that might be tapped into when needed, as well as a historical sequence that supports the possibility of future returns by his mother. Proust's narrator longs to concentrate in these moments with his mother, as one controlled by some "mania," so as to create a symbolic reserve that may function as a psychological talisman to protect against an undefined and uncertain future.

The anxiety generated by these summer evenings when Proust's narrator fears the loss of his mother's kiss (the separation of the mother) is twofold. First, there is the trauma of the moment itself, the actual separation and the accompanied longing that the narrator struggles to internalize. Second, and more importantly, the separation from his mother forces a change to the narrator's personal identity thus presenting a new dynamic by which Marcel must interact with the outside world as he moves beyond the present moment of his trauma. This new dynamic is one in which he must face a future existence without the support of his mother. Marcel will look to re-orient and rebalance his new identity with possible futures, but until this re-orientation process is complete, Marcel exists in an anxious state of dis-orientation. This early sequence in *À la recherche du temps perdu* highlights the manner in which present identity continually engages with future possibilities as well as the ways in which present experience (no visit from his mother) that is incongruous with past experience (consistent visits from his mother) can disorient an identity and disrupt the manner in which one incorporates a horizon of future possibilities.¹¹

The temporal aspect of "separation" anxiety might be considered unique, but I believe this aspect of anxiety (that of a temporal disorientation or imbalance among past, present and future) to apply more widely. Given its growing influence across a number of fields of study over the last twenty-five years, let us consider some aspects

¹¹ The transhistorical character of Proust's account of anxiety does not explain the reasons for the uniqueness of modern anxiety. I highlight it here merely to stress the temporal nature of human anxiety. The unique nature of modern anxiety can then be understood through an evaluation of the changing nature of experience in modernity and its effects on future possibilities. I will turn to this subject in section two of this thesis.

of trauma theory and its accompanying forms of anxiety. In Cathy Caruth's influential work *Trauma and Experience* (1995), she constructs a psychoanalytic and theoretical framework around more generally accepted contemporary notions of what it means to be traumatized. Her work has served as the basis for an explosion in trauma and memory studies as well as for the inevitable backlash that follows any new trend in intellectual thought.¹² I would argue that Caruth's influence in this work (and the 1996 follow-up *Unclaimed Experience*) stems not from insights that serve to focus or efficaciously limit the manner in which physicians may diagnosis trauma as such, but rather in its "opening up" of trauma – an opening up that allowed for a considerably wider universe of possible traumatic referent events.

Caruth served as the catalyst for a shift in the diagnostic approach away from the underlying cause to the symptoms of trauma itself. Building on Freud's concept of *nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, she argues: "the pathology cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a distortion of the event... The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception" (200). In other words, the experience of traumatic symptoms – most generally defined by Caruth as the repetition of an unknown and prior event that possesses the afflicted person and manifests itself after varying periods of latency – is what defines trauma, as opposed to any particular past referent event. Caruth refers to

¹² Some psychiatrists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had explored perceived temporal disruptions, but the majority of this work was focused on the experiences of patients already determined to be mentally unstable or insane. For a discussion of some of this work, see Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (20).

the traumatized as being “possessed” by a history but not having the possession of the accompanying historical knowledge that allows one to synthesize a past history with one’s present experience:

The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event *that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience*: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time. (202-3, emphasis mine)

The traumatized person (re)lives in the present a terrifying experience, one that is likely to be repeated again in the future, based on an unknown or inaccessible past. The thread that is used to stitch together past, present and possible future identities has seemingly disintegrated for the traumatized patient. Even if they were to grasp a particular past experience that repeats itself today, who is to say that there are not other historical traumas lingering in their latent state waiting to emerge? The latency of the historical event is disruptive to the perception of a balanced continuum of temporal reality. It is the temporal disruption caused by the historical traumatic event, as opposed to a particular event, that is responsible for much of the stress or anxiety associated with PTSD. Despite this liberating approach and its resulting expansion of those persons considered to be afflicted with PTSD (not to mention the increased colloquial usage of traumatic lingo), there seemingly remained an underlying attachment among psychiatrists, sociologists and cultural theorists to an “event” and its nature as the underlying kernel of traumatic experience. In other

words, while it was generally accepted that symptoms would define diagnosis, an underlying cause to the symptoms in the form of an event or events remained. Again, we see here a persistent desire to reclaim a lost aspect of the past to explain a present anxiety. Any understanding of traumatic anxiety or other forms of anxiety, though, must ultimately be rooted in a disrupted experience of temporality.

I have attempted thus far to reorient and reemphasize the basis of social anxiety in our present relationship with future possibilities and the ways in which we as a society are able to connect the two. To state that the future is uncertain or unknowable or to simply point to a loss of times past are both insufficient measures in understanding the “unfamiliar” anxieties of modernity. An understanding of a changing sense of the future and how that perception relates to and connects with a lived present (one that is sedimented with the thoughts and desires of the past) is critical in assessing modern anxiety. If one is to attribute the reason for modernity’s anxieties to a loss, it can only be to the loss of a particular vision of the future or the loss of a particular expectation; a vision or expectation that was consistent with a corresponding past social identity.

The attenuation of society’s ability to define a specific future for itself appears to contradict certain key tenets of the Enlightenment. The enlightened mind was thought capable of achieving a complete knowledge of nature and a guide for understanding social behavior that would allow for the greatest possible certainty regarding future possibilities. The Enlightenment was to provide for a secular certainty that could replace or accompany a waning religious establishment that found

certainty in future salvation. By the middle of the nineteenth century, though, lived experience seemed to contradict, at least to a degree, this assumed possibility of future predictability. In section two, I will explore some of the political, economic and social specifics that constituted a historically unique existence during the nineteenth century. Here, I will consider the issue from a more general and theoretical perspective. To do so, I turn to two contemporary sociologists and theorists of modernity to elucidate certain antitheses embedded in the rationalism of Enlightenment thinking that expand the scope of future possibility for modern society.

Anthony Giddens has written extensively on the institutional aspects of modernity, arguing in *The Consequences of Modernity* that the “modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order” resulting in a collective feeling of “disorientation” (4). Giddens points to a number of basic discontinuities of modernity including the pace of change due to technological innovation, the increasingly global nature of human interaction, and critical shifts in the basic functioning of modern institutions. He also draws attention to an aspect of modern life that he labels the reflexivity of modernity. By reflexivity Giddens is referring to the process by which thought and action “are constantly refracted back upon one another” (38). Action based on tradition, that of religion or anything else, does not require new thought. In fact, to (re)think traditional actions is to subvert tradition’s very *raison d’être*. And while tradition maintains a presence in modern social action, Giddens notes that “only in the era of modernity is the revision of

convention radicalized to apply (in principle) to all aspects of human life” (38-9).

Over time, this “revision of convention” is continually reapplied to itself such that the only aspect of convention that might be said to be certain is its continual revision:

Modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge, but *the equation of certitude has turned out to be misconceived*. We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of knowledge will not be revised. (39, emphasis mine)

In other words, the authority given to rational thought during the Enlightenment drives social action but also results in a need to revise that same social action in a process that continues *ad infinitum*.

Zygmunt Bauman, the Polish sociologist and social theorist, has also written extensively on modernity and its social dynamic. In *Modernity and Ambivalence*, he outlines his belief in modernity’s underlying desire for order – a desire maintained by both the individual intellect and the modern social institution. For Bauman the antithesis of order is ambivalence, which he defines as “the possibility of assigning an object or event to more than one category” – he believes modernity to be “an era of particularly bitter and relentless war against ambivalence” (1, 3). In a manner similar to Giddens, Bauman recognizes the reflexive nature of modern society and its uniqueness relative to other epochs of Western civilization:

We can think of modernity as a time when order – of the world, of the human habitat, of the human self, and the connection between all three – is *reflected upon*; a matter of thought, of concern, of a practice that is aware of itself, conscious of being a conscious practice and wary of the void it would leave were it to halt or merely relent. (5)

Strongly influenced by Max Horkeimer and Theodor Adorno, Bauman suggests that this drive to order combined with obsessive and continuous reflection results in high levels of intolerance for anything that complicates the desire for “a world in which links between certain situations and effectivity of certain actions remain by and large constant” (2).¹³

While fairly consistent with Giddens’ theorizations of reflexivity, Bauman’s conception suggests a recognition among modern humans (even if only unconscious) of the need for some level of chaos to exist in spite of a collective desire for order – the “modern state and modern intellect alike need chaos – if only to go on creating order. They both thrive on the vanity of their effort” (9). As such, modern institutions accept some level of resistance to order to provide a basis for their continued existence. To the extent perfect order is achieved, how is one to satisfy the drive to order what is chaotic? In fact, Bauman seems to suggest at times that modern consciousness may unconsciously pursue destructive measures regarding its own initiatives so as to create the need for additional ordering. This is what he means when he observes that “modern existence is both haunted and stirred into restless action by modern consciousness” (9).

Giddens’ and Bauman’s slightly different theorizations of the reflexive nature of modernity have similar results – lived existence begins to suggest possible futures that are in contradistinction to the identity of order that modern society has

¹³ Bauman’s basis for the intolerance of modern society is the foundation for much of his work on the Holocaust.

constructed itself around (this applies to both the more totalizing form of order suggested by Giddens as well as to the more instinctive desire for order initiated by lingering aspects of ambivalence that Bauman outlines). Modern society has an inclination that “the equation of knowledge with certitude” has been misconceived, as Giddens puts it, or, as Bauman eloquently suggests:

...modern consciousness is the suspicion or awareness of the inconclusiveness of the extant order; a consciousness prompted and moved by the premonition of inadequacy, nay non-viability, of the order designing, ambivalence-eliminating project; of the randomness of the world and the contingency of identities that constitute it. (9)

This “suspicion” or nascent “awareness” militates against the initial designs of a modern identity thought to be capable of mastering natural and social phenomena – the irony being that the initial identity constructed by modern societies is the very thing that serves ultimately to bring about its destruction. Experience in the nineteenth century begins to suggest a future that is not simply unknown, but unknown in such a way that the ability of contemporary society to frame future experience within some kind of boundary becomes more challenging or is eliminated completely.

I have argued thus far that the basis for collective social anxieties, including those ascribed to modern existence, reside in an inability to reconcile a present identity with perceived possibilities for the future. I would add, further, that a society’s current identity (and this applies to any historical time frame) is based in present experience but is also based in past experience and past expectation. There is a stickiness to the past that serves to define our identity long after present experience has moved beyond

it.¹⁴ Present expectations for the future, on the other hand, are more reliant upon our most recent experiences. We cannot predict the future, but we often assume that future life experiences and our feelings about them will be something akin to the way we feel today. To the extent that our perception of future possibilities cannot be assimilated with our current identity, one is no longer able to envision a smooth transition from the present into the future. I believe this temporal discontinuity to be at the heart of collective social anxiety in modernity. And while this point of view may help to shed some light on the reasons for the anxieties of modernity, it does not necessarily address the reason that modernity's anxieties have been assumed to be greater (or at least more unfamiliar) relative to the anxieties of other times. This latter question can only be answered by considering the specifics of lived experience in the nineteenth century that led to a growing suspicion and nascent awareness of a more incomprehensible future. A comprehensive review of nineteenth century life is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I believe that by leveraging the substantial existing historical and sociological work of other scholars, I might re-conceptualize certain economic, political and social realities at the heart of the question posed above. As part of this analysis, I will introduce the theoretical concept of *volatility of experience* in my evaluation of nineteenth century life. Volatility of experience more effectively captures the affect of nineteenth century experience, particularly relative to those characterizations that only stress increased or increasing speed.

¹⁴ I will explore some the basis for this stickiness in section two.

SECTION TWO

The Experience of Modernity, its Metaphors, and the Site of Anxiety

No historical period has been more critical to the social organization of time than the late nineteenth century. Advancements in the standardization of time were frequent during this period and its overall coordination a gradual process, but the pivotal moment of its standardization may have come at the International Meridian Conference of October 1884. The conference established Greenwich as the zero meridian while also defining an exact length for the day and specific world time zones. The standardization of time was thought to have a number of social benefits, but it was commercial interests that drove its widespread adoption. Stephen Kern, in his study *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, notes that “despite all the good scientific and military arguments for world time, it was the railroad companies and not the governments that were the first to institute it” (12). In their collection of essays on the railroad and modernity, Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman support this assertion commenting that the railways “mapped both the time and space of a nation” (19). No longer would one have to change their watch multiple times as they traveled across a particular country.¹⁵ And no longer would one have to wonder about the specific time outside of their own place – this became a matter of simple mathematical conversion, thus, more directly connecting each person with space beyond their own locality.

¹⁵ As Kerns notes, “...in 1870 there will still about 80 different railroad times in the United States alone” (12).

A distinction between the measurement of time and the human experience of it, whether this be individual or collective, would become an important area of focus during the late nineteenth century. Giddens reflects this distinction when he refers to the clock as expressing “a uniform dimension of ‘empty’ time,” the word “empty” suggesting that a more fulsome consideration of temporality must go beyond its mathematical measurement (17). And if the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were key moments in the standardization of mathematical time, they were concomitantly key moments in the recognition of the diversity of experienced time. In *Time and Free Will* (1889), the philosopher Henri Bergson outlines his concept of *durée* (duration), a non-spatialized conception of time. For Bergson, *durée* reflected an internal time that was felt by the individual and was not quantifiable in mathematical units. Philosophy was not the only discipline exploring new conceptions of experienced time during this period – psychology was as well. Bryony Randall, in her study of daily time in modernity, comments that “at the turn of the [twentieth] century, when psychology was disengaging itself as a discipline from philosophy and medicine, the concept of time as potentially fluid, emerging from within the human mind rather than fixed in the external world, began to gain ground” (30). William James bridged the fields of psychology and philosophy arguing in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) that mathematical time and one’s experience of time are distinct conceptions. In an attempt to better understand differing modes of temporality, philosophical and psychological inquiry forced a separation between external (the social measurement of time) and internal (individual

consciousness of time's affect) conceptions of time. Émile Durkheim sought to reconnect these two categories and their mediation in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912):

Try to imagine the notion of time without the procedures by which we divide, measure, express it by means of objective signs, a time that is not a succession of years, months, weeks, days, and hours. It is almost unthinkable. We can conceive of time only by differentiating between discreet moments. Now what is the source of this differentiation?... For time is not merely a partial or total commemoration of our past life; *it is an abstract and impersonal framework that encompasses not only our individual existence but that of humanity.* (12, emphasis mine)

Durkheim affirms the heterogeneous possibilities of experienced time while maintaining the connection of this experience to particular forms of social existence. As he would later state, “the foundation of the category time is the rhythm of social life; but if there is a rhythm of collective life, we can be sure that there is another rhythm in the life of the individual” (20). For Durkheim, the experience of time is personal, but this experience cannot be severed from one’s social existence and the experiences generated within a particular community. Thus, while acknowledging the conceptual advancements of Bergson, James and Durkheim – these theorists, among others, would collectively initiate a period in which the human relationship with time, both for the individual and for society collectively, would no longer be thought of as fixed but fluid and subject to change – we must also read their focus on temporality as symptomatic of dramatic changes in human experience during this time.

Our experience of time is not important merely because it changes or because we as individuals experience it differently but more so because our relationship with time

effects the manner in which societies live and informs the decisions they make. The historian Reinhart Koselleck points out that society's relationship with time "is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations. All these actions have definite, internalized forms of conduct, each with a peculiar temporal rhythm" (2). In other words, social actions and the resulting experience for those within a society are simultaneously constitutive of and informed by conceptions of temporality. Koselleck's conception of temporality is similar to Durkheim's and supports the assertion that the focus on temporality in the late nineteenth century logically implies substantive changes to the nature of experience during this time as well. A brief foray into the histories of this period, of which there are an endless amount, will immediately confirm the momentous advancements and reconfigurations of technological, economic and political manners of life. How individuals and societies experienced these changes at the time of their occurrence, though, is a more challenging question. In other words, the *affects* of these changes (as opposed to their purported *effects*) are difficult to access.

Before exploring how these affects are typically theorized, I want to briefly return to Koselleck and his framework for assessing a society's relationship with time. The dialectical nature of his approach will be useful in our considerations of experience, temporality and anxiety. Building on the work of Kant and Heidegger, Koselleck established a theory of "historical time," or that sense of time that is unconnected with natural conditioning (i.e., the rising and setting of the sun or the passing of the

seasons) and is constituted by social experience. Koselleck uses the concepts “space of experience” and “horizon of expectations” as the dialectical poles of historical time. For Koselleck, space of experience represents “the totality of what is inherited from the past, its sedimentary traces constituting the soil in which desires, fears, predictions, and projects take root” (*Collective* 475). The horizon of expectations speaks to the perceived possibilities for one’s future existence.¹⁶ It is expectation that is the “future made present” and is constituted by a society’s “hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity” (Koselleck 259). Paul Ricoeur, commenting on Koselleck’s framework, suggests that the “space of experience exists only in diametrical opposition to a horizon of expectation, which is in no way reducible to the space of experience. Rather, the dialectic between these two poles ensures the dynamic nature of historical consciousness” (*Collective* 475). Despite the difficulty in grasping its specific affect, it is in this living consciousness where the dialectic of experience and possibility plays itself out and where we might logically return to our concerns regarding the site of modernity’s sense of anxiety.

I have already pointed to the tension between current social identity and expectations for the future (and the possibility of temporal discontinuities as this tension rises) as the underlying source of collective social anxiety. A temporally informed etiology of anxiety is homologous in certain productive ways with Koselleck’s theory of historical time and, as such, I would like to leverage his concepts of space of experience and horizon of expectations to make a further inquiry

¹⁶ The phrase “horizon of expectations” was originally used by Hans Robert Jauss as part of his work on the aesthetics of reception.

into the increasing sense of social anxiety in modern times, particularly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In what follows, I will consider a number of theorists' more abstract examinations of the characteristics of modernity, and identify two general experiential shifts relative to pre-modern times – that of the initiation of change and that of acceleration. Also considered are certain metaphors (and their implied visualizations) that are frequently used to convey these experiential shifts. I will interrogate the figurative effectiveness of these metaphors when considered relative to specific political and economic activity during the nineteenth century and relative to contemporary theories of social identity. My considerations of experience during the nineteenth century, particularly in its latter half, will support a supplemented conception of the motion of modernity that better captures not only the increasing speed of modern life but also its frequent changes in direction and basic unevenness. I will refer to this broader conception of movement as the *volatility of experience*. As we shall see, volatility of experience in the nineteenth century was relatively new, fairly constant, and frequently extreme. It is increasing volatility, as opposed to only speed, that explains an expanded horizon of expectations at this time – a horizon that finds itself increasingly misaligned relative to a space of experience still largely informed by the more distant past.

In his essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” Walter Benjamin notes a change in social experience that undermines its communicable possibilities. Writing in 1936, Benjamin observes, “with the [First]

World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since” (84). He elaborates:

For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in the countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body. (84)

The awesome spectacle of never before seen global conflict brings to light for Benjamin the newly evolving nature of experience in modernity. His point, though, is not simply to highlight changes in experience. More importantly, Benjamin seeks to highlight change itself as an incipient category in our social mode of existence. For the storyteller, pedagogy, whether it be moral or more practical in nature, is his *raison d'être* and the efficacy of his narrative is dependent upon experiential consistency. For Benjamin, the instability of modern experience has vitiated the realm of the storyteller (while at the same time opening up possibilities for other narrative structures such as the novel) and the “art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out” (87). The critical nature of his assessment lies not in any particular change in experience but in the initiation of change itself as a crucial aspect of social existence.

Koselleck makes an argument similar to Benjamin’s in his essay “*Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process.*” The expression “*historia magistra vitae*,” typically attributed to Cicero, is commonly translated as “history as life’s teacher.” In short, this is a

historiographical topos in which the past serves as both playbook for the present and source of boundary for the future. This formula functioned for two thousand years lasting “almost unbroken into the eighteenth century” (27) and was the means by which civilization assumed historical successes might be repeated while avoiding prior mistakes. Koselleck argues that “until the eighteenth century, the use of this expression remained an unmistakable index for an assumed constancy of human nature, accounts of which can serve as iterable means for the proof of moral, theological, legal or political doctrines” (28). Koselleck then traces the attenuation and ultimate dissolution of this notion of iterability through a number of eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers (Hegel, de Toqueville and others) unearthing a growing “apprehension of human possibility within a general historical continuum” (27). For Koselleck, the disappearance of constancy is at the heart of a new historical consciousness – one in which history shifts from pedagogical tool to something in and of itself. And whether we agree that it was “ultimately ‘history itself’ that began to open up a new experiential space,” the critical point for our purposes is a recognition that “experiential space” underwent a fundamental change, moving from a space of iterable constancy to one of constant shift and “bringing past and future into a new relationship” (31).

Sociological inquiry has offered similar themes. Giddens, who has written extensively on the institutional aspects of modernity, highlights his evaluative approach as one emphasizing the “discontinuous” nature of modern social development – an interpretive stance grounded in a belief that “modern social

institutions are in some respects unique – distinct from all types of traditional order”

(3). This focus on discontinuity implies a break or rupture from traditional methods of social practice. Giddens does not go so far as to refer directly to pre-modern existence as fixed, but his frequent use of terms such as “reflexive” or “dynamic” to describe modern existence implies a certain level of stasis of the preceding epoch. In a somewhat more abstract manner, Bauman takes a similar approach. Bauman highlights modernity’s struggles with ambivalence and issues he associates with an almost obsessive quest for order in the nineteenth century. For Bauman, the orderly world is a world in which “one knows how to go on” and where “links between certain situations and effectivity of certain actions remain by and large constant” (1-2). Bauman does not specifically name the pre-modern world as one of order, but he implies that modernity’s desire for order is based in an attempt to reclaim that which has been assumed to be lost – to regain some level of control in a newly fluid world marked by persistent ambivalence. For Bauman, the issues stemming from the modernist quest for order are clearly grounded in a sense of experiential shift – a shift from the effective constancy of pre-modern existence to the “uncanny and unprecedented dynamism” of modernity (10).

In his seminal book *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Marshall Berman sources the metaphor of his title from Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* in which Marx argues:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at

last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (McLellan 248)

In this passage, Marx is referring to a new age of constantly changing relations of production and wider societal relations that the bourgeoisie rely upon for their existence (and that will also be their demise according to Marx). Berman takes up Marx's organic metaphor, one based on a fundamental change in physical properties, to support his own assessment of modernity as a new kind of universal that "cut(s) across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology" (15). I don't want to overemphasize the use of any one particular metaphor, which of course is used in large part for rhetorical effect, but in this instance the metaphor becomes the basis for a reinforcement of a particular perception of modernity, one that constitutes a fundamental change in the structure of our existence – less a transition and more of a break, or rupture, from the past. Marx's choice of metaphor is effective and, as such, somewhat contagious. Bauman takes up this metaphor in a more gradual manner, writing extensively on the shift from a more stable (or solid) modernity to that of "liquid" modernity – an epoch in which the traditional bonds of society have melted away and, as one scholar summarizes it, "the breakdown of these symbols [of social bonds] is seen to constitute the very nature of a liquid world swirling in mobile capital, atomized relationships and individualistic expectations" (Lee 652).¹⁷

¹⁷ Bauman has used the metaphor of liquidity in the titles of a number of his works describing contemporary society including *Liquid Love*, *Liquid Life*, *Liquid Fear* and *Liquid Time*, among others.

The metaphors used to represent critical aspects of modernity have the unintended effect of only allowing for binary visualizations of a process that is, in reality, long and gradual. The traditional (or pre-modern) becomes that of the solid, the permanent, the stable – a world of continuity and unity. The modern becomes that of the liquid, the fleeting, the unstable – a world of discontinuity and disunity. The process of transition and the possible existence of the traditional within the modern and vice versa are effaced and one is left feeling that modern society is categorically different from its preceding era. For the moment, though, let us reserve judgment on the accuracy of this assessment and ask a different question: if we are not what we once were, then what are we? To answer this question, I would like to turn to another set of metaphors often used to describe modernity – those of motion, speed and acceleration.

Scientists sometimes refer to the early twentieth century as the beginning of the “Great Acceleration” – a period in which population, technological advancement and the consumption of natural resources began to grow at unprecedented rates.¹⁸ The concept of modernity as a period constituted by increasing speed is not exclusive to the scientific community nor is it a relatively recent representation. In *The Birth of the Modern World*, the historian C.A. Bayly labels the years 1890 to 1914 as “The Great Acceleration,” implying increases to speed the likes of which had never before been seen (451). What does one really mean, though, when saying that we live at a greater speed or that life is accelerating? And why has speed become the privileged

¹⁸ For a discussion of this, see “The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene” by Colin N. Waters.

and oftentimes exclusive measurement of modern experience? The description is often literal – representing actual motion generated by the steam engine or the movement of the early automobile – but it is also used metaphorically to describe the experience of modernity more generally. Life is changing quickly and both the effects and affects of these changes are a collective sense of moving at great speed. Henry Adams, as part of his famous autobiography written in the early years of the twentieth century, wrote the essay “A Law of Acceleration” in which he outlines his own theory explaining historical and social developments in the second half of the nineteenth century. Adams was interested in a scientifically informed approach to history and believed motion to be “the ultimate object of science” and that “with thought as with matter, the true measure is mass in its astronomic sense – the sum or difference of attractive forces” (407). Adams grounds much of his theory of acceleration on the growing use of coal in the late nineteenth century – he traces a doubling of coal output every decade from the period 1840 through 1900. This type of expansive growth is not limited to coal consumption, but its use during this time and its signification of power and progress is important to Adams’ conception of growth and its infinite possibility:

Thought had more than once been upset, but never caught and whirled about in the vortex of infinite forces. Power leaped from every atom, and enough of it to supply the stellar universe showed itself running to waste at every pore of matter. Man could no longer hold it off. Forces grasped his wrists and flung him about as though he had hold of a live wire or runaway automobile... (411)

Adams’ typically measured prose gives way to some hyperbole here, but he quickly re-grounds the awesome power of newly accelerated life, commenting that his

metaphor of the runaway automobile is “very nearly the exact truth for the purposes of an elderly and timid single gentleman in Paris, who never drove down the Champs Elysées without expecting an accident” (411). Social existence for Adams is moving at a pace heretofore unseen and he believes that for many, confined to living in this new paradigm, it is “in their minds a toss-up between anarchy and order” (412).

Adams was a direct participant and acutely sensitive observer of the scientific, technological and social developments of his time. Later twentieth century writers would build on Adams’ themes of acceleration across a variety of disciplines, scientific and non-scientific alike. Giddens refers to modernity as a “juggernaut” or “that runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control...” (139). Paul Virilio, the French cultural theorist, goes so far as to make speed the crux of a new mode of philosophical inquiry that he labels dromology, or the study of the nature of speed and its effects on society.¹⁹ Writers have used a number of metaphors in an attempt to elucidate the accelerated pace of modern life. In attempting to capture the essence of the late nineteenth century, though, one metaphor has risen above all others in representing the increased speed of modernity – the railway train. Peter Gay refers to it as “the supreme metaphor for a nineteenth century in motion”

¹⁹ The term “dromology” is based on the Greek word *dromo* meaning to race. Virilio’s assessments of the increasing speed of modern life are particularly pessimistic. Stefan Breuer notes that “the findings of [Virilio’s] research are devastating. The constant increase in acceleration, [Virilio] argues, is leading to nothing other than the ‘liquidation of the world,’ to the realization of the one original idea the West has produced: nothingness, the being of nothing, the void” (215-216).

(13) while Eric Hobsbawm notes that “no other innovation of the Industrial Revolution has fired the imagination as much as the railway” (*Revolution* 44).

Beginning with the widespread expansion of the railway system in Western Europe and America in the mid-nineteenth century, the train was immediately recognized as a technological marvel and it came to function as the primary icon of modernity’s infinite possibilities. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes in the foreword to *The Railway Journey*, his seminal study of the industrialization of consciousness in the late nineteenth century, “Nothing else in the nineteenth century seemed as vivid and dramatic a sign of modernity as the railroad. Scientists and statesmen joined capitalists in promoting the locomotive as the engine of ‘progress,’ a promise of imminent Utopia” (xiii). The train as the archetypical image of commercial and social developments of the mid-to-late nineteenth is understandable – the train had become a pervasive and influential material presence in daily life by the end of the nineteenth century and certain aspects of its functioning, primarily its speed, appeared to mimic general trends in social life at the time. Despite this relevance, certain critical and more problematic components to the experience of railway travel during the nineteenth century have often gone unaccounted for when using the train as a figure to represent the experience of modernity.

The effacement of the more problematic aspects of railway travel was often an issue in early figurative uses of the train and this issue has worsened over time. Beaumont and Freeman comment that contemporary academic work in this area “has often seemed unsophisticated, if not irredeemably clichéd, because it has treated the

railway as an unproblematic symbol of technological and social progress” (7). More thorough investigations of railway travel in the late nineteenth century portray an inherently contradictory experience. The train and railway travel were exhilarating, both as a technological innovation and as individual experience, but as Schivelbusch notes: “from its beginnings the railroad was never free of some note of menace, some undercurrent of fear” (xiii). Contemporary figurative use of the train metaphor too frequently elides more problematic aspects of railway travel and, in the attempt to illuminate certain critical aspects of the experience of modernity, obscures the actual experience of life lived at this time.

The growing ineffectiveness of the railway metaphor is partly due to anachronistic conceptions of both the social impact of the physical railway system itself as well as misplaced presumptions about the effects, or lack thereof, on the train rider’s consciousness when in motion. For contemporary individuals, the railway system is a pre-existing network of trains, tracks and stations that function, for the most part, with consistent dependability. The disruptiveness of the train ride itself on one’s consciousness is minimal, if not non-existent. Due to the longstanding presence of the rail system in contemporary society, the railway as a fully functioning network and the experience of the train ride itself have been fully integrated into social and individual consciousness. The improvement of railway performance obfuscates the more problematic aspects of its development in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The railway system at this time was not pre-existing but, rather, coming into existence, and it did so in a manner that was unfamiliar and disruptive. As Beaumont

and Freeman comment, “across Europe and the Americas, the elaborate ensemble of the railway was mostly built to an improvisatory and often chaotic rhythm by competing private companies, and consequently could not possibly operate with the efficiency of a single purposeful machine” (16). The railway’s inability to function as a unified system was compounded by the urban congestion resulting from new train stations as well as the large displacement of peoples necessary for the construction of these stations. John Kellet, who studied the impact of the mid-nineteenth century railway system in Victorian cities, notes that “the street system of the old cities were unable to cope with the new volume of traffic” around newly built stations thus requiring further construction in highly populated areas and resulting in further disruption (Schivelbusch 181). While the development of the modern railway system had undeniable commercial and social appeal, its benefits were not achieved without a substantial re-orientation, both physical and mental, of the nineteenth century urban populace.

Beyond the railway network, the train ride effected individual consciousness in ways that were similarly disruptive. Schivelbusch, in seeking to “recover the subjective experience of the railway journey at the very moment of its newness,” finds that the new experience of increased speed and spatial possibilities were accompanied by meaningful physical and mental strains and discomforts – “the train was experienced as a projectile, and traveling on it, as being shot through the landscape – thus losing control of one’s senses” (54). Beaumont and Freeman make a similar point noting that “the train itself... made unprecedented physical and

perceptual demands on its travellers, whose prevailing conceptions of motion were quickly reorganized” (20). The increase in railway travel altered society’s conceptions of both space and time. Formerly unreachable destinations were now within the common traveller’s grasp. These possibilities were viewed favorably, but they also required a cognitive remapping of one’s relationship with the physical world. As Kern observes, “the railroads ended the sanctuary of remoteness” (213).

Early train rides were also physically taxing in ways that are often forgotten. A study on the railway and public health from 1862 stated that “the frequency, rapidity, and peculiar abruptness of the motion of railway-carriages keep thus a constant strain on the muscles; and to this must be ascribed a part of that sense of bodily fatigue, almost amounting to soreness, which is felt after a long journey” (Schivelbusch 117). The passenger of the nineteenth century train also had to consider the possibility of derailments and collisions, the consequences of which were often fatal – “as train speeds and train tonnages rose, the potential for spectacular disaster grew,” leaving riders with an ever present fear of impending death (Beaumont and Freeman 35). As one mid-nineteenth century rider remarked: “It is really flying, and it is impossible to divest yourself of the notion of instant death to all upon the least accident happening” (Schivelbusch 129). To ride the train of the mid-to-late nineteenth century was to participate in a new system of speed and efficiency, but this was only part of the experience. The train ride also required a collective reorientation of time/space relations while exacting a meaningful mental and physical toll from individual riders.

I have highlighted the more problematic nature of early railway travel to illustrate how metaphorical use of the train often obscures critical components of the very experience it seeks to elucidate. Contemporary consciousness imagines the train ride as one of high speed but also of efficiency, dependability, and comfort. This particular visualization of the train ride is far from sufficient when attempting to convey the actual experience of early train passengers. When the train metaphor is used more broadly (i.e., when used to convey the overall experience of modernity), two different and more substantive issues emerge. First, the visualization of an object moving on tracks implies a form of telic motion – predetermined and persistent movement toward a particular point in space. Efficient movement of peoples and commodities from one predetermined point to another was the very reason for the construction of the railways. While the visualization of a movement toward a specific destination is consistent with nineteenth century notions of social evolution and progress, images of telic movement are no longer consistent with contemporary understandings of modernity and their critique of enlightenment predictability – “the equation of certitude has turned out to be misconceived,” as Giddens puts it (39). In other words, the metaphor of the train and its unavoidable association with a vast network of predetermined destinations has come into sharp conflict with more contemporary understandings of modernity that better appreciate its inherent unpredictability.

The second misrepresentation of motion that the railway metaphor creates is a visualization that privileges constant speed and horizontal linearity. In a celebration

of that blissful moment of efficient transition from one place to another, the metaphor of the train creates an image that ignores the constant starts and stops, the accelerations and decelerations, and the frequent delays inherent in early railway travel. The metaphor also attenuates any visualization of vertical movement. This latter effect is bound up in the very efficiency of the railway system itself – the shortest distance between two points, by definition, eliminates any unnecessary vertical movement. This was certainly the goal of engineers at this time – in the construction of bridges and tunnels, “mechanical regularity triumphed over natural irregularity,” as Schivelbusch puts it (23). And yet, despite the best efforts of engineers, the experience of changing vertical positions remained. Consider the following passage from Zola’s *La Bête humaine* in which the protagonist, the railway engineer Jacques Lantier, attempts to maneuver his train through the French countryside during a snow storm:

They were entering the rugged parts of the countryside, *the vast groundswell of hills and valleys* that stretched as far as Malaunay in *endless humps and bumps*; and here the snow had piled up in irregular drifts, leaving the track clear in places while other sections were blocked by great mounds. The wind swept the embankments bare but filled the cuttings. So there was *a continual succession of obstacles to be overcome*, lengths of clear track intermittently barred by veritable ramparts. It was broad daylight now, and beneath its covering of snow the wild countryside, with its narrow gorges and precipitous slopes, had assumed the desolate air of some ice-bound ocean, frozen still in the surrounding tempest. (190, emphasis mine)

This passage highlights the lack of constancy, both of speed and linearity, in railway travel at this time as the train manages “hills and valleys,” “endless humps and bumps,” and “a continual succession of obstacles.” The experience of vertical

movement is attributable both to actual changes in altitude during train rides but also to an assault on the rider's senses. This assault seemingly separates the rider from any connection to the ground, frequently resulting in a sense of flight – “the traveler felt that he lost contact with the landscape,” Schivelbusch observes (23). Beaumont and Freeman astutely draw our attention to a passage in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) in which his protagonist describes the feeling of time travel:

I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling. They are excessively unpleasant. There is a feeling exactly like that one has on a switchback – of a helpless headlong motion! I felt the same horrible anticipation, too, of an imminent smash. (24)

This passage tellingly amalgamates two critical areas of interest in the late nineteenth century – society's changing perception of time and the pervasive presence of railway travel. The type of train used by Wells, the switchback, is particularly interesting – the switchback was a “railway consisting of a series of alternate ascents and descents which was designed to maximize the force of gravity as a means of propulsion” (Beaumont and Freeman 24). The “helpless headlong motion” that Wells' protagonist notes is based on propulsion that combines both changes in horizontal movement with changes in vertical positioning.

I have used the metaphor of the train to illustrate the ways in which certain visualizations of train motion often fall short in representing the lived experience of incipient railway travel. This type of misrepresentation might be more broadly applied to descriptions of the mid-to-late nineteenth century as one of increasing speed or acceleration. These overly reductive descriptions elide the frequent starts

and stops, the moments of deceleration that often precede or follow moments of acceleration, and the non-linearity of experience in this time period. A new conception of the motion of modernity is necessary, one that moves beyond linear notions of speed and acceleration, and better captures the diversity of movement during this time. In attempting to capture this wider range of metaphorical movement, I will use the term *volatility of experience*. Increasing volatility of experience expresses greater overall speed but also implies significant deviations in vertical positioning. It is this latter effect that certain metaphors of modernity too often elide. A derivative effect of this elision is a reduction of the dialectical tension between past experience and future expectation that I believe to be at the heart of modern anxiety.

It is my contention that in our attempts to synthesize history, the affect of experience (as it is lived by individuals or groups of individuals at particular points in time) often becomes an afterthought to the more general desire to define and categorize the reasons for significant historical change. As a past becomes more distant, the reasons for change reify into generally accepted narratives, while the actual experience of the change itself becomes less interesting to confront in all its specificity. The result can be a visualization of past experience in which a form of linear motion is imposed on the movement from one point in historical time to another. In effect, there is an inherent “smoothing out” of the volatility generated by historical change. To understand the experience of change, we must not only seek to understand the change itself (i.e., what was it?) but also the level of volatility

experienced during times of historical change and how that volatility compares with periods that precede it. I believe this smoothing out effect is particularly acute in times of extreme volatility and nowhere is this more important than the political and economic changes occurring in Europe in the nineteenth century.

To observe that there were substantive political and economic changes in nineteenth century Europe is not controversial. The transition from the absolute monarchies of seventeenth century Europe to liberal democracies and republics as well as the transition from feudal forms of commerce to industrial and global capitalism are well worn territory. These “dual revolutions” (to use the term of Eric Hobsbawm, the Marxist historian of the long nineteenth century), resulted in fundamental changes to the representation of larger groups of peoples in the institutions of government and massive improvements in economic production and overall standards of living. Nowhere were these effects more pronounced than in France. The French Revolution was perhaps the seminal event in the history of political revolution and its effects were widespread throughout Europe and beyond. If it was clear, though, to the people of France that the “source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation,”²⁰ the form that this sovereignty should take was much less certain and the transition to a liberally based political system was not a smooth one. How far to transition, if at all, was a constant subject of debate often resulting in insurrection, revolution, and regime change. As Hobsbawm characterizes it, the French Revolution would provide the “main shape of French and all subsequent

²⁰ As stated in The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

bourgeois revolutionary politics,” but this shape would only come in to existence through a “dramatic dialectical dance” that was to dominate the rest of the nineteenth century (*Revolution* 62).

While a comprehensive review of this “dramatic dialectical dance” is beyond the scope of this thesis, I want to highlight the extreme non-linearity of political transition during this time and its uniqueness relative to prior periods of French history. During the period 1789 to 1870, France experienced major political regime change seven times, or about once every eleven to twelve years on average.²¹ These changes were often accompanied by violent revolutionary activity and social strife. In addition to extreme political volatility at home, this period was also marked by constant military conflict – some being successful (i.e., Napoleon’s expansion of French territory), some resulting in devastating loss (i.e., the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870). While political insurrection and military conflict are not unique to this period, the instability attributable to the transition from the *ancien régime* to a modern liberal form of government was unique in the history of France. The Capetian Dynasty and its branches had ruled France for almost a millennium prior to the French Revolution. The political environment of the nineteenth century was unique in its push and pull, its movement between revolution and counter-revolution. To stand on the side of the victor had become a tenuous and temporary position, one that was subject to political winds that shifted frequently, unpredictably

²¹ These figures include the French Revolution and First Republic (1789-1804), The First Empire (1804-1814), The Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830), The July Monarchy (1830-1848), The Second Republic (1848-1851), The Second Empire (1851-1870), and The Third Republic (1870-1940).

and often violently. Commenting on the French political environment of the time, Benjamin sums it up nicely: “for the bourgeoisie, even political events were apt to assume the form of occurrences at the gambling table” (198).

The Third Republic, established in 1870, would mark the beginning of a period of decreased political and social insurrection. The ideological basis of the Revolution of 1789 and subsequent counter-revolutions remained but no longer in forms sufficient to generate violent political insurrection.²² A new form of experiential volatility was emerging, though, particularly in the second half of the century – a volatility that was intimately associated with economic development and progress (the later being the most critical of descriptors for the nineteenth century). The fear of revolution remained but, as Hobsbawm notes, “with the revolution of 1848, the earlier symmetry [of the dual revolutions] broke down, the shape changed. Political revolution retreated, industrial revolution advanced” (*Capital 2*). Technological innovations – in particular the steam engine, the railway, and the telegraph – combined with the development of industrial capitalism would provide the basis for economic growth never experienced before in the history of humanity. Angus Maddison, an economic historian, estimates that “the annual rate of growth in the Western World from AD 1 to AD 1820 was a mere 0.06% per year, or 6% per century” (Gordon 3). For the period 1820 to 1913, Thomas Picketty estimates the annual growth rate of world GDP

²² One event that highlighted the remaining political tension in French social consciousness is the Dreyfus Affair of 1897-99. In her memoir of this period, Barbara Tuchman observes that the Dreyfus Affair resulted in social conflict the sides of which “fought for an idea, its idea of France: one the France of the Counter-Revolution, the other the France of 1789; one for its last chance to arrest progressive social tendencies and restore old values; the other to cleanse the honor of the Republic and preserve it from the clutches of reaction” (171-2).

at approximately 1.5% per annum, or more than 340% per century (101). The transition to a growth economy was a radical change and the resulting impact on per capita wealth was astounding – one economist casually summarizes it in the following way: “Modern humans first emerged about 100,000 years ago. For the next 99,800 years or so, nothing happened... Almost everyone lived on the modern equivalent of \$400 to \$600 a year, just above the subsistence level.... Then – just a couple of hundred years ago – people started getting richer. And richer and richer still” (Gordon 3).

Increasing wealth and its impact on overall standards of living confirmed to those at the time that the modern world had entered a new epoch, one of human progress. While increases in per capita wealth were unevenly distributed among various classes of society, the Industrial Revolution’s overall impact on aggregate economic growth is undisputed. This growth is typically exhibited in the form of compound annual growth rates that refer to decades of time, if not centuries. These growth rates provide a general economic picture over long periods but often fail to capture more specific movements within shorter time frames and within more specific areas of a particular economy. To focus on the particularities, whether of time periods or of specific economic activities, is to see a less consistent picture; one that exhibits both expansion and contraction, acceleration and deceleration, the creation of wealth as well as its destruction. A detailed economic history of this time period is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I would like to consider two aspects of these new capitalist

economies that highlight their inherent volatility: financial crises and pricing instability.

Economic crises were not an entirely new phenomenon in the nineteenth century, but their nature and frequency underwent fundamental changes. “The economic system that took shape in a few countries in the early nineteenth century had one notable feature which, in our view, sets it apart from the systems that preceded it: that of having undergone a number of sudden, often violent fluctuations” and these fluctuations “were apparently periodic in character, recurring in a more or less regular way,” note the economists Maurice Flamant and Jeanne Singer-Kérel (7). Economic crises of the eighteenth century had been less frequent and less severe and were mostly associated with agrarian cycles.²³ The economic expansion of the nineteenth century was, as Hobsbawm characterizes it, “curiously catastrophic” on a regular basis – “sharp, sometimes dramatic and increasingly global slumps succeeded stratospheric booms, until prices had fallen sufficiently to dissipate the glutted markets...” (*Capital* 46). In *Modern Economic Crises*, Flamant and Singer-Kérel highlight twelve economic and financial crises in Europe and the United States in the period 1816 to 1913, or one crisis every eight years on average. In his study *Manias, Panics and Crashes*, Charles Kindleberger attempts to catalogue various economic crises by region in Europe and the United States and finds twenty separate financial crises in the nineteenth century (many of which impacted multiple regions of Europe and the United States) while finding only seven such instances in the eighteenth

²³ Agrarian crises would continue to impact economies of Europe during the nineteenth century, but their effects were mitigated by improvements in transportation and food storage capabilities.

century (the majority of which were limited to England). For the contemporary reader, financial crises have become an almost commonplace phenomenon of capitalist economies. For the nineteenth century European, economic oscillations were a relatively new phenomenon and their frequency and severity were both increasing.

Consider the economic situation of France in the latter half of the nineteenth century. France had lagged behind others in Europe, most notably England, in terms of its industrial and economic development in the first half of the century. By the early 1860s, the Second Empire had instituted a number of more liberal economic policies (lower tariffs, etc.) that further freed the French economy from the *ancien régime* whose business practices had remained a common element of French economic activity in the first half of the century. After a period of strong growth in the 1860s, the longer-term effects of this transition would result in an economic environment that Gordon Wright describes as “jerky”:

Until about 1883 expansion continued at about the same rate as during the latter part of the Second Empire – that is, a rate somewhat slower than that of 1840-1860 but respectable nevertheless. Then, from 1883-1896, came a *period of virtual stagnation: prices dropped sharply, industrial growth was slowed, while agriculture found itself in almost constant difficulties* caused by the competition of overseas imports and by the disastrous impact of vine disease... In the mid-1890s *the upturn came and developed into a real boom* after 1905, almost impressive as that of the 1850s. From 1896-1914 *prices rose again by 40 percent*, foreign trade increased by about 75 percent, and the national income made its most phenomenal growth since the days of Napoleon III. (260, emphasis mine)

Economic growth moves from moderate to stagnate to booming and then back again.

The impact of a “jerky” economic environment would be one in which prices for

industrial goods and consumer staples were no longer stable. The impacts of severe price movements were dependent upon one's location within the socio-economic structure of this time. Regardless of one's place in the economic structure, though, prices could no longer be counted on or predicted with any degree of accuracy.

Like financial crises, fluid movement of commodity prices was a new economic phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Movements were both inflationary and deflationary depending on technological developments and changes in supply and demand relations. Movements were often rational responses to changes in market dynamics, but at times they were also irrational, particularly during financial crises. Hobsbawm describes the inflationary environment during the period 1848-1875 as "moderate, though fluctuating" and one as "basically an inflationary interlude in a deflationary century" (*Capital* 35). Movements in the aggregate were still relatively moderate (particularly compared with levels of inflation experienced in the twentieth century) but the social impacts were noticeable. Thomas Piketty and others have noted the disappearance of references to specific monetary quantities in literature in the latter half of the century. Writers of the early nineteenth century, Austen and Balzac for instance, would use specific monetary reference points to convey social position without concern for future inflation or deflation – "In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, money was everywhere, not only as an abstract force but above all as a palpable, concrete magnitude" (105). Price movements and general inflationary trends would make the "concrete magnitude" of money less stable and

writers would have to find other more permanent ways of conveying class status within their works.

The bourgeoisie, the typical protagonists for writers like Austen and Balzac, were not the only class subject to commodity price fluctuations nor were tangible commodities the only category of commodity to experience value fluctuations. The commodification of labor-power, as outlined by Marx in *Capital Volume I*, would subject the income of the working class to price fluctuations inherent in an increasingly capitalist society. Hobsbawm argues that the availability of work and the value offered to workers by the hiring capitalist had become a volatile proposition:

If any single factor dominated the lives of nineteenth-century workers it was *insecurity*. They did not know at the beginning of the week how much they would bring home at the end. They did not know how long their present work would last or, if they lost it, when they would get another job and under what conditions... Theirs was not the insecurity of peasants... it was a more profound unpredictability... (*Capital* 219-20)

I don't mean to suggest that the economic situation experienced by the working class was in any way similar to that of the more economically privileged. The working class of the late nineteenth century was typically only one rung above the destitute, making the likelihood of economic volatility a particularly frightening prospect. To hold a socio-economic position at this time, though – whether one of bourgeois privilege or working class struggle – was to be subject to extreme movements in financial and economic markets.

The foregoing discussion has highlighted an existence during the late nineteenth century in which experiences occur both faster *and* cover a wider and less predictable spectrum of outcomes. Social formations, both political and economic, had become inherently short lived and one's place in the social hierarchy insecure. Before considering how this increased volatility was assimilated into social consciousness, I would like to briefly note how volatility, and its broader conception of motion, helps make more visible an aspect of experience that has historically been underappreciated. As I have already outlined, the last years of the nineteenth century produced a number of intellectual inquiries into the nature of temporality. Spatial considerations and their impact on experience, though, were given less focus or often ignored. David Harvey argues in *The Condition of Postmodernity* that "social theories typically privilege time over space in their formulations. They broadly assume either the existence of some pre-existing spatial order within which temporal processes operate, or that spatial barriers have been so reduced as to render space a contingent rather than fundamental aspect to human action" (205). When we inquire into the reasons for the increased volatility of experience at this time, though, spatial considerations can no longer be ignored.

The increase in economic crises during the nineteenth century is largely due to the greater interconnectedness of regional and national economies – a network in which the crisis of one locality could quickly spread and engulf others. Harvey notes that the economic crisis of 1847-8 proved that Europe "had achieved a level of spatial integration in its economic and financial life that was to make the whole continent

vulnerable to simultaneous crisis formation” (*Condition* 261). A similar argument can be made regarding political formations. Revolution and political upheaval were no longer contained within the specific localities where they originated. The French revolution of 1848 is but one example – “there have been plenty of greater revolutions in the history of the modern world... yet there has been none which spread more rapidly and widely, running like a brushfire across frontiers, countries and even oceans” (*Capital* 10). What the volatility of experience of this time makes clear is that the specifics of an individual’s or a particular community’s experience were no longer tied exclusively to their particular location in space. Giddens summarizes this phenomenon as follows:

In pre-modern societies, space and place [place conceptualized by means of the idea of the locale] largely coincide, since the spatial dimensions of social life are, for most of the population, and in most respects, dominated by “presence” – by localized activities. The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between “absent” others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. (18-19)

Metaphors of speed and acceleration not only fail to capture the broader nature of experience during this time, but they also have the corollary effect of occluding the impact of geographies beyond one’s own. To the extent spatial considerations are made when using metaphors of speed and acceleration, there is a tendency to project a particular society’s existing social structures beyond its own confines as opposed to a genuine engagement with how other spaces stand in relation to one’s own.

The impact of spatiality and its use in the containment of modern anxiety is a topic to which I will return in section three. For now, I want to stress the importance of increasing volatility to the understanding of modern experience. We are not simply moving faster – the direction in which we move appears to be changing more frequently and with less predictability. While the train has historically been the supreme metaphor of the nineteenth century, this metaphor is insufficient and requires supplementation to better capture not just the increasing speed (visualized horizontally) of modernity but also the increasing range of that movement (visualized vertically).²⁴ For the individual as well as for collective society, the range of future possibility is greatly expanded by the compounding effects of increasing speed and increasing volatility and this expansion is reflected in a wider range of expectation experienced in the present. Koselleck observes that expectation is “at once person-specific and interpersonal, expectation also takes place in the today; it is the future made present... Hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity: all enter into expectation and constitute it” (259). Expectation, in other words, is a critical component of historical consciousness and the volatility of nineteenth century experience widens the horizon of expectations to levels never before experienced.

²⁴ As I have suggested, the rhetorical effect achieved by certain metaphors of modernity has the simultaneous effect of obscuring or misrepresenting its underlying object of analysis. Despite this general concern, I cannot resist supplementing the metaphor of the train with that of the roller coaster to illustrate my argument regarding the experience of modernity. The roller coaster with an unknown or invisible track would be even more applicable so as to eliminate the assumption of a predetermined destination.

I have sought to outline this expanded and troubled sense of expectation as part of an overall assessment of modernity's increased levels of anxiety. It would be tempting to stop here and point to an unknown and possibly volatile future as the source of modernity's unease. To do so, though, would fall short of exploring the temporal discontinuity I believe to be critical in the generation of collective social anxiety. I have previously argued that the etiology of collective anxiety is related to the misalignments of current social identities and expectations of future possibility. In other words, expectations are only one part of this relationship. My analysis thus far has shown that experience in the nineteenth century exhibits increasing speed and unique levels of volatility, but an obvious question remains: if current experience (i.e., the recent past) is largely responsible for the assessment of future possibility and thus expectations, why were the volatile experiences of the late nineteenth century not assimilated into social identities at the time in a way that successfully managed possible anxieties?

In a 1949 study, two Harvard sociologists, Jerome Bruner and Leo Postman, presented a theory of perception based on assessing individual reactions to changing environmental stimuli.²⁵ Their study was titled "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm" and the changing stimuli were an altered deck of cards – a deck containing normal cards and several altered cards (i.e., the three of hearts would be painted black as opposed to red). These cards were then shown in rapid succession to subjects who were asked to identify each card as it was shown before moving on to the next

²⁵ I was made aware of this study in Elizabeth Kolbert's fascinating book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.

card. When shown an altered card, or an “incongruous” card as it is referred to in the study, a number of response types occurred before an accurate recognition of the incongruous card was made. Bruner and Postman grouped these pre-recognition responses into three categories: dominance reactions, compromise reactions, and disruption reactions. Dominance reactions were responses that denied the difference between the trick card and its analogous normal card (i.e. the black three of hearts is identified as a red three of hearts). Compromise reactions were responses where the subject created a compromise object (i.e., the red six of spades is reported as either the six of hearts or the purple six of spades). Disruption reactions were responses, or a lack of response, where the subject felt they could no longer provide any kind of accurate answer. One example of a disruptive response from the study is the following:

‘I can’t make the suit out, whatever it is. It didn’t even look like a card that time. I don’t know what color it is now or whether it’s a spade or a heart. I’m not even sure what a spade looks like! My God!’ (218)

What this study makes clear is that the mental processing of new experience, particularly when incongruous with past experience, is far from perfect and, in some cases, mentally disruptive. Incongruity is a “violation of expectation” and it is Bruner and Postman’s contention that “for as long as possible and by whatever means available, the organism will ward off the perception of the unexpected, those things which do not fit his prevailing set” of expectations (208). In other words, the experience of incongruity puts expansive pressure on the boundaries of future possibility (even if only unconsciously), but our comprehension of present experience

is limited by mental responses that deny the new experience, contain the new experience via compromise, or refuse to engage with the new experience at all given its overwhelming disruptiveness.

Bruner and Postman's study highlights the stickiness of pre-existing categories of knowledge in the face of incongruous experience. These pre-existing categories of knowledge are formed from past experience and serve to define the ways in which an individual or group of individuals identifies itself. For these particular subjects, their responses to the cards shown are derived from an identity in which a deck of cards contains fifty-two cards, each with a specified suit and color. The incongruity experienced and responded to in their study might be broadly applied to experience during the nineteenth century. Adams remarks on the incomprehensibility of the latter half of the nineteenth century commenting: "If science were to go on doubling or quadrupling its complexities every ten years, even mathematics would soon succumb. An average mind had succumbed already in 1850; it could no longer understand the problem in 1900" (413). Recognition of new forms of experience is achieved over time and new boundaries of future possibility are drawn, but society is in a permanent state of catching up. This is both because the slow process of understanding new experience is a permanent condition in a world that is constantly changing, but also, and just as importantly, the manner in which the experience of incongruity (of which I believe the volatility of modernity to be a form) is assimilated into social procedure and cultural identity is delayed and uneven. This process of

assimilation is one that would be a focus of social theorists throughout the twentieth century.

In the early 1920s, the American sociologist William Ogburn proposed a theory of cultural lag. Based in part on Marx's materialist conception of history and Freud's dream theories, cultural lag occurs "when one of two parts of culture which are correlated changes before or in a greater degree than the other part does, thereby causing less adjustment between the two parts than existed previously" (86). Ogburn based much of his theory on a distinction between material (concrete experience) and non-material culture (theoretical discussion). This particular distinction has been controversial among certain critics, but the crux of his theory – differing and non-synchronous levels of change within various sectors of society – has had a lasting influence in sociological work.²⁶ Raymond Williams, in developing his concept of "structures of feeling" in the 1970s, highlights a similar distinction between different parts of the cultural collective but does so in starkly different terms and in a way that more effectively explicates possible cultural misalignments and the resulting tensions relative to Ogburn's more empirically based work.

In interrogating the relationship between lived experience and the more formal (or institutional) aspects of social relationship, Williams stresses the frequent misalignment between these two categories and the ways in which this incongruity

²⁶ For a good summary of Ogburn's work, see Benoît Godin's "Innovation Without the Word: William F. Ogburn's Contribution to the Study of Technological Innovation" in *Minerva: A Review of Science, Learning & Policy* (July 1, 2010, 277-307). For specific areas of criticism regarding his work, see pages 282 and 288.

expresses itself. Its expression is an affective one defined by a kind of “thinking or feeling” that is in an embryonic state and is yet to be formally articulated in social discourse (131). Williams makes an important distinction between the social and the personal: “the social is the fixed and explicit – the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions – all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal – this, here, now, alive, active, ‘subjective’” (we must be careful not to associate these terms with a distinction between society and the individual) (128). For Williams, the personal is a key component of the social but is constitutive of a nascent and yet to be defined aspect of collective social identity requiring affective methods of evaluation to understand its present and historical existence. This new evaluative mode is necessary because the past, or those experiences that have been formally interpreted and translated into formulas of social existence, over-influences attempts to evaluate a present social consciousness that is living with yet to be translated experience:

In most description and analysis, *culture and society are expressed in habitual past tense*. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products. What is defensible as a procedure in conscious history, where on certain assumptions many actions can be definitively taken as having ended, is habitually projected, not only into the always moving substance of the past, but into contemporary life, in which relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes. Analysis is then centered on relations between these produced institutions, formations, and experiences, so that now, as in that produced past, only the fixed explicit form exist, and *living presence* is always, by definition, receding. (128, emphasis mine)

Williams' notion of a "living presence" bears some similarity to Koselleck's concept of historical consciousness – both attempt to capture and express a social affect derived from temporal dislocations. And while Williams falls somewhat short of capturing the critical aspect of future expectation within this dialectic, his framework of how past experience informs our experience of the present speaks to the crucial manner in which present social identities are largely defined by a past that becomes increasingly irrelevant in a perpetually changing modern existence.²⁷ In highlighting the deficiencies of various social formation's assimilation of present experience, Williams makes a no less important point – historical experience, that of the past and even the distant past, maintains a position of lasting influence in the ways a particular society defines itself collectively. When I use the term identity, I am referring to a collective social consciousness that informs our ways of managing current experience and assimilating possible transitions into the future. Social identity is largely drawn from existing frameworks and models that can then be applied to present experience. The inelasticity of these models and their basis in an increasingly distant (and possibly irrelevant) past provides a foundation for a social identity that is ill-equipped to face present experience. For Williams, the use of these models (or as he refers to them, these "social generalities," "categorical products," and "absolute formations") for evaluations of culture and society constitute a "basic

²⁷ I say "somewhat" because in using phrases such as "habitually projected," Williams hints at a temporal mindset that encompasses aspects of the future, but he does not formally address the concept of future expectation in his work on structures of feeling. Koselleck would most certainly argue that a society's "living presence," as Williams conceives of it, is critically informed by its horizon of expectations.

error,” an error that increases in magnitude in environments of increasing volatility (129).

Much has been written regarding the reasons for the inelasticity of social frameworks and the ways in which they are perpetuated – reification is one culprit; ideology is often another whether it be a form of false consciousness perpetrated by one class upon another or the more pervasive process of Althusserian interpellation. For purposes of this discussion, though, I am less interested in an exploration of the mechanics that possibly perpetuate these frameworks than I am in the affirmation of their existence and a recognition of the inherent delays in the assimilation of new experience into social identity. These delays and the resulting misalignments of social formations and lived experience are critical to understanding the magnitude of and reasons for modernity’s anxiety, particularly during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As I have outlined, experience during this time period was of a uniquely volatile nature – one encompassing both speed and unpredictability of outcome. The impact of this volatility on social consciousness is twofold: first, it serves to expand the future horizon both horizontally and vertically, thus creating a meaningfully greater field of future possibility; at the same time, volatility exacerbates delays in the translation of current experience – experience that was unanticipated, inconsistent with the past, and possibly short lived – into a fully integrated social identity. Thus, the volatility of modern experience disproportionately impacts two categories of collective social consciousness – an identity based on the past and a sense of expectation based on the future. The misalignment of these two components of social

consciousness – and the resulting disruption in temporal continuity – is the critical site and source of social anxiety.

So what then of the metaphors often employed to express the condition of modernity – those of break and rupture (as opposed to transition) and those of speed and acceleration (as opposed to volatility)? In asking this question, I am not suggesting that all considerations of modernity, or even the majority of them, are based upon the simple binaries of pre-modern versus modern or stability versus motion. And yet, even in our most sophisticated attempts to understand and represent the unique experience of modernity, these metaphors may have unintended consequences. Bruno Latour addresses this phenomenon when he comments:

The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern', 'modernization', or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished. (10)

While Latour comments on a growing reluctance among contemporaries to support this double asymmetry (this thesis being one example), this reluctance and its ultimate rectification have yet to be considered with respect to its relationship with how anxieties of modernity were generated and how they are thought about in contemporary discourse. Metaphors of break and rupture, even if only implied, have eliminated the pre-modern as a part of modern social identity.²⁸ The rhetorical

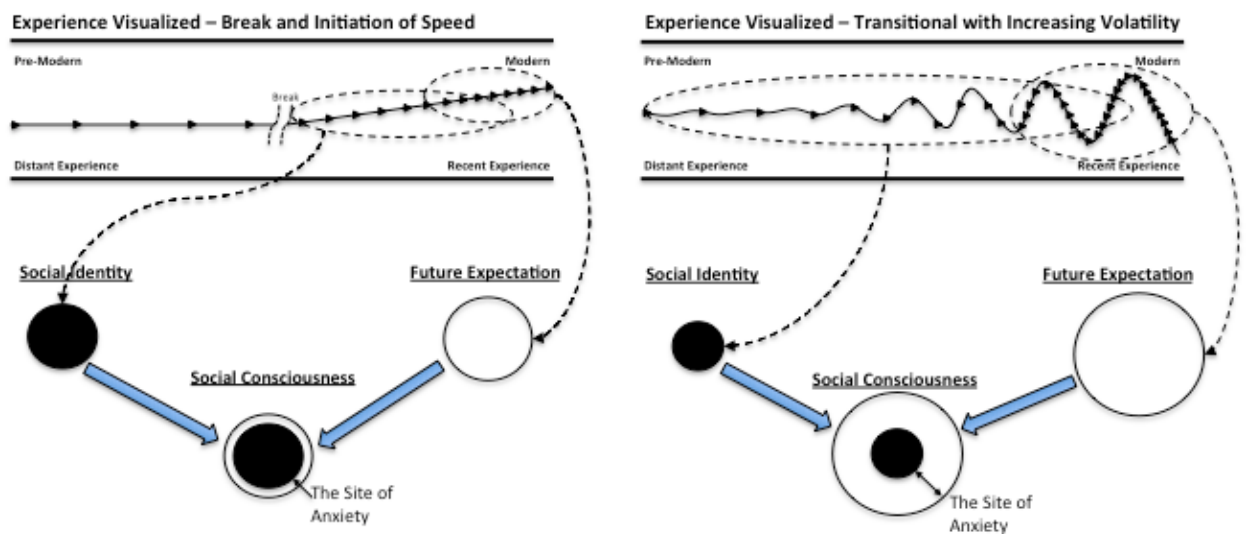
²⁸ Despite an obvious reservation regarding the ways in which the terms “pre-modern” or “ancient” suggest a categorical difference from that of “modern,” I continue to use them here but do so in a way

starkness of these metaphors limits the conceptualization of a social identity in transition – instead, metaphors of break and rupture create a portrait of a historical consciousness in the late nineteenth century that was no longer connected to or informed by its more distant past. Other metaphors of speed and acceleration fail to appropriately account for the volatility of modern experience in ways that fully capture the expansive pressure applied to the horizon of future expectation. These two effects – that of a social identity formed exclusively from modern or post-break experience (resulting in an overestimation) and future expectation based exclusively on speed of experience as opposed to its volatility (resulting in an underestimation) – combine to reduce the magnitude of the tension that is at the heart of modern collective anxiety.

The following schematic attempts to represent graphically the manner in which certain metaphors of the experience of modernity combine to reduce the dialectical tension generative of social anxiety. The intensity of this tension is expressed by the size differential (this differential being *the site of anxiety*) between the two circles representing social identity and future expectation – the overlaying of these two circles is meant to represent their dialectical relationship. Each circle is informed by a visualization of experience both of which are increasing in speed (as represented by the increasing number of small arrows on the lines on each side of the schematic).

that is meant to capture a more transitional nature between the two time frames. This is not to suggest that the modern, as it has come to be known, is not significantly different from that of the pre-modern or ancient. I am more focused on the ways, though, in which certain language used to represent the magnitude of these changes simultaneously obscures the manner in which past and present remain connected and also possibly limits the horizon of future expectation as it was lived at specific moments of the past.

On the left hand side, experience is visualized as one of a break from the past and with no increases to experiential volatility (only increases to experiential speed). On the right hand side, experience is visualized as continuous while the up and down movements of the line are meant to represent the increasing intensity of the volatility of this experience. The schematic then highlights the manner in which metaphors used to express the experience of modernity can serve to reduce the site of anxiety:



Whether this reduction of the site of anxiety is an unintended consequence of the ways in which modernity has been narrated or could possibly be an unconscious effort to contain past anxieties, it is difficult to say. As I have already commented, the recognition of modernity's anxieties has been a consistent and enduring trope of most writing on this time frame. It is not the recognition of anxiety that I have attempted to highlight here so much as the reasons for its magnitude and the ongoing sense of its uniqueness relative to prior periods of history. Anxiety's etiological basis in temporal discontinuity and the magnitude of this discontinuity in the nineteenth

century have been frequently ignored or underestimated by many social critics – anxiety is often taken as a given with minimal consideration given to the temporal dialectic and the specificities of experience that give rise to it. By limiting the site of anxiety, as I am referring to it, I believe you create space for retroactive attempts at its containment. Singular narratives of either a loss of the past (often nostalgic) or of an unknown future are put forth without any attempt to consider the ways in which these two aspects of temporality relate to one another in social consciousness. Given that many of the anxieties of early modernity are still with us today, an understanding of the etiology of anxiety and the ways we attempt to manage anxiety are still of the utmost importance.

Much of the discussion to this point has attempted to reestablish a temporal dialectic in evaluations of collective social anxiety – the role of space has, thus far, received less attention. There has long been a consensus among theorists of modern and post-modern aesthetics that the former period was one of intense temporal contemplation while the latter has privileged spatial considerations (while marginalizing, if not completely eliminating, temporal ones). “The organization of space, whether it be in painting, architecture, or sculpture, has become the primary aesthetic problem of mid-twentieth century culture, as the problem of time (in Bergson, Proust, and Joyce) was the primary aesthetic concern of the first decades of this century” notes Daniel Bell In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (107). Fredric Jameson captures a similar sentiment stating that “modernism already ended some time ago and with it, presumably time itself, as it was widely rumored that

space was supposed to replace time in the general ontological scheme of things” (*Ideologies* 636). Jameson’s tone conveys his skepticism of mutually exclusive assessments of either time or space, but his point regarding a general “scheme of things” and its evolution is important to note – only more recently have spatial concerns come to the forefront of theoretical inquiry.

One notable exception to this trend is M.M. Bakhtin, who in the 1930s introduced the concept of the “chronotope” (literally, “time space”) in an attempt to better evaluate the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Even so, Bakhtin still believed that “in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time” (85). One reason for this focus is the material form of the novel itself – the very act of reading is one that requires time (particularly compared with painting or other plastic arts which can be apprehended more immediately). Contemporary critics have placed greater emphasis on spatial considerations in late nineteenth century fiction, but I believe there is more work to be done in this respect. As I have noted, society’s changing relationship with space was integral to the increasing volatility of experience of the late nineteenth century and its resulting anxieties. The novel is a critical site in which this new relationship with space and its connection with anxiety is represented – as Jameson has noted, “works can not manage anxieties about the social order unless they have first revived them and given them some rudimentary expression” (“Reification” 144). Let me be clear, though, that in addressing spatial concerns, I do not seek to reorder the time-space “ontological scheme of things” so much as to give spatial

considerations equal footing in the assessment of human experience and its aesthetic representation. As Edward Soja has argued, the historical imagination during the late nineteenth century “seemed resolutely to be erasing a sensitivity to the critical salience of human geographies” (31). The section that follows looks to certain literary texts of this period in an effort to counteract this erasure while also considering how space is used as a means to contain anxieties generated by the volatile nature of late nineteenth century experience.

SECTION THREE

Zola's Volatile Representations and Engagement with Empty(ied) Colonial Space

Reformulated conceptions of anxiety and modern experience allow for productive re-examinations of fictional texts and the criticism that surrounds them. I have argued for an understanding of collective social anxiety based on the tension between a present social identity and collective expectations for the future. While social identities of the late nineteenth century were still meaningfully informed by a distant past, their horizon of expectations had been greatly expanded due to increasingly volatile experience. The term volatility captures both the increasing overall speed of modern experience (well covered ground by social theorists) and its frequent changes in direction – changes encompassing movements both large and small, starts and stops, accelerations and decelerations, growth as well as contraction. The experience of volatility has often been obscured in narratives of modern progress – both those political, economic, and social discourses of the nineteenth century, as well as contemporary historical discourse that addresses life at this time. To understand anxiety and volatility in these ways is to acknowledge their unique pervasiveness with respect to modern experience – a ubiquity that is best approached in terms of gradations or intensities (as opposed to binary categorizations such as anxious/carefree or crisis/normalcy). As we have seen, the experience of volatility and its resulting anxieties penetrates modern existence in ways that cross traditional social categories, including class, as well as the arbitrary temporal markers of the

calendar. For these reasons, I believe the concepts of anxiety and volatility might serve as an effective basis from which to interrogate and possibly break down the lines that are inevitably drawn in social and aesthetic taxonomies.

One area where critical pressure might be applied is to literary genres. Modernism, a genre typically associated with the first several decades of the twentieth century, has come to be identified, both in terms of its formal structure as well as the social experience that informs its structure, with a singular form of experience: crisis. The concept of crisis is often vaguely defined but inevitably connotes a form of collective experience that is both significant and socially destructive (World War I being the most obvious experiential crisis of the early twentieth century). As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane explain: “the shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis, is a crucial element *of the style*” of Modernism (24). The link between Modernism and crisis is not misplaced, but I believe this suturing of crisis to works of the early twentieth century has had the derivative effect of delimiting the nature of experience as it is represented in texts that preceded this period, particularly those labeled as works of literary naturalism. Alan Bullock notes this reductive effect in “The Double Image,” his essay on the experiences of the early twentieth century that inform aesthetic Modernism, when he comments that “...one of the strongest impressions left on the external observer examining the world of the [nineteenth century] is of an age remarkably unselfconscious, self-confident, far less troubled by the anxieties, fears and fantasies, the self-consciousness and guilt which may tremble underneath a few

of its writings but which have found such vivid expression and subscription in Europe since then” (62). These vivid expressions, and the various schools that came to be associated with them, seemingly “made of Naturalism a spent force, a mechanical and basically unimaginative mode in the arts” (Bradbury and McFarlane 197).

In recent decades, some critics have begun the much-needed process of tearing down the reductive assessments that dogged literary naturalism for much of the twentieth century, having brought to light the modernist (and even post-modernist) structures embedded within these works. Significant work remains to be done in this respect, though, and I believe the concepts of anxiety and volatility can serve as a basis to further this effort. In doing so, I will turn to two economically focused texts of Émile Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* series: *La Curée* and *L’Argent*. Published in 1872 and 1891, respectively, these texts span the majority of Zola’s engagement with the *Rougon-Macquart* project as well as a meaningful period of time during the late nineteenth century (the primary focus of this thesis). The benefits of applying the concepts of anxiety and volatility, as I have conceived of them here, are twofold. First, I believe they enhance the visibility of experiential movement as it is represented in Zola’s texts. As I shall outline, volatility is a constant and increasing presence in *La Curée* and *L’Argent*. This presence complicates historical criticisms that have limited the representation of modern experience in Zola’s work to one of two categories: stasis or crisis. Second, these concepts can enhance our understanding of the ways texts attempt to manage social anxieties that inevitably result from an increasingly volatile existence. In the case of *L’Argent*, these attempts

involve an aggressive push into colonial space whose abstracted representation can be read both as an attempt to represent the interconnectedness of space (a critical reason for modernity's volatility) and as a manipulation of colonial space that serves to enhance its anxiety reducing effect. And while the efficacy of Zola's attempts in *L'Argent* to contain the social anxieties of his time is questionable, an appreciation of the nature of experience in late nineteenth century France and its inherent volatility allows for readings of Zola that are less constrained by a critical history that has relegated works of naturalism to designations of the mechanical and the unimaginative.

Zola's fictional works (and works of French and American naturalism more generally) have been frequently assigned to a barren transitional period in the evolution of the novel – one in which the great realist writers of the early nineteenth century (Balzac, Scott, Tolstoy) have given way, but before the novel has been transformed by modernist icons of the early twentieth century (Joyce, Woolf, Proust). For many critics, as Susan Harrow observes, Zola is simply “too *lisible*, too historically located, too prescriptive, too anachronistic, too stable, too unreconstructed, too remote from contemporary concerns, too prolix, too predictable, too representationalist, too naïve, and perhaps... just too obvious” (24). Georg Lukács was a particularly prominent critic of late nineteenth century realism in this respect and his critiques have had a lasting effect. In his 1936 essay “Narrate or Describe?,” Lukács mourns the loss of what he calls “epic significance” in the writing of this time, particularly in the novels of Flaubert and Zola. Life in Zola's fiction, as

Lukács sees it, “develops almost *without movement or change* so long as it is, in his conception, socially normal” (123, emphasis mine).

For Zola, who had claimed that his only interest was in “life, struggle, intensity,” the charge that life in his novels was static and lacking in animation is a serious one.²⁹ As the title of his essay suggests, Lukács argues that the literary process of narration, one in which the representation of material things is integrated within the overarching dramatic context of the work, has given way to a process of mere description in which social facts are presented exclusively as “results, as *caput mortuum* of a social process” already given (113). Lukács accuses Zola and Flaubert of providing weak connections between characters and events portrayed – characters are “merely spectators, more or less interested in the events” (116). This separation is grounded in a perceived overemphasis by Zola and Flaubert on things instead of persons, resulting in an unstructured narrative that presents itself to its reader as a series of unconnected snapshots of modern life – “without the revelation of important traits and without the interaction of the characters with world events, objects, the forces of nature and social institutions, even the most extraordinary adventures would be meaningless and empty,” Lukács warns (124). According to Lukács, the lack of structural unity by Zola and Flaubert deprives their work of any sense of temporal movement while simultaneously excluding from its textual surface the occurrence of the exceptional or the irrational. Lukács describes the representation of life in the texts of Zola and Flaubert as “constant,” “even-tenored,” “monotonous,” “sprawling

²⁹ From *My Hates* (1866).

without contours,” and “without movement or change” (122-3). In other words, normal life is depicted as a form of permanent stasis, lacking movement and any aspect of volatility, minimal or otherwise.

The charge of stasis relates to another fatal aspect of Zola’s fiction according to Lukács – Zola’s representation of “socially normal” bourgeois society does not properly integrate the representation of catastrophe (and its reasons for occurring) (123). This violates a critical imperative of the fictional text for Lukács:

An accurate appreciation of the motive forces of the social process and a precise, impartial, profound and comprehensive reflection of their effects on life are always manifested in movement which *exposes the organic unity of the normal and the exceptional*. (123, emphasis mine)

The reasons for catastrophe and crisis have been relegated to “other diverse and heterogeneous factors,” such as heredity, that Lukács believes to be beyond the “motive forces of the social process” (123). Zola’s commitment to science and scientific determinism in his fiction is well-covered ground, both in his own essays such as “The Experimental Novel” and in the vast amount of critical scholarship on Zola and naturalism more generally. It is not difficult to agree with Lukács’ argument that the exclusive use of scientific determinism is insufficient to explain social catastrophe. My issue lies more in his characterization of catastrophe as being the only form of experience that might exist outside of the “normal course of life” in the *Rougon-Macquart*. This difference of interpretive opinion may be related, in part, to how one defines catastrophe. Even so, I would argue that the binary approach taken by Lukács, one in which the diegesis of Zola’s texts is one of either normalcy

(stasis) or catastrophe (movement), fails to appreciate the vast spaces between these two poles and the degrees to which social, political and economic volatilities are represented there. A close reading of Zola's fiction, particularly in the economically driven texts of the cycle that I will explore here, reveals the persistent presence of experiential volatility within the "normalcy" of everyday bourgeois life. These volatilities are both large and small and apply to both primary and secondary characters of the text. And while factors of scientific determinism play a critical role in many of the texts of the *Rougon-Macquart*, it is by no means the only path by which the experience of modernity is approached in the texts. To read Zola is to experience the representation of experience in all its multiplicity. As Harrow characterizes it: "Zola's thematic modernity is plural and equivocal... and is the modernity of one who is alert to both the affirmative and the aversive consequences of accelerated modernization" (43).

To best understand Lukács' critique of Zola, I must touch upon his theories of experience under modern capitalism as outlined in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). It is here that Lukács' puts forth most clearly his theory of reification, a process by which "the commodity structure of all 'things' and their obedience to 'natural laws' is found to exist already in a finished form, as something immutably given" in the individual's confrontation with society (92). Lukács believes this reified social existence in a commodity based culture is accompanied by an increasingly rationalized labor process in which the subjective and objective experiences of the worker are formed:

The chief changes undergone by the subject and object of the economic process are as follows: (i) in the first place, the mathematical analysis of work processes denotes *a break with the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity of the product...* In the second place, the fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject... As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized his lack of will is reinforced by *the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative.* (88-89)

These changes experienced by the subject and object of the capitalist economic process reduce the nature of experience to one of “pure immediacy”:

The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e., a perfectly closed system must likewise transform the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world: *it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space.* (89)

It is clear that, for Lukács, the fictional writing process becomes similar to that of any other work process under capitalism – the work product of the writer becomes a passive vessel where the reified relations of modern capitalism are put forth in descriptive snapshots lacking in narrative unity and temporal flow. Given the ubiquity of the processes of reification and rationalization under capitalism, these are forces from which no author might be exempt, particularly those like Zola and Flaubert who were thought to be of the bourgeois class and subject to certain categories of experience.

Lukács believes the capitalist system and its “continuous dehumanization of social life” and “general debasement of humanity” has come to dominate the literary aesthetic of this time, draining it of its poetic vitality, while simultaneously making literature itself an accomplice in a general deterioration in human social relations –

“the poetic level of life decays – and literature intensifies the decay” (127). For Lukács, the reified relations of social existence severely limit (or even eliminate) possible insights into the real struggles of society by the fictional writer – the fictional text is no longer “the poetry of men in struggle, the poetry of the turbulent, active interaction of men” (126). What remains in the text has largely become a litany of material description, lacking any substantive connection to the larger plot or narrative structure of the text – “description is the writer’s substitute for the epic significance that has been lost” (126). Lukács’ focus on loss is interesting to note and his critique in this essay offers no path forward for the writer of the late nineteenth century or of his own time. He offers no examples of late nineteenth century fiction that offer better possibilities of interrogation or escape from the iron cage of modern capitalism.

I find the nostalgic nature of his critique to be problematic in two respects. Lukács faults Zola and Flaubert for failing to narrate their fiction with individual action supported by a process of “poetic selection of *the essential elements* within the varied richness of life” (128, emphasis mine). But can epic representations of selected “essential elements” in a time of unique volatility and constant change represent a genuine attempt to engage with the social, political and economic realities of this time? Put differently, would narratives of epic significance have relevance for modern sensibilities? The transformation of the fictional text away from epic action to one of material description would seem to be emblematic of the very dehumanization of capitalism that Lukács speaks of. New methods of expression are required to express the effects of a volatile capitalist system in which essential

elements, to the extent they are recognizable at all, become irrelevant before they can be recognized. To write the epic story in times of extreme volatility would be disingenuous or, at a minimum, under-representative of the very strength of the system it is trying to represent or possibly struggle against. Furthermore, Lukács does not accuse Zola or Flaubert of having freely chosen to write passive works of bourgeois ideology so much as he claims that the structure of their work is the unavoidable consequence of the larger capitalist system which has contaminated and predetermined the outcome of any creative process. To the extent this is the case, why engage in the act of aesthetic critique at all?

And yet, in “Narrate or Describe?,” Lukács does just this, spending considerable time with only a limited number of examples of Zola’s description (the race scene in Zola’s *Nana* is the only descriptive sequence discussed at any length). In doing so, he concludes that Zola’s work is simply a series of discontinuous fragments lacking any narrative of unified action:

In objectivism like Zola’s, the unity of the objects chosen as the thematic material provides the principle of composition. The composition consists of the assemblage of all the important details as seen from various points of view. *The result is a series of static pictures*, of still lives connected only through the relations of objects arrayed one beside the other according to their own inner logic, never following one from the other, certainly never one out of the other. The so-called action is only a thread on which *the still lives are disposed in a superficial, ineffective fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures*. (144, emphasis mine)

This “assemblage of all the important details,” or process of description, is condemned to the status of an empty gesture, an involuntary response to the material forces of modern capitalism in which no revelation of the repressed and real relations

of society might be interrogated in a genuine or enlightening way. I believe Lukács' theory of reification to be an important and influential aspect of understanding modern capitalism, but is the process of reification so ubiquitous and evenly applied within bourgeois aesthetics that they can have no value for understanding the ways in which artists represent and struggle against, consciously or not, larger social forces? Lukács' limited engagement with examples of Zola's description is insufficient to justify the kind of totalizing critique that "Narrate or Describe?" makes. In this sense, Lukács appears to apply a process of interrogation homologous to the one he ascribes to Zola – one in which the outcome of the text, whether this be representations created by fictional texts or arguments created in critical ones, has largely been predetermined. Just as Lukács claims that Zola has lost "himself in a whirlwind of details of apparently equal significance" and does not actively integrate these details within a larger narrative, Lukács seems to treat all instances of Zola's description, which are countless, as all having "apparently equal significance" (128). Lukács never puts instances of description in conversation with one another nor considers them diachronically across the entirety of the *Rougon-Macquart*. Jameson argues that if the process of reification is one of repressed realities (as opposed to outright cynicism or lies) then "an exploration of repression or of ideological bias in literary criticism demands an attention to the outer and constitutive limits of the discipline just as much as to the positive acts committed on a daily basis in its names and within its confines" (*Ideologies* 419). Lukács' critique of Zola focuses exclusively on these "positive acts," an important task to be sure, but fails to consider any aspect of "the

outer and constitutive limits” of Zola’s work as a means of considering their usefulness in understanding the dynamics of late nineteenth century modernity.

I have lingered on Lukács because his critique of Zola has had a lasting influence. Only more recently has the presumed representational stasis of Zola’s descriptive philosophy begun to become unstuck. As David Baguley notes in *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision*, excessive description “became, and has remained, a particularly convenient issue on which to attack naturalist literature and on which to pin dismissive and reductive attitudes” (186). Baguley explains that the naturalist writer rarely succumbs to a complete process of realist description, stating instead that the “dialectic of (realistic) involvement and (artistic) detachment” is an “extensive and fundamental feature of naturalist literature” (81). The resulting tension from this dialectic is fluid as “such documentation,” or description, “was incorporated into naturalist texts *with varying degrees of integration* within the narrative line” (81, emphasis mine). These varying degrees of integration, intended or not by the author, are an aspect of the naturalist text that Lukács does not pursue, resulting in a critique of Zola that itself feels “episodic” – a critique based on singular engagements with relatively few episodes of description in the text.

Newer generations of critics have conducted more comprehensive and sustained analyses of Zola’s fiction and have documented wide ranging contradictions and ambivalences. In his essay on *La Bête humaine*, Gilles Deleuze notes a “double register” in the text in which themes of instinct and heredity, on the one hand, are at play with themes related to the death instinct (famously referred to by Deleuze as “*la*

fêlure” or “the crack”), on the other. For Deleuze, Zola’s text “integrates two basic elements that were previously foreign to it: Drama, with the historic heredity of instincts; and Epos, with the epical heredity of the crack. As they cross each other, they form the rhythm of the work, that is, they assure the distribution of sounds and silence” (326). In *Zola and the Bourgeoisie*, Brian Nelson outlines an oscillating and ambivalent representation of bourgeois society in the *Rougon-Macquart* stating: “an element of ambiguity arises from the contrast of Zola’s positivist ideology, which leads to an optimistic vision of a well ordered society based on science, and his detailed observation of the anarchic nature of the society based on the survival of the fittest” (24). In his analysis of the theme of speculation, David Bell comments that the texts are haunted by ambivalences in which “speculative transactions are both beneficial and potentially harmful” (152). And, in stark contrast to the sterility of Zola’s description suggested by Lukács, Jameson goes so far as to label Zola as the “novelist who offers some of the richest and most tangible deployments of affect in nineteenth-century realism” (*Antinomies* 44).

The preceding summary is cursory, but a consistent picture begins to emerge among these critics of a particular liveliness to the texts of the *Rougon-Macquart* – a push and pull between various thematic and poetic registers in which the fluidity of nineteenth century society plays itself out on the fictional page. The effect of extreme volatility of nineteenth century experience, which I have outlined in section two of this thesis, is a critical factor in these competing registers. Before considering this claim in more detail, I would make one note relating to critical protocol when

considering Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*. The literary critics just mentioned, Lukács notwithstanding, highlight the efficacy of a diachronic and sustained evaluation of the thematic and poetic registers across the entirety of the *Rougon-Macquart*. A complete review of the twenty texts of the *Rougon-Macquart* is not possible here, but I will attempt to conduct a similar process as it relates to two more economically focused novels in the cycle: *La Curée* and *L'Argent*. I believe these texts create for the possibility of better understanding certain literal and metaphorical movements within the *Rougon-Macquart* that have received less attention among critics.

Let me start with *La Curée*, in which the fluid plurality of Zola's modernity begins to emerge. In *La Curée*, Zola's story of the rampant and fraudulent speculation connected with the Haussmannization of Paris, Aristide Saccard attempts to shed his prior political and economic impotence by following his politically influential brother to Paris and seeking a new beginning. His economic rise is fast and fortuitous as Saccard stumbles into a bevy of inside information about government construction plans while also securing a fortune to pursue a variety of investment schemes through his marriage to the aristocratic Renée. Despite his access to inside information and significant investment funds, Saccard's financial security moves back and forth between overwhelming success (or at least the appearance of it) and the brink of total ruin leaving an impression of constant movement on the story's reader. Even at a moment of seeming financial success, Saccard's exhilaration is offset by a number of anxieties suggesting that crests can only be thought of as mere preludes to later troughs:

At this period his affairs became so complicated, he had his finger in so many pies, that he slept barely three hours a night and read his correspondence in his carriage. The marvelous thing was that his coffers seemed inexhaustible. He held shares in every company, built houses with a sort of mania, turned to every trade, and threatened to inundate Paris *like a rising tide*; and yet he was never seen to realize a genuine clear profit, to pocket a big sum of gold shining in the sun. This flood of gold with no known source, which seem to flow from his office *in endless waves*, astonished the onlookers and made him, at one moment a prominent public figure to whom the newspapers describe all the witticisms that came out of the Bourse. (98, emphasis mine)

The figurative use of tides and waves to describe Saccard's financial situation leaves a clear impression of perpetual movement – a constant up and down, and coming and going. Saccard would later reach the point of having to “perform a daily miracle” to pay his ongoing bills and possessed only “the façade of missing capital” (136, 138). By the end of the novel, Saccard finds a scheme to temporarily solve his financial problems – “The golden stream had a current at last. But it was not yet solid, established fortune, flowing with an even continuous current” (253). This oscillation between wealth and destitution, between an apparent financial prowess and total ineptitude, is a constant thematic presence within the novel with implications that reverberate beyond Saccard. Renée fears that she will one day “awaken from the dream of pleasure she had lived in for the past ten years, mad, soiled by one of her husband's speculations, in which he himself would go under” (19). It is easy to dismiss Saccard's financial instability as the inevitable outcome of a manipulator with little vision or talent, but the impression on the reader remains – the economic environment of Paris at this time is one in which every success is offset by

simultaneous or future failures, where no improvement is permanent, where every rise is precipitated by a subsequent fall.

These movements in financial security are related to another important site of volatility in *La Curée*: the streets and buildings of the city of Paris. In probably the most memorable and referenced scene of *La Curée*, the young Saccard sits high above Paris on the Buttes Montmartre and describes to his first wife Angèle the ways in which new networks of streets and buildings are to be constructed across Paris. Saccard describes this process (and his expected personal influence on it) physically, using his “outstretched hand, open and sharp as a sabre” to indicate a coming process of rearrangement in which parts of the city will be created or renewed while others will be destroyed or effaced – “whole neighborhoods will be melted down” (68-9). The violence implied by Saccard’s performance is clear – the city is a “giant prey” whose “entrails” would be torn apart by Haussmannization and the real estate speculator (69). The future productivity of these destructions provides a basis for their justification, but it should be noted that this process, as represented in the text, is not one of simple or linear enhancement. Each new construction requires destruction and displacement that contributes to varying levels of disorientation for Parisians. For each structure that creates new spaces within Paris and draws people to the city, other structures are eliminated or re-priced leaving the impression that whole neighborhoods were “bubbling away in a chemist’s retort” (69).³⁰ Zola’s

³⁰ In his introduction to *La Curée*, Brian Nelson notes that rents in Paris doubled in the years 1851 through 1857 and that during the “1850s and 1860s a great number of buildings were torn down. Hundreds of thousands of people were evicted” (see pages xi-xv).

representation of Haussmannization in *La Curée* is not exclusively one of supplementation and enhancement, but also a simultaneous process of creation and destruction, of new possibilities combined with social disorientation.

In addition to narrative volatilities surrounding financial wealth and urban development, *La Curée* exhibits a thematic oscillation of critical importance. *La Curée* is as much the story of the aristocratic Renée as it is Saccard's and their relationship forms the basis of a stark contrast between lingering social structures of the *ancien régime* and the social and economic behaviors of modern day Paris. Nowhere is this tension more present than in the representation of Saccard's residence and Renée's family home. The Parc Monceau, Saccard's opulent apartment, is "full of noise, business, and pleasure, through which modern life, with the sound of jingling gold and rustling skirts, swept like a whirlwind" (93). Renée's family home, on the other hand, the Hôtel Béraud, attempts to maintain the façade of a flourishing aristocracy and represent a "bourgeois family whose pedigree went further back than that of certain noble houses" (59). Nelson highlights that in these two homes the "corruptions of the present are thus opposed to the lost rectitude of the past" and that "these two hotels are the two poles between which Renée's existence oscillates: purity and corruption, past and present" (66). This oscillation, between a weakening past and an all-consuming volatile modern present, is a dominant thematic element to *La Curée* and its resulting tension is most strongly reflected in Renée's descent into degeneracy and her death at the end of the novel. The thematic tension that develops from these competing registers can be read as being reflective of the site of anxiety,

as I defined it in section two of this thesis. A long-standing social identity (represented by Renée and her family) can no longer effectively manage an expanded horizon of expectations associated with a more volatile present (represented by the fluctuations of financial wealth and urban development). The result is a text steeped in the tension of social transition – a transition marked by present volatilities and anxiety. Zola’s focus in *La Curée*, though, is on the evocation of this transitional period and its resulting social degeneration rather than an active attempt to manage the resulting anxieties – as Zola commented in his notes on the text: “*La Curée* is the unwholesome plant that has sprouted out of the dung heap of the Empire; it is the incest grown on the compost of millions” (Nelson 202).

By the time Zola wrote *L’Argent* almost twenty years later, he would be in the middle of a transition of his own – one in which he more actively engages in an attempt to manage the increasing anxieties of late nineteenth century Paris through a forward looking social idealism.³¹ In his preparatory notes for the novel, Zola writes: “I should like, in this novel, not to conclude on disgust with life (pessimism). Life, just as it is, but accepted, in spite of everything, for love of itself, in its strength.”³² In *L’Argent*, Zola continues Saccard’s narrative and undertakes the formidable task of outlining in naturalistic detail the inner and increasingly complicated world of the late nineteenth century French financial system. The story begins in the days following

³¹ Zola’s brand of social utopianism would find its fullest expression in the texts of *Les Trois villes* and *Les Quatre évangile*, written in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. I am less focused here on Zola’s changing overall social vision than I am with certain tonal and spatial shifts specific to *L’Argent* that underlie his attempt to diagnose and manage anxious aspects of late nineteenth century Parisian life.

³² As quoted by Valerie Minogue in her introduction to the text (xix).

the death of Renée. Saccard again teeters on the verge of bankruptcy and searches for new possibilities upon which to amass another fortune and return his reputation to its rightful place among the rich of the Paris Bourse. Saccard discovers this possibility after meeting his neighbor Georges Hamelin, an engineer, who has travelled the world extensively along with his sister Caroline in pursuit of public construction works in the Middle East. In these works, Saccard finds the basis upon which a narrative of limitless wealth can be constructed and sold in the form of equity interests in a new publicly traded bank – the aptly named Universal Bank. Once the shares are listed on the Bourse, Saccard maniacally pursues every available path, many of which are morally questionable or illegal, to increase the shares' value. After a precipitous rise (a six-fold increase during the bank's first years), the shares begin to stumble when a short position, established by the significantly better-capitalized Jewish banker Gundermann, begins to put downward pressure on the bank's shares. A market panic quickly develops and the impact on the share price is catastrophic – the bank's shares become worthless in a matter of days. Despite the financial ruin that is unleashed on almost every character of the text except Gundermann, the text of *L'Argent* ends on a particularly positive note – money was “poisonous and destructive,” it concludes, but it also was “the ferment of all social growth, the compost necessary for the great works that made life easier” (371).

Despite the hopeful conclusion of *L'Argent*, one notices that the experience of volatility has intensified relative to *La Curée* and is seemingly embedded within every aspect of Second Empire life as it is presented in the text. Saccard's financial

position will continue, as it did in *La Curée*, to oscillate wildly, but here Zola further expands the implications of economic volatility to a broader set of characters all participating in the growing practice of economic speculation. Riding home one evening, Saccard describes the ostentation of the residences he passes:

And all of this expansive life, this luxury, blazing in an apotheosis of caprice and art, was entirely paid for by speculation, *a constantly shifting fortune which seemed as infinite as the sea, but also ebbed and flowed like the sea*, with differences of two or three hundred thousand francs at every fortnight settlement. (85, emphasis mine)

The majority of the characters of *L'Argent*, even those who operate outside of the speculative excesses portrayed in the novel, are constantly subject to forces of change that result in both the joys of success but also in the difficulties of actual or possible failure. The journalist Jordan is pursued by a bill collector who continually changes the terms of his debt resulting in alternating moments of sustainability and “severe crisis” (161). The stock traders Pillerault and Moser, minor characters in the text, are situated next to one another highlighting the stark contrast between success and failure – “[Pillerault] had the exuberant nature of a bull trader, always expecting victory, whereas Moser, by contrast, short with yellowish complexion, ravaged by a liver complaint, was always moaning, forever prey to fears of disaster” (4). With the possible exception of Maxime, Saccard’s son, there are few persons or spaces within *L'Argent* that are immune to the extreme volatilities of the Paris financial system and the wider forces of modernity. Even Gundermann, who profits substantially from the ultimate collapse of the Universal Bank, is far from secure in the outcome of his financial position until the concluding chapter of the novel.

Given the groundwork laid in *La Curée* and the volatile nature of modern experience more generally during the time in which the text was written, the presence of increasing volatility in *L'Argent* is to be expected. More interesting are *L'Argent*'s tonal shifts and the increasing use of colonial space that accompany the intensification of the volatility represented. In both *La Curée* and *L'Argent*, statements regarding possible benefits of modern disorientation are made, but the source and impression of these statements are meaningfully different. In *La Curée*, claims to future progress are sporadic and limited to direct statements made by Saccard or his business associates – as Toutin-Laroche, the municipal counselor and Saccard co-conspirator, claims: “to turn Paris upside-down is to make it productive” (26). Despite these sporadic and frequently self-interested claims to progressive ends, the text remains decidedly backward looking as a prior moment of French history crumbles in the face of a diseased present moment.

L'Argent goes to greater lengths to emphasize possibilities of progress, thus bringing the tradeoff between the volatilities of modernity and their possibilities of productivity into greater balance relative to *La Curée*. As such, *L'Argent* is more forward looking – the present is considered only in relation to future possibilities and not in its confrontations with a dying past. Furthermore, the voice used to develop the theme of future productivity shifts in *L'Argent* – it is no longer just the statements of self-interested characters (Saccard and his business colleagues) but also that of the third person narrator. Nowhere is this voice more prevalent than in the novel's concluding pages:

[Saccard] was right: money was always the manure in which the humanity of tomorrow was growing; money, poisonous and destructive, became the ferment of all social growth, the compost necessary for the great works that made life easier... Why then blame money for the dirt and crimes it causes? Is love any less sullied, love, the creator of life? (371)

The effect is one in which Zola himself feels meaningfully present in the text – Zola is not simply seeking to represent aspects of Parisian economic life but also to explain and manage their often deleterious effects. In other words, Zola has shifted from a process of artistic detachment to one that might be thought of as artistic participation.³³

Commenting on his efforts to write *L'Argent*, Zola states in an 1890 letter that, “nothing, I believe, resists artistic shaping quite so much as... this financial matter, in which I find myself plunged neck-deep” (Brown 625). Zola reveals an artistic anxiety in his process of representation, a process that seeks to illuminate an environment that was far from understood by the general populace of Paris and created meaningful anxiety in its own right. As the closing lines of the first chapter inform the reader, the great crowds of Paris “...could not go past this great lottery of speculation without turning their heads, impelled by desire and fear of what went on in there, the mystery of financial transactions, a mystery all the more attractive to French brains since so few of them ever penetrate it” (38). Saccard offers to the Universal Bank’s founding partners and later to the general public a narrative based

³³ As I have noted, the shift in tone from *La Curée* to *L'Argent* was part of a larger aesthetic transition in Zola’s fiction that presented itself most fully in texts written after the completion of the *Rougon-Macquart*. Brian Nelson helps situate this shift in tone in the wider context of Zola’s fiction when he notes that “Zola’s later fiction [*Les Trois villes* and *Les Quatres évangiles*], while plainly influenced by this wider context of intellectual issues, also makes discursively explicit the developing tendencies of the *Rougon-Macquart*, expressing Zola’s growing visionary idealism” (35).

on world progress; a story that seemingly exonerates the destructive (and oftentimes fraudulent) use of capital based on a promise of money as the transcendental seed of world progress.

Given testaments such as these by Saccard as well as those made by the narrator, *L'Argent* has rightfully been read as an apologia for capitalism. If *L'Argent* is an apology for capitalism, though, a number of questions should follow: How is the apology constructed in the text and how genuine and effective is it? What are the specific mechanisms used to support the shift in tone to one of future productivity? And how well do these mechanisms work? One cannot consider these questions without noting a second difference in *L'Argent* relative to its precursor: its aggressive incorporation of space beyond the city of Paris. The diegesis of *La Curée* takes place almost entirely in Paris and Saccard's investment schemes are focused exclusively on Parisian real estate. In the one instance where a foreign investment is presented to Saccard, he "laughed in [Toutin-Laroche's] face and asked him if he thought he was such a fool as to invest in the Société Generale of *The Arabian Nights*" (97). The possibility of foreign investment is beyond Saccard's vision of possibility in *La Curée*. Not only does investment in the imperial periphery enter Saccard's vision of possibility in *L'Argent*, but these new spaces become thematically central to the text's overall structure.

To consider why this might be leads me to the second aspect of my argument – the fictional representation of *empty(ied) space* serves as a critical site in the management of anxieties associated with modern volatility. By empty(ied) space, I

am referring to space that is both beyond the metropole and that is or has been, to the extent possible, empty(ied) of social, political, or geographical impediments that could limit its efficacy in providing an outlet (meant both literally and metaphorically) for the building pressures of modern volatility. In this sense, fictional engagements with empty(ied) space serve a double function – they seek to represent the increasing interconnectedness of modern spatialities while simultaneously and paradoxically using the same space as a site in which to mitigate the effects and affects of volatile experience. I say paradoxically because, as I outlined in section two of this thesis, the increasing connectivity of space is a primary driver of modern volatility. In the late nineteenth century, social experience is effected in an increasingly disproportionate manner by spaces beyond the localities of place. In this regard, the representation of space outside the metropole is a logical and necessary presence for those seeking to genuinely engage and realistically represent spatial realities of the late nineteenth century, but we must also consider the ways in which this space has been apprehended. In the case of *L'Argent*, the incorporation of colonial space into the narrative presents a number of difficulties.

Zola's stated intention regarding *L'Argent* was an examination and application of the literary realist lens to the world of money and, more specifically, the speculative operations of the Paris Bourse. But *L'Argent* is a double-voiced text, one that simultaneously works in the realms of the concrete and the abstract, the world of people and the world of ideas, the real and the romantic, and the specifics of the metropole and the generalities of the colony. To understand how these contrasting

dialogic emphases support, determine, and undermine one another, particularly in light of the literary tendencies of Zola's time, is critical to assessing Zola's incorporation of colonial space in *L'Argent*.³⁴ In the opening chapter, Zola provides the reader with a lengthy parade of financial players and details regarding their role and status – job, wealth, intelligence, political tendencies and financial relationships are all commented on. We are introduced to Busch and Gundermann, both Jewish, who will play critical roles in the story and who also serve as an introduction to the anti-Semitic nature of the French financial community of late nineteenth century.³⁵ The Bourse itself, that “great monument,” and the Little Bourse (where discredited stock is traded) are also described in detail (3). Zola's lens in this opening chapter is focused and narrow. The radius of description is limited to the Bourse and its surrounding area while characters, both individual and specified groups, are written with naturalistic detail. Consider the introduction of Madame Méchain:

[Saccard] was now interrupted by the arrival of an enormous woman, Madame Méchain, well known to the regulars at the Bourse, one of those rabid and wretched speculators whose greasy hands are always poking into all sorts of dubious activities. Her moon face, red and puffy, with narrow blue eyes, an almost invisible little nose, and a small mouth from which emerged a child-like fluting voice, seemed to spill out from under her old mauve hat, tied on lopsidedly with red ribbons; and her enormous bosom and dropsical belly seemed to stretch to the limit her mud-bespattered poplin dress, once green, now turning yellow. (15-6)

³⁴ My interest in the dialogic play of Zola's novel is based primarily on the work of M.M. Bakhtin who states in *The Dialogic Imagination*, “the stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its ‘languages’.” It is this “higher unity” (or dis-unity as the case may be here) that interests me.

³⁵ Anti-Semitism factors meaningfully into the plot of *L'Argent* although it is not my focus here. See Richard Grant's “The Jewish Question in Zola's *L'Argent*” for an interesting discussion of these issues.

Zola's descriptions of Madame Méchain and the other characters surrounding the Bourse are expressed in significant detail and provide the reader with a sense of tangibility. In the novel's second chapter, the characters of Caroline and Georges Hamelin are introduced and their experience in Egypt and other areas of the East provide the catalyst for Saccard's founding of the Universal Bank. It is here that a new dialogic strain emerges regarding the operations of the bank that are beyond the metropole – one that differs meaningfully from the novel's opening chapter. Saccard leverages the Hamelin's experience and interest in the East to formulate his pitch to providers of capital in the possible formation of the bank. While the ideas regarding investments abroad are specifically named and mapped, they are described without concrete detail. Even the Hamelins, who have spent significant time living in North Africa and the Middle East and whose objectives are presumably more charitable than Saccard's, do not speak of specific individuals from their travels but rather in idealistic generalities. The East is imaged as “this ancient land slumbering beneath the ashes of dead civilizations” while foreign resources are imagined as infinite and untapped: “all that silver, sleeping in that tomb, alongside such poverty” (48, 51). When moving beyond the spatial boundary of the metropole, the narrative lens that previously had described the “red, puffy, full-moon face” of Madame Méchain zooms out and shifts to a generalized picture of abstracted and idealized foreign lands.

This stylistic shift is far from subtle and has registered with a number of critics. In her study of the Oriental woman in French literature, Madeline Dobie observes more generally that the “cultural sphere has consistently aestheticized colonial

experience, devoting its energy and attention to relatively peripheral matters, while saying almost nothing about the nuts and bolts process of colonial expansion” (5). In an article addressing Zola’s use of scale as a means to transcend metropolitan anti-Semitism, Dorian Bell notes that *L’Argent*’s imperial subalterns are “effaced throughout” and refers to Zola’s description of imperial peripheries as having “magical counter-properties” to a “devouring capitalism” (491-2). In Jonathan Hunt’s study of Zola’s literary and political representations, he comments that “the exclusively metropolitan setting of *L’Argent* entails an indirect and seemingly incidental representation of colonized territories, yet the experience of the metropolitan setting is always mediated by an awareness of colonial space” (168). Hunt also draws attention to the dual meaning of the text’s title – *argent* refers both to money (as currency) as well as to silver which has obvious ties to the Carmel Silver Mining Company of the story (161). The double meaning of this word alludes to the novel’s interest in imagining both the abstract and the concrete of the French financial system and their interplay. Of course it is money that has traditionally been described as an abstraction of social relations (most clearly in Marxist theory), so it is somewhat ironic that here Zola attempts to hypostatize, through a mode of literary descriptive realism, that which is typically treated as an abstraction, while the imperial periphery and its cache of concrete resources is relegated to the realm of the abstract. When speaking of the bank’s imperial concerns, the text frequently goes so far as to describe Saccard’s rhetoric and gestures as poetic in nature. Hamelin, after hearing of the massive potential of investments abroad, reflects on Saccard’s speech as “the

poetry of results, but we haven't yet even reached the prose of implementation" (65). At the first shareholder meeting, Saccard explains the bank's imperial enterprises "in broad strokes, with his ardent words transforming a business venture into a poetic tale" (88). Saccard is later referenced as the "the poet of money, undaunted by bankruptcies and ruins" (224). The imperial periphery is also personified in the image of the child thereby romanticizing its untapped resources and future potential. This idealized image of the child is particularly effective in alleviating Caroline's concerns regarding the bank's engagements.

The existence and differing nature of the two voices of *L'Argent* is interesting, but it is through a closer inspection of the text's abstract voice where I believe new insights might be gained with respect to Zola's efforts to incorporate empty colonial spaces in the novel. The abstraction of the imperial periphery and the colonial other in the nineteenth century European novel is a well-studied topic, most notably by Edward Said who writes about a pervasive "structure of attitude and reference" in *Culture and Imperialism*.³⁶ In this respect, it is not surprising to find aspects of imperialism referenced abstractly in *L'Argent* as they draw on colonial attitudes pervasive at the time. While the colonial tropes of *L'Argent* cohere in many ways with Said's conception, there are particular ways the text exceeds more traditional

³⁶ The section of Said's book I rely on is the first section of the second chapter, subtitled "Narrative and Social Space." While the focus of this section is mostly on the early nineteenth century British novel, I think it is fair to extrapolate many of these themes to later nineteenth century France. In speaking of the differences between early nineteenth century British and French imperialism, Said states, "but in the [French] culture at large – until after the middle of the century – there is rarely that weighty, almost philosophical sense of imperial mission [in France] that one finds in Britain" (63) implying that late nineteenth century France and early nineteenth century Britain are comparable to some degree from an imperial perspective and its representation in fictional narratives.

levels of abstraction and ventures into the realm of what I refer to as hyper-abstraction, a concept based both in the actual dialogic of colonial representation as well as the relative importance of colonial space to the overall narrative. In addition to this hyper-abstraction, the romantic nature of colonial tropes voiced in the text seemingly violate Zola's own artistic project – a literary project based on obsessive levels of research and a commitment to the description and logical arrangement of the observable facts of society. I have already noted the general shift in tone exhibited by *L'Argent* and a number of the later *Rougon-Macquart* novels – a shift that Nelson describes as including “the increasing prominence in the representation of social reality of mythic structure” (36). Zola's changing approach is not problematic in and of itself, but to accept *L'Argent*'s dual-dialogicism without interrogating the nature of its newly present “mythic structure” would be insufficient. In the case of *L'Argent*'s incorporation of colonial space, a number of divergences from representational norms of the nineteenth century attenuate its efficacy in providing a genuine outlet for the pressures of modern volatility. These divergences focus the reader's attention on an active process of emptying colonial space – a process whose visibility works against its own objective (i.e., to the extent the space were empty and available for claim, no process of emptying would be necessary to make it so).

Let me touch briefly on the ways *L'Argent* diverges from typical nineteenth century means of imperial representation. Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* that, “references to Australia in *David Copperfield* or India in *Jane Eyre* are made because they *can be*, because British power (and not just the novelist's fancy) made passing

references to these massive appropriations possible” (66, emphasis his). Said situates literary representation of the colonial as one that follows a progression of ideological justification, political and military intervention, and then, literary reference and attitude that reflects a “vision of a moment” (67). While I have already argued that colonial representation in *L’Argent* paradigmatically exceeds the level of “passing reference” as noted by Said with respect to Dickens and Brontë, it also exceeds Said’s spatial boundaries of possible colonial reference by moving into areas of colonial space that had little, if any, ties with actual French imperial presence in the late nineteenth century. The bank’s interests in transportation traverse the mediterranean and encompass areas outside of France’s presence in parts of Northern Africa. The silver mines of Carmel and the proposed banking operations in Turkey are also beyond French colonial presence at that time. Of course Napoleon’s campaign a century before had unsuccessfully explored possible colonies in these regions (which Saccard references), but the point remains that the primary regions of interest for the bank’s investments do not overlap with France’s actual colonial positions of the late nineteenth century.³⁷

In exploring the possible reasons for the increased spatial license taken by Zola, it is worth returning to the implied progression suggested by Said. In commenting on Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the ideological justifications of colonialism, Said argues that “redemption is found in the self-justifying practice of an idea or

³⁷ The references to Mexico and the Suez in the novel’s opening chapter are rooted in actual French presence at or around the time of the novel’s publication, but they factor only into the text’s politically driven dialogue and are never connected with the Universal Bank’s investment interests.

mission over time, in a structure that completely encircles and is revered by you, even though you set up the structure in the first place, ironically enough, and no longer study it closely because you take it for granted” (69). The structure referenced by Said here is presumably one grounded in political (and military) constructs; one in which the economic benefits of colonialism, while important, remained secondary to more general interests of world domination and a tilting of the power dynamic between Western imperial powers. In *L'Argent*, this latter dynamic is not present in the text. While Saccard will occasionally speak nostalgically of a completion of Napoleon's failed imperial efforts and the prospect of moving the Vatican from Italy to Israel based on financial assistance from the bank, never are the bank's foreign investments discussed in the context of their impact on France's position with other imperial powers. The reason for this is that the underlying structure of the text, the structure that completely encircles you (as Said characterizes it), is no longer that of the political but rather the economic, that of later stage capitalism.

In addressing the changing dynamic of colonialism and its representation in literature, Jameson claims that:

For it is in our time, since World War II, that the problem of imperialism is at it were restructured: in the age of neocolonialism, of decolonization accompanied by the emergence of multinational capitalism and the great transnational corporations, it is less the rivalry of the metropolitan powers among each other that strikes the eye; rather... the relationship between First and Third world countries, and in particular the way in which this relationship... is one of... an economic type, rather than a primarily military one. (*Nationalism* 47-8)

In its shift to the economic and away from the political and military, *L'Argent* may in some ways be thought of as a proto-neocolonial narrative. This is less interesting to

me, though, than the ways in which *L'Argent* appears to avoid the repression of the “axis of otherness,” as Jameson refers to it, through an overemphasis on imperialism’s impact on First World military and political situations:

...in that older period, from 1884 to World War I, the relationship of domination between First and Third World was masked and displaced by an overriding (and perhaps ideological) consciousness of imperialism as being essentially a relationship between First World powers or the holders of Empire, and this consciousness tended to repress the more basic axis of otherness, and to raise issues of colonial reality only incidentally. (*Nationalism* 48)

In short, Jameson suggests that in texts preceding World War I the more basic axis of otherness, the axis between the colonizer and colonized, was repressed by a literary focus on the relationships between imperial powers. These relationships, as I have already discussed, do not have a meaningful presence in *L'Argent*, though. This is another instance of *L'Argent* diverting from more typical methods of colonial representation during this time period. Not only does *L'Argent* take a more aggressive and universal approach in terms of its spatial opportunities for colonial involvement by moving beyond those areas already in the French imaginary through actual political involvement, it dismisses any need to populate or displace its abstracted portrayal of colonial spaces through a shift in focus to imperial rivalry.

Zola’s use of colonial space in *L'Argent* as a means to contain anxiety might be productively considered in relation to David Harvey’s political and economic conception of the spatial fix. Harvey’s spatial fix refers to the use of “geographical expansion and territorial domination, of colonialism and imperialism” as a means of “perpetually assuag[ing] and reproduc[ing]... the inner dialectic of civil society”

(Spaces 284, 302). And while the short-term efficacy of any spatial fix is debatable (Harvey looks to the work of Hegel, Von Thünen, and Marx to consider this question), the longer-term prospects are decidedly dim:

How long can continuous expansion be sustained before geographically-localized crises, or ‘switching crises’... merge into global crises? And what internal dilemmas inhere with such a process? When a particular civil society creates fresh productive powers elsewhere to absorb its overaccumulated capital, it thereby *establishes a rival center of accumulation which, at some point in the future, must also look to its own spatial fix to resolve its problems.* (Spaces 302-3, emphasis mine)

In other words, the spatial fix is a dilatory strategy at best. As such, the objective of any spatial fix involves not just the acquisition of incremental space, but also requires steps that might further delay the establishment of a future “rival center” within this space. In the case of *L’Argent*, this latter step is pursued in a manner that I believe to be counter-productive. Through its hyper-abstraction of the imperial periphery, its penetration into areas that are inconsistent with historic French colonial presences, and its lack of participation in the modernist imperial axis of otherness, *L’Argent* engages in an atypical and arduous process of emptying the colonial space it seeks to incorporate. The cumbersome nature of this effort focuses the reader’s attention on the process itself (the process of emptying), as opposed to the outcome of this process (empty space). By drawing the reader’s attention to the process of emptying, the text paradoxically prevents its desired outcome. Instead of extending the productiveness of its spatial fix, *L’Argent* does the opposite – the text draws attention to the fix’s inherent temporariness as well as the present and future materiality of the colonial space it seeks to incorporate.

The importance of colonial space to *L'Argent*'s plot further magnifies the problematic nature of Zola's spatial fix. In discussing the Universal Bank with Caroline, Saccard states that its operations will include traditional deposits and loans but, "what I want above all is to make it a vehicle for launching your brother's great projects: that will be its true role, with its profits increasing and its power gradually dominating the market" (102). While these projects are never discussed in any concrete detail (their representation is based on Saccard's rhetoric and the diagrams and watercolors of the Hamelin's portfolio), they are the purported heart and value generating motor of the Universal Bank. In fact, the more traditional aspects of the bank's operations, domestic deposits and loans, are hardly mentioned again in the text. It is foreign investments that will produce a "real craze in the public" and will drive demand in the shares of the bank (102). The United Steam Navigation Company, the Carmel Silver Mining Company, the Oriental Railway Company and the National Turkish Bank are the life-blood of the Universal Bank narrative as well as the more general diegesis of *L'Argent*. With the exception of the first chapter of the novel, the imperial periphery maintains a fairly constant presence in the text, making its abstracted representation all the more notable. In many nineteenth century realist texts, the imperial periphery is often present but tends to reside in the peripheries of the text itself, supporting the plot indirectly as opposed to residing at its center.³⁸ For this reason, Said suggests that "we must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European

³⁸ There are of course a number of notable exceptions including Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Kipling's *Kim*, among others.

and American culture, *with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis* and voice to what is silent or marginally present” (66, emphasis mine). The imperial periphery of *L’Argent* may be silent and marginally represented, but it hardly needs to be drawn out or extended given its centrality to the narrative and its critical role in the expatriation of metropolitan monetary transactions. The imperial periphery is a massive presence in the text of *L’Argent*, albeit one that is never made tangible.

The desire for empty space (and the means by which this space is apprehended) is intimately connected with the experience of volatility and its resulting anxieties. In “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” published in 1903, the sociologist Georg Simmel had a developing sense for the ways in which the affects of modernity (which he assumed to be most intense in metropolitan settings) tended to push beyond the boundaries of the city – “For it is the decisive nature of the metropolis that its inner life overflows by waves into a far-flung national or international area” (56). For Simmel, the inner life of the individual had been complicated by modern experience – “the individual’s inner security is replaced by a ‘faint sense of tension and vague longing,’ by a ‘secret restlessness,’ by a ‘helpless urgency,’ which ‘originates in the bustle and excitement of modern life’” (Frisby 72). In the case of *L’Argent*, it is useful to return to the Saccard of the novel’s opening chapter; the reeling and damaged Saccard who seeks to reestablish himself in Parisian society but is yet to be consumed by the process of what will later become the Universal Bank. It is here that we find statements symptomatic of the anxiety pervasive among the speculators of the Bourse that are often forgotten in Saccard’s later monomaniacal

obsession with the bank's share price. In contemplating the possibilities for regaining his stature, Saccard thinks to himself: "What he didn't like about speculation was *the constant instability*, the huge sums lost as fast as they were gained: he had never been able to sleep on a *real* million, owning nothing to anyone" (9, emphasis mine).

Earlier Saccard comments on his desire to achieve "[not] the façade of mendacious wealth but the solid edifice of fortune" (8). Saccard seeks forms of realness and solidity that can appropriately be read as capitalist greed, but they should also be read as expressions of a desire to insulate oneself from the constant instabilities, or volatilities, of modern experience. I believe an appreciation for this latter desire is important to keep in mind as we interrogate the means by which solutions to modernity's anxieties are pursued.

Attentiveness of this kind is crucial to evaluating the efficacy of Zola's universalizing prescriptions in *L'Argent*. As a solution to the anxious agitation caused by the volatilities of modern capitalism, it is not surprising to see Zola turn to the imperial periphery given its prominence in the French imaginary at the time of the novel's writing. But to accept Zola's use of this trope as something common place to the novels of its time is to ignore the unique manner in which Zola incorporates and empties these spaces. Colonial space is pervasive in *L'Argent*. It is a presence that is at the heart of the novel's narrative and one that goes far beyond the passing colonial references of other nineteenth century texts. The colonial for *L'Argent* is not the mere setting for a scandal (as it is in Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*) or the place of last resort to restore a lost family fortune (as it is in Balzac's *Cousin Bette*) – the colonial of

L'Argent is the locus of future prosperity, the mechanism that will alleviate metropolitan anxieties, and the theoretical child that will provide fulfillment to its imperial parent. The spectral nature of *L'Argent*'s colonial presence (this hyper-abstraction as I have referred to it) ultimately only serves, however, to undermine its putative salubrious possibilities. So while *L'Argent* provides an exemplary representation of modernity's volatility, I believe its prescriptions for the containment of resulting anxieties through the incorporation of empty(ied) colonial space are ineffective.

In my approach to Zola's economic texts of the *Rougon-Macquart* and some of the theory that surrounds Zola's work more generally, I have done so through a lens that pays particular attention to the ways in which volatility and its generation of anxiety are critical aspects of modern experience. It is my belief that an appreciation for the ubiquity of volatility and anxiety, as I have conceptualized them in this thesis, can be an important aspect of evaluating various fictional and theoretical engagements with modernity. In the case of *L'Argent*, these concepts help make visible the ways in which Zola's universalizing narrative of future progress relies upon a process of emptying colonial space. The result is a binary and problematic representation of modernity in which the metropole is full, alive and rife with affect, while the colony is empty, dead, and void of experience. The evaluation of the fictional text is not the only site where these concepts might be of use, though. In our discussion of Lukács' social theories and their application to the works of Zola and Flaubert, we saw a representation of bourgeois experience that was limited to either

the normal (stasis) or the catastrophic (movement). This was supported by his theory of reification, an important tool in the evaluation of modern capitalism, but one that might also go too far in its totalizing attempt to empty bourgeois experience of any connection with the real nature of social relations. Let me be clear, though, that my intention is not to place the global experience of modernity under the universalized headings of volatility and anxiety. While I believe the presence of volatility and anxiety to be ubiquitous presences in modernity, their intensities vary widely and are unique to one's temporal, spatial, and social situation. It is my hope that these concepts might be used as tools to approach experience in all its specificity, to complicate the often rigid conceptions used to characterize our modernity, and to avoid the sometimes disingenuous and manipulative moves that are made in our attempts to define and represent what it means to be modern.

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