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## C21's Roundtable Review of Timothy Bewes's *Free Indirect* (2022)

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## Introduction to the Roundtable

Denise Wong and Oliver Haslam

As part of this special issue's endeavour to reflect on our own discipline and its methods, we – C21's Reviews Editors – wanted to deviate from our previous single-monograph reviews and our newly standardised format of review essays to collate multiple responses to a particularly monumental contribution to the study of literary criticism in recent years. We selected Timothy Bewes's *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* (2022) for the central text of this roundtable review forum because it has provoked intense scholarly discussion about the contemporary novel and reinvigorated debates around (post)critique since its publication. Centrally, Bewes argues that the contemporary novel prompts us to read *beyond* 'the logic of "instantiation"' and beyond the hegemonic critical tradition that reads features of texts as allegories for a larger societal truth or phenomenon in the world (see also Felski 2015; Anker and Felski 2017; Best and Marcus 2009: 1–21). Instead, Bewes advocates for the novel's *thought*, a thought that cannot be thought by us. As Leonid Bilmes, our first contributor on the roundtable, remarks, *Free Indirect* challenges 'a key prejudice of contemporary criticism' that risks 'speaking on the novel's behalf' by connecting fictional representation to a 'grander interpretive category'. By way of an expansive theoretical framework that draws upon the work of Georg Lukács, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, and Michel Foucault, among others, Bewes's reading of 'postfictional thought', discernible in contemporary novels by writers such as J. M. Coetzee, W. G. Sebald, Zadie Smith, Jesse Ball, and Rachel Cusk, marks a clear divergence from recent scholarship that emphasises models of authorial intention and communication. Through unapologetically disrupting the kinds of critical methods frequently taken for granted in contemporary literary studies, Bewes's project locates a disconnect integral to the novel form.

Our roundtable begins with a lucid overview of the two central questions at the heart of *Free Indirect*, written by Leonid Bilmes, before moving into Laura Zander's essay focusing on Bewes's reading of Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* as a means of testing out *Free Indirect*'s main hypotheses. By examining *Elizabeth Costello*'s opening conceit of the 'bridge' that connects fiction to reality, Zander unpacks Bewes's argument that such descriptions are particularly suggestive of the kinds of gaps and disconnections constituting a novel's postfictional thought. As Zander observes, such narrative gestures 'render impossible thought as both an objective statement or a subjective event'. From here, Alex Houen explores the ways in which Bewes's intervention relates to contemporary critical debates around affect, voice, and how both relate to the

experience of, and thinking of, free indirect style. Adam Kelly, meanwhile, highlights how postfictional thought leaves us with the sense that ‘the novel is not a form or a genre but rather a problem or a logic’. Kelly leaves us with questions pertaining to Bewes’s historicisation of the postfictional age, as well as the theoretical and aesthetic spectres of Jacques Derrida and twentieth-century Modernism. In a concluding written response, Bewes considers these questions, and many of the points raised by our contributors, before relating the importance of the novel’s thought – a thought beyond ideology – to the prominent ideologies of the contemporary moment.

[n.b. The authors contributing to this roundtable use different spellings for the Russian linguist V. N. Volosinov’s name. These variations generally correspond to the spelling used in their respective editions, including Vološinov and Voloshinov.]

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## The Murmur of the Novel's Uninhabitable Thought

Leonid Bilmes

*Free Indirect* makes two radical claims. The first is that 'the novel thinks' (19). This does not mean that the novel 'thinks' in a metaphorical way, as in a statement like: 'This novel thinks through the disaffection brought about by the global neoliberal nightmare'. It means, quite literally, that the novel *thinks*, that it makes possible a certain kind of thought: the novel is 'the *subject* rather than a *vehicle* of thought' (255). This leads to the book's second, still more radical claim: 'if there is a thought of the contemporary novel, it is not thinkable by us' (11). However outrageous these claims might seem, they point to something vital about the novel and about the mode of thinking peculiar to it, that criticism is constantly trying, and failing, to capture. That, quite simply, is the free indirect.

The free indirect, in Bewes's sense, is not quite the same thing as free indirect discourse, long familiar to narratology. 'Free indirect', he writes, 'is not only, and not primarily, a particular *use* of language; it is also an experimental hypothesis, advanced by literature itself, about the capacity of language to function in an *interstitial* or *nonsubjective* space' (my emphasis, 257). According to Bewes, the free indirect is not merely a novelistic mode of narration, but 'a mode of thinking' singular to the novel. The question is, what does such thinking, the thought of the free indirect, look like? And, we might ask, why bother looking for it since such thinking is 'not thinkable by us'?

Before turning to the second question – a question, it should be added, which betrays a key prejudice of contemporary criticism that *Free Indirect* tries to challenge – let's consider the first. In the novel, Bewes argues, two kinds of thinking operate: the logic of 'instantiation' and the logic of the 'interstice' (256). The logic of 'instantiation' is part and parcel of both representation and interpretation, whereby a given thing is an 'instance' (representation) of another, larger thing or category (interpretation). For example, in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Emma is an 'instance' of bourgeois sentimentality. Of course, Emma Bovary is much more than this, but that is precisely the point: 'the instantiation relation is the basic organizational principle of every novelistic work' (27), which connects the world of fiction to the world beyond fiction in as many ways as our critical imagination is ingenious enough to accommodate. 'Nothing in the *form* of the novel', Bewes writes, 'nothing the novel *says* or *does*, is possible outside this structure, which is inseparable from the novel's critical legibility' (38). The 'instantiation relation', the glue that holds together the novel's representational schema, also serves as the fulcrum upon which criticism pivots: after all, everything that can be meaningfully said about a novel has to *connect* what the novel itself 'says

or does' (formally, discursively, representationally) to a grander interpretive category (aesthetics, politics, ideology), which would seek to speak on the novel's behalf and, in that sense, make the novel's thought explicit. The problem, Bewes argues, is that the *real* thought of the novel is not reducible to the logic of instantiation. He calls this elusive, propositionally irreducible element of contemporary fiction 'postfictional thought'.

'Postfictional thought' is immanent to the novel form and there are certain contemporary texts – Bewes discusses, among others, Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder*, J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* – where it is most readily discernible. Bewes's readings of these texts are compelling, homing in as they do on '[the] gaps and spaces *within* apparent unities denoted by such phrases as "human beings", "human types", "substantial hypotheses", "fictional worlds", or "the meaning of life"' (141). The trouble with identifying gaps and spaces, however, is that the moment one has done so and articulated their *significance*, one falls prey to the very logic of the instantiation that one sought to avoid: these texts' characters and events now become *instances* of absence, aporia, negative thought, the abandonment of point of view, or whatever. Bewes is well aware of this danger and does not pretend to be immune from it in his own critical discourse.<sup>1</sup> What he is after is to persuade his reader that '*the absence of the instantiation relation* [...] is the novel's destination: the point at which every novel is perpetually arriving, a principle of absolute heterogeneity that gestures back at the novel, and every novel, from the perspective of its realization' (205).

The above citation can be said to sum up the book's difficult task, and its key phrase is 'absolute heterogeneity', invoking Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of the novel as a genre that is continuously evolving, that speaks in multiple tongues, and whose language and form cannot be captured in a definition that would not lag behind the novel's already having morphed into a slightly different shape. Aside from Bakhtin, Bewes also draws on V. N. Volosinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and Gilles Deleuze's two-volume *Cinema* to delineate the contours of the thought of the interstice. Bewes's readings of all three thinkers are exemplary and I lack the space to comment on them further, other than to say that what ties Bakhtin, Volosinov, and Deleuze is that they all speak of the existence of that element of novelistic (and, in Deleuze's case, cinematic) discourse where we might glimpse the thought of the interstice in operation.

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<sup>1</sup> 'To the extent that the present work remains within the theoretical register, it too falls short of grasping the thought of which contemporary fiction is capable or of understanding the full implications of the postfictional formation' (Bewes 2022: 139).

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari conceive free indirect discourse as a collective assemblage [which] is always like a murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. [...] To write is perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices [...] My direct discourse is still *the free indirect discourse running through me*, coming from other worlds [...]. (my emphasis, 2005: 84)

In the susurrating realm of the free indirect we can never arrive at closure and drop interpretive anchor, for a certain murmur is ever heard that reminds us that we have not yet said the final word about the thought of the novel – not least because the thought of the novel cannot be discursively stated. It can only show itself in-between us and the text and within the gaps opened up by the text: the moment it is interpreted, it is no longer free indirect, just as to rewrite free indirect speech from the perspective of either the author or the character is to lose its essence of in-betweenness, of neither/nor and something other than both.

To sum up what has been said so far: ‘postfictional thought’ is the thought of the interstice and the thought of the interstice cannot be inhabited subjectively. This is so because no subject can think interstitial thought directly, if thinking means reducing such thought to assertional or locutionary form. ‘Postfiction’ is, perhaps, best understood as that gap of uncertainty in the novel *where thinking emerges*: where virtual thought has not yet become actual thinking. The novel today, Bewes contends, displays ‘a quality of not only refusing to connect the work and the world but of thinking, inhabiting, even forging the space of their disconnection’ (6). It is within this disconnect between the world and the work that we must look to find ‘a nonanchored, nonsubjective thought, a *thought without perspective*’ (141).

This brings us back to the second question posed at the beginning of this essay, namely: Why should we even bother with the thought of the free indirect, if it is not thinkable by us? We should bother with it because the question of what it means to think, and of what calls for thought today, has been silenced by the dominant critical voices making up the chorus of the ‘liberal critical tradition’ (6). ‘There is no historical period’, Bewes observes, ‘in which the question of thought comes more directly into focus as a problem and no period in which it is more difficult to address’ (3). This remark is inspired by Martin Heidegger’s 1952 series of lectures, *What is Called Thinking?* Responding to his own question about what is most thought-provoking about modernity, Heidegger argues that the present age of technology *instrumentalizes* thinking: thought becomes a tool used to provide an answer already waiting behind the question’s back. In such conditions, no surprise is possible and real thought does

not take place; what is needed for it to take place, Heidegger suggests, is to approach, in one's own thinking, that which withdraws from thought: 'Whatever withdraws, refuses arrival. But—withdrawing is not nothing. [...] The event of withdrawal could be what is most present in our present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual' (1968: 9). When we approach that which withdraws – such as the thought of the interstice that the novel thinks – 'we are pointing then at something which has not, not yet, been transposed into the language of our speech' (Heidegger 1968: 18). To describe *Free Indirect* in Heidegger's terms: the uninhabitable interstitial thought of the novel is that which alluringly withdraws from interpretation, for all interpretation is a refutation, a betrayal of the difficult questions that the work inexhaustibly poses us.<sup>2</sup> The novel remains rich with what has *not yet* been thought, and '[t]he unthought is the greatest gift thinking can bestow' (Heidegger 1968: 76).

*Free Indirect*, as Bewes makes clear at the outset, is not concerned with tracing formal developments in the novel (though it does do this in part). Instead,

it is about a logic of novel thinking that reaches its fullest realization in the continual emergence of a thought that is *not* verifiable or falsifiable, a thought that barely registers at the formal level [...] in which *the novel's refusal of prevailing ideologies is located*. (13)

Of course, we might reject the possibility of such a thought: we can choose to insist that everything a novel 'says or does' is reducible to form and historicism. But Bewes's book presents a strong case for the fact that the withdrawn realm of the free indirect is precisely what the contemporary novel manifests, what it thinks in its interstices: *in what obtains between* author and character, text and reader, reality and representation, the world and the subject. Such thinking, such refusal of all 'prevailing ideologies', never did, and never could, belong to the critic. Perhaps, as Bewes claims, it belongs only to the novel.

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<sup>2</sup> As Heidegger puts it: 'As though any interpretation could escape the necessity of taking a stand or even, simply by its choice of starting point, of being an unspoken rejection and refutation' (1968: 54).

## Bridges, Crossings, Thoughts: The (Yet) Unattainable Novel

Laura A. Zander

Timothy Bewes's *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* is both an incisive critique of the contemporary novel and its criticism as well as a bold reimagining of its theoretical possibilities. Anchored in a philosophical engagement with the novel as a mode of thought, its relation to ideology, and the restraining but also productive limits of its form(s), Bewes suggests that the novel's emancipatory potential lies in its capacity to exceed its own formal boundaries. His assertion that the 'free indirect' mode of the novel represents a mode of thought that escapes ideological containment situates the novel as uniquely poised to address the conditions of our postfictional, neoliberal era. In this rather brief review contribution, I would like to critically engage with some of Bewes's hypotheses through the lens of J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), a text that Bewes positions at the heart of his argument. By interrogating Coetzee's metaphor of the 'literary bridge' and its negotiation of ontological and narrative divides, I argue that while *Elizabeth Costello* exemplifies many of the qualities Bewes attributes to the postfictional novel and its potential for 'deauthorised' thought, it also reveals the persistent challenge and ambivalences connected to such theoretical ambitions.

Obviously, within the limited space of this review any critical engagement with the far-reaching arguments brought forward in *Free Indirect* cannot do justice to the ambition and the depth of Bewes's re-thinking of the novel. Thus, to selectively focus on Bewes's dialogue with Coetzee in particular is meant to acknowledge both the embarrassment of riches and the predicament of insufficiency in face of the sheer range of inspirations offered by *Free Indirect*.

### Instantiating Thought/Exceeding Form

Bewes's first hypothesis – that instantiation underpins the organisational structure of the novel – presents a provocative challenge to the tradition of literary criticism. This structure (or 'logic'), according to Bewes, presupposes that a thought must be tied to a form. Instantiation is what ties the novel as a mode of expression to something outside of its own 'world'. As such, instantiation, or better, the instantiation relation is what assures the functional relevance of the novel as a form of representation claiming 'truth'. Yet, at the same time, as Bewes argues forcefully, as an expectation instrumental to interpretation and criticism the instantiation relation also obscures or even forecloses the novel's most original and essential achievement as a mode of thought.

The novel's 'thought' as Bewes insists, ultimately exceeds instantiation, residing instead in a 'noninstantiated, noninstantiable idea' (38). Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* epitomises this tension between instantiation as constraint and the excess of thought, especially in its emphatically hybrid form as a 'novel for want of a better word' (Lodge 2003). Structured as a collection of 'lessons' – many adapted from previous lectures delivered by Coetzee – *Elizabeth Costello* openly resists conventional categorisation, oscillating between essay and fiction, realism and metafiction, autobiography and autofiction. As Bewes emphasises, Coetzee's specific strategy should not be categorised simply as a 'postmodern' assemblage which merely de-conventionalises existing forms of self-reflexivity in the writing of fiction. Rather, Coetzee's persistence on paradox is meant to render impossible thought as both an objective statement or a subjective event – i.e., linguistic structure and subject no longer correlate. From this perspective, Coetzee's metaphor of the bridge, which Bewes returns to repeatedly, is especially pertinent since it follows a conventional, even trite, logic only to deconstruct the logic in the act of proposing it.

Coetzee's use of the bridge metaphor in the first chapter, 'Realism', foregrounds the novel's dual role as a site of instantiation (connecting) and transcendence (moving across). The narrator's claim that the opening of a novel poses 'a simple bridging problem' highlights the effort required to transport readers from 'nowhere' to the 'far territory' of fiction (Coetzee 2004: 1). Thus, the metaphor operates on two levels: it acknowledges the novel's constructedness while simultaneously gesturing toward its capacity to connect disparate ontologies. By invoking the 'literary bridge', Coetzee affirms the potential for narrative fiction to establish a tenuous link between the real and the imaginary, yet his anti-illusionist techniques consistently disrupt this immersion. The narrator's self-reflexive interruptions, such as his assertion that 'we skip ahead' (Coetzee 2004: 17), foreground the performative nature of storytelling, undermining the illusion of a seamless fictional world. At the same time, however, within the emphatic self-reflexive mode of construction, the borders between the fictional and the real (or factual) begin to bleed into each other, and the bridge, in fact, is only proclaimed as a fiction but never built: 'Crossing the bridge would imply the possibility of transmission between the two worlds, a connection (the nature of which would remain to be determined) between what goes on in the work and what goes on outside it' (75). In *Elizabeth Costello*, however, the bridge is not crossed, or at least, the crossing of the bridge is not narrated. Rather, the bridge must be 'assume[d]' to be 'built and crossed', and then 'put... out of our mind' (Coetzee 2004: 1). And further: 'The bridge that is silently traversed in works of fiction that make no mention of it is, in *Elizabeth Costello*, effectively dismantled' (75).

This tension between successful (i.e. silent) instantiation and open (i.e. claimed) fictional excess aligns with Bewes's assertion that the novel's true thought exists outside the formal structures that have historically defined it. However, Coetzee's metafictional strategies also complicate this claim. While *Elizabeth Costello* resists being confined to a singular form, its deliberate construction of narrative gaps and fissures raises questions about whether such anti-illusionist techniques merely create new forms of ideological entanglement. Does the novel's self-awareness liberate it from instantiation, or does it reinscribe the very structures it seeks to transcend? In other words, Coetzee's bridge, while it may be interpreted as a form of withdrawal or even of subversion, in the very act of interpretation the logic of the instantiation relation is at least implicitly rehearsed and thereby affirmed. Bewes's references to Coetzee throughout his larger argument thus also carry and sustain an inherent ambivalence throughout. Even if the thought of the novel is to be actualised only 'at the edges of fiction' and even beyond and maybe in negation of the novel's form(s), as long as these novels are being read and interpreted, some version of the instantiation relation may eventually be re-established in the forms of the readings rather than the form of the novel itself. To use a famous phrase by Raymond Bellour in reference to the filmic text, the thought of the novel is and remains 'unattainable' (Bellour 1975: 19).

### **The Ontological Divide: Fiction as Bridge**

The bridge metaphor in *Elizabeth Costello* echoes Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), where fiction is similarly framed as a precarious crossing over the void between the real and the imaginary. Calvino's narrator describes the story as 'a bridge over the void', advancing through sensations and emotions to create meaning in the midst of darkness (Calvino 1981: 82). Coetzee's invocation of the bridge is similarly ambivalent. While the narrator asserts that 'the bridge is built and crossed' (Coetzee 2004: 1), the persistent narrative gaps reveal the fragility of this crossing – in fact, they may be read as constant reminders that there is no bridging and thus crossing taking place at all. By repeatedly drawing attention to the constructedness of the text, Coetzee emphasises the unfinished and precarious nature of the bridge, echoing Calvino's assertion that 'beneath every word there is nothingness' (Calvino 1981: 83).

### **Free Indirect: A Perspective Beyond Ideology**

Central to Bewes's argument is the concept of the 'free indirect' as a decentred ('de-authorised') perspective that enables the novel to escape ideological claims, or rather, to reject and subvert these claims by complicating its commitment to the requirements of proper form. Analogous to concepts of free indirect discourse

as a stylistic technique which decouples narrative position and the position of the narrating subject, Bewes reimagines the free indirect as the novel's nonanchored, noncentered mode of thought. In *Elizabeth Costello*, this decentring is evident in the shifting narrative perspectives and the protagonist's oscillation between ethical arguments and fictional embodiment. As both a figure and a narrator, Elizabeth Costello herself is a profoundly unstable figure, alternately presented as a surrogate for Coetzee and as an autonomous consciousness whose views more often than not remain ambiguous. This creates a space of utterance in which central statements about the relation between writing (form) and ideas (thought) assume the character of *Kippfiguren* (ambiguous, bi-stable figures, akin to the famous duck-rabbit figure in Wittgenstein [*Philosophical Investigations* 1953]), as Bewes emphasises. Yet, while the truth of these statements appears to be mutually exclusive or 'paradoxical' it does in no way block any attempt to bring both 'duck' and 'rabbit' into a correlation that reaffirms a basis instantiation relation. In other words, Coetzee's novel (for want of a better term), like all of his other works, could be read both as a resistance to the claims of the instantiation relation and, albeit not at the same time, as a way of expanding the claims of the relational mode for the novel beyond mere 'content'. This new ambivalence (because it is not inherently literary, but deliberate and strategic as a style) at 'the edges of fiction' is precisely the site where Bewes's claims about the free indirect mode's potential as 'non-instantiable', and thus resistant to ideological formalisation and its potential ethical ambivalence, become most critical.

Coetzee's debates in *Elizabeth Costello* on animal ethics and literary realism, for instance, clearly resist easy resolution, reflecting what David Lodge describes as the novel's obvious discomfort with 'universal statements or monolithic truth claims' (Lodge 2003). This resistance to ideological closure readily aligns with Bewes's vision of the free indirect as a mode that transcends the constraints of form and ideology. However, the novel's deliberate ambiguity also raises questions about the limits of such transcendence. If the free indirect enables the novel to escape ideology, does it also risk rendering the novel's ethical and philosophical inquiries indecisive or evasive? What, indeed, is the relation between the novel's free indirect mode of thought and the possible ethical and political arguments – which may be put forward on the basis of all the modes of instantiation and relation the novel's forms may suggest, demand or even require in the act of reading and interpretation? Eventually, that question also marks the gap between Bewes's argument as a provocative incitement for philosophical perspectives on the novel, on the one hand, and its potential consequences for literary criticism in practice, on the other – particularly in how this would come to bear on the study and teaching of literature in higher education.

### **The Novel as a Perfect Incomplete Bridge**

Bewes's *Free Indirect* offers a compelling framework for rethinking the novel in a postfictional age, foregrounding its capacity to exceed ideological and formal constraints. Through re-engaging some of Bewes's hypotheses with Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, a novel central to his argument, both the potential and the ambivalences of the free indirect thought of the novel may be stated more clearly. While Coetzee's work exemplifies the novel's potential to resist instantiation, it also reveals the inherent instability of such aspirations. The literary bridge, as Coetzee (and Calvino) suggest, remains a construct that is as fragile as it is suggestive, always maintaining a tension between marking the boundary and crossing it. Yet, in its perfect incompleteness, the novel as a 'yet unattainable' bridge (Bellour 1975: 19) always opens up new possibilities for thought, ethics, and form, challenging us to imagine a world beyond belief.

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## Free Indirect Thought Felt and Lived

Alex Houen

Timothy Bewes emphasises that *Free Indirect* 'is not a study of free indirect style or discourse' (37), and his Introduction makes some bold summative statements about why that's the case. In his view, despite the interpersonal fusions of voice and thought presented by free indirect style, it continues to be regarded as upholding a conception of an 'encapsulated self or other' (5) and of literary voice as the 'representation' or 'expression' of such unified subjectivity. Because of that, he argues, thinking about free indirect style has not departed from three ideologies nurtured by 'the main traditions of novel theory': the ideology of literary 'form' as expressive or representative of ideas or concepts that have a pre-existing unity; the ideology of the 'expressive subject', the unity of which buttresses unity of voice and concept; and the ideology of 'fiction', which maintains a 'fundamental separation' of fictional writing 'with respect to the real' (5). In contrast to those ideologies associated with the style, what Bewes conceives of as 'free indirect' is a mode of thought that's irreducible to unities of subject or voice, and which is 'outside the novel's representational economy' because it's a thought 'located outside all subjective or conceptual unity, an *internally dialogical thought* that takes place in the crevices between forms, or concepts, or intentions' (34, 96). Bewes offers that as very much a novel conception – something new that contemporary fiction is evolving – but the novelty bound up with its supposed departure from conventional economies of expressive representation means that it's not actually 'speakable' nor even thinkable: 'if there is a thought of the contemporary novel, it is not thinkable by us' (11).

In terms of form, it's true that while free indirect style blurs the boundary of first- and third-person voice and perspective, as well as the distinction of time narrated and time of narrating, it has nevertheless usually been characterised as wavering between two distinct fictional subjects: a character and a narrator. Proponents of the 'dual voice' view of the style consider how the voice and thought of the narrator 'embeds the character's statement of thought in the narrative flow' (Pascal 1977: 75), which is why the style is also regarded as being a form of high literary artifice. As Dorrit Cohn puts it, the 'audition of another voice in another head' has become a literary convention divorced from reality: the ability of a person to track another person's 'inner voice' is pure fiction; in contrast, she argues, 'inner voice *itself* is a generally accepted psychological reality, and by no means a literary invention' (1978: 77). In Fredric Jameson's view, the ease and artifice with which free indirect style has come to present one person accessing another person's interiority amounts to a facile 'subjectivism' (2013: 181) similar to the one that Bewes thinks has stuck to the style.

But what if a person's own inner voice spoke and thought by means of free indirect discourse? What if how a person relates to the dynamics of their own inner voice also entails modes of indirect discourse? Critics and theorists, Bewes included, have considered *interpersonal* aspects of free indirect style, but they've tended to ignore how it can also present complex *intrapersonal* blends of voice. As I've discussed at length in research exploring lyric poetry and poets' novels (see Houen 2021), once we appreciate that inner voice works with indirect discourse we can see the style as presenting forms of thinking and feeling that are in no way reducible to an 'encapsulated self or other', or a unity of voice or concept, or a representational economy tied to those things.

Other critics and theorists, some of whom Bewes cites, have laid down foundations for relating inner voice to free indirect discourse even if they haven't made the connection explicit. Valentin Voloshinov, for example, asserted that 'A poet's style is engendered from *the style of his inner speech*' and that 'Style is at least two persons or, more accurately, one person plus his social group' (1976: 114) because a person's inner speech is itself saturated with social discourse. Voloshinov doesn't explicitly associate the inner fusion of personal and social voices with indirect discourse, but it's what the fusion amounts to – that individual language use is indissociably social is why Deleuze and Guattari argued that *all* language 'in its entirety is indirect discourse' (1987: 84) – and it raises an issue that most other critics and theorists haven't considered: the fact that free indirect discourse can commingle not just two people's voices but many.

As the philosopher Denise Riley has stated: 'Inner speech is no limpid stream of consciousness'; it's 'a sludgy thing, choked with the rubble of the overheard', such as 'mutterings of remembered accusations, [...] the embarrassing detritus of advertising, archaic injunctions from hymns, and the pastel snatches of old song lyrics' (2004: 20–1). Riley, like Voloshinov, doesn't describe such linguistic blending as indirect discourse, even though the way one speaks and hears inner voice entails syntheses of pronouns and perspectives: my inner voice 'speaks' silently at the heart of me, it is profoundly *mine*, yet I often hear *it* as being external to me, as when it addresses me in the second person as 'you' or starts to reiterate things my father said. That is to say: what feels like depth of interior voice is a fold in the breadth of language that extends way beyond me. In blending the personal with transpersonal language and impersonal modes of social discourse, inner voice can speak as another or others no less than one can hear it speaking others as oneself.

For that reason, the free indirect dynamics of inner speech mean that it can bespeak you as an *impersona* built up of identifications, projections, and impersonations. In other words, the free indirect dynamics of inner speech testify to how individuals are constantly thinking beyond the unities of subject and statement that Bewes

disparages. Consequently, rather than viewing free indirect style to be a literary artifice ontologically removed from real consciousness and everyday language use – which is how it's regarded by theorists such as Cohn and Ann Banfield – it can instead be seen as generating a mode of composite and '*internally dialogical thought*' that people are thinking all the time.

Numerous contemporary writers have explored such composite thinking by playing with modes of indirect style. Some of that play has included thinking between forms and genres, which is why it's been undertaken not just in prose fiction but also in lyric poetry. An example of the latter is Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) which she composed largely by gathering anecdotes of racist micro-aggressions from 'a community of friends' and then 'fold[ing] them into my own stories' (Rankine qtd. in Berlant 2014). The interfusion of voices is augmented by a lyrical mode of free indirect style that relates inner voice and social identification:

You take in things you don't want all the time. [...] Hold up, did you just hear that, did you just say, did you just see, did you just do that? Then the voice in your head silently tells you to take your foot off your throat because just getting along shouldn't be an ambition. (Rankine 2014: 55)

The 'you' here, and elsewhere in the text, is a manifold of different voices and perspectives. It's thickened with otherness and second-person addresses of others that sometimes bear an accusative mood – hence the comment about internalising 'things you don't want all the time'. In wavering indeterminately between the singular and plural/generic, and between the personal and other(s), the 'you' can be heard as silent inner voice addressing the speaker ('did you just hear that, [...] did you just see that'), just as it can be heard addressing someone else ('did you just say'). The accretive nature of the second person also relates to the tense of the free indirect style which gathers multiple instances of reacting to micro-aggression into the one present. Not only have such instances happened 'all the time', the internalisation of them means they've accumulated as a continuous present that the free indirect style conveys.

In exploring how a person's own inner voice is constantly grappling with a slew of pronouns, perspectives, and voices, Rankine's lyrical style draws attention to how affect as well as thinking can be free indirect. In contrast, because Bewes posits his 'postfictional' thought as being 'nonsubjective' his tendency is to seal it off from individual characters and narrators as well as from affect despite his criticism of 'encapsulated' thinking. Yet what Rankine and other writers show with their innovations in indirect style is how diffusions and multiplicities of thoughts, feelings, and voices can be actively lived, felt, and refigured.

Lisa Robertson's *Baudelaire Fractal* (2020) is a prime example. An autobiographical *Künstlerroman*, the novel is narrated in the first-person by Robertson's impersona, Hazel Brown, who recounts her journey to becoming a writer. That journey includes her realising just how composite the first-person really is: the feeling of having an 'inner life, animated by a cold-hot point of identification called "I" is a linguistic collaboration' (2020: 160). Prolonged reading can be part of that collaboration, whereby 'another's style of consciousness inflects one's own' (2020: 15). Such free indirect experience is a basis for her waking one morning with 'the bodily recognition that I had become the author of the complete works of Baudelaire. Even the unwritten texts [...]' (2020: 16). That might sound like fanciful identification, but it turns into the basis for Robertson's/Brown's real creative becoming. Having read Baudelaire's characterisation of a generic young girl as '*frightful, monstrous, assassin of art [...]; the greatest imbecility joined with the greatest depravation*' (2020: 106), Robertson's impersona resolves to become 'that monster': 'The girl within the Baudelairean work will undo it by repeating it within herself, as indeed she repeats girlhood, misshapen' (2020: 136). Magnificent. Appreciating how contemporary novels relate free indirect thought and affect requires getting to grips with writers' innovations in free indirect style.

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## The Always Already Novel

Adam Kelly

We live in an era when cutting-edge criticism concerns itself as much with institutions as with aesthetics. Literary scholars today find themselves studying ‘systemic intelligences’ and ‘conglomerate superorganism[s]’ (Sinykin 2023: 12, 25) while addressing ‘literature as a social fact’ of diminishing significance (Brouillette 2022: 129). Against this background it is something of a giddy indulgence to encounter a book that transports its reader back to the age of high theory, when literature seemed a social fact of undisputed centrality that possessed the power to remake institutions rather than relying on their arbitrary favour. *Free Indirect* pits Timothy Bewes’s ‘taste for speculative thinking’ against the contemporary disciples of Bourdieu and Latour, subjecting many critical sacred cows to ritual sacrifice (71). Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era* (2009) sees its author ‘presenting himself as something like a literary character and the critical principles he seems to be proposing as fictional ideas’ (109). Caroline Levine’s *Forms* (2015) ‘dispenses with the uncertainty and work of reading’ and contains ‘nothing but deflections’ (181, 185). Part of the giddiness of reading *Free Indirect* lies in encountering such unapologetic fighting talk.

Among French theory’s own sacred cows, Bewes has his favourites: Deleuze and Rancière – whose debate about modern aesthetics is reconstructed across the book’s closing chapters – along with Badiou and Foucault. Yet in reading *Free Indirect* the thinker I was most regularly reminded of was Derrida, a figure barely mentioned within it. Bewes likes to proceed methodologically, as Derrida did, from the words of other thinkers, inhabiting their discourse so as to unpack its immanent logic and key concepts, eventually translating those concepts into his book’s own terms. This is how we get from an account of McGurl’s foregrounding of ‘the experiences of the author’ (qtd. 80) to a reading of his prose as ‘postfictional’ (109). More profoundly, it is how we get from Rancière’s rejection of Deleuze’s ‘sensorimotor break’ to a reading of something like that break – the spectre of ‘nonregime’ thinking – as the unspoken heart of Rancière’s aesthetics, where what the work cannot articulate directly is precisely what it nevertheless conveys. This might be described as a classically deconstructive move, repositioning the marginalised as central to an entire edifice of thought; another such move is Bewes’s invocation of the thinking of limits as simultaneously the thinking of what lies beyond the limit. As in Derrida, too, Bewes’s speculations on what lies beyond the limit can sometimes feel close to negative theology. But this may be unavoidable when what is being theorised in *Free Indirect* is ‘the thought of the novel’, a thought that cannot in fact be theorised, except to say that it is ‘noninstrumental, nonsubjectively inhabitable, nontransferable and therefore nonideological’ (6).

In nonetheless attempting to approach this peculiar thought, Bewes leans on another old poststructuralist saw: the double implication of the word ‘of’. The thought of the novel is not primarily thought *about* the novel but thought generated *by* the novel, just as Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* (1916) refers not to theory about the novel but to theory generated by the novel itself. As Bewes puts it in an earlier engagement with Lukács, ‘not only is the novel read; it *reads*. The novel is itself a theorization, driven by its own lack of “completeness”’ (Bewes 2010: 3). The other great theorist of the novel’s incompleteness, of its ‘*internally dialogical*’ quality (96), is Mikhail Bakhtin, and one of the many rewards of *Free Indirect* is how it brings these two giants of novel theory into productive and original alignment with one another, and into conversation with other key but sometimes overlooked figures in the critical tradition such as Ann Banfield and Benedict Anderson. The way Bewes’s book moves between the various languages of these thinkers feels open and unschematic, as if his own practice aims at reproducing the untheorisable indeterminacy of the novel itself.

*Free Indirect* arrived not long before another book that has already gained significant attention in literary studies and beyond, Anna Kornbluh’s *Immediacy* (2024). The comparison is instructive, because Bewes and Kornbluh both proceed from a Lukácsian conception of the novel, where what ultimately matters is the relation (or non-relation) of the singular work to the ‘totality’. The difference is that where Bewes proceeds from the early Lukács of *The Theory of the Novel*, Kornbluh is guided by the later Lukács, the staunch defender of realism against the modernist tide of inwardness and fragmentation. A Canute of the contemporary, Kornbluh fights back this tide by counselling a return to third-person narrative to counter the baleful ‘immediacy’ she sees embodied in the recent cultural dominance of first-person narrative in general and autofiction in particular. The same autofictional texts scorned by Kornbluh are, by contrast, the very works that for Bewes are ‘most directly expressive of the thought of the era’ (71). Beginning with Sebald’s novels of the 1990s, proceeding through Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) – described as ‘an event in the history and theory of the novel’ (76) which ‘universalizes the principle of free indirect discourse’ (126) – and alighting on other recent works by Jesse Ball, Patrick Modiano, and Rachel Cusk (who begins and ends *Free Indirect*), Bewes’s canon of the contemporary is dominated by autofictional texts, most of them written in first-person or with consistent allusion to the guiding hand of an author. And yet he never uses the word autofiction (preferring the more speculative ‘postfiction’), presumably because to do so would risk casting as a mere genre what is *novel* about the contemporary novel, would risk reifying its thought into a form. The shared characteristic of these texts for Bewes is their ‘overriding obsession’

with ‘the noninstantiability of the work’s idea’ (74), a refusal of ‘the instantiation relation’ that takes place at the level of thought but is impossible at the level of form (‘Nothing in the *form* of the novel, nothing the novel says or does, is possible outside of’ instantiation; and yet ‘what defines the novel exceeds its form’ [38]).

Given its emphasis on ‘the enigma of the novelistic utterance’ (83), the relative absence of literary modernism from *Free Indirect* is striking. Beckett appears in the introduction and conclusion, but only in relation to *Three Dialogues* (1949) rather than a work like *The Unnamable* (1953), which might seem to exemplify the collapse of the instantiation relation as much as any novel before or since. Yet apart from some asides on the abyssal disruptions of Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907), the one early twentieth-century novelist who receives sustained treatment in *Free Indirect* is Forster. *Howards End* (1910), a great novel but hardly a high modernist one, is presented as the culmination, and fraying, of the novel’s commitment to the instantiation relation, which sustained it across the nineteenth century and beyond. But with the absconding of modernism (not to mention postmodernism) from Bewes’s account thereafter, it can seem as if we have moved directly from the long nineteenth century of Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, and Forster to the long twenty-first century of Sebald, Coetzee, Zadie Smith, and Cusk, with only VS Naipaul popping his head up inconclusively from the seven or eight decades in between. It is philosophy (particularly David Armstrong), the philosophy of film (Deleuze), and film itself (Ozu, Bresson, Godard, Hitchcock) that fill the temporal gap between the early and late twentieth century, leading to an account of literary history that can be hard to narrate or reconstruct. What was the novel doing between *Howards End* and *The Emigrants* (1992), one wants to ask? Even after Beckett’s negations, was it still operating out of the old faith in instantiation, which somehow finally only collapsed at the turn of the twenty-first century? And if it did finally collapse, why did this occur? Can we point to some happening in the world that led to the replacement of Dickens’s faith in connection and Flaubert’s aesthetic of implication by Sebald’s disconnection and Coetzee’s arbitrary bridge to the other side of meaning?

*Free Indirect* sometimes makes gestures that we can recognise as conventionally periodising. The thought of the novel has become newly important, Bewes writes, ‘in a technocratic era where all possible options for thought – data-linked to income, postcode, employment, demographic reporting, patterns of behavior—seem to have been anticipated and laid out in advance’ (19). Elsewhere he calls this technocratic era ‘neoliberal’ (28, 38, 167), though only ever in quotation marks, as if to name the period would constitute another act of reification (a word that, surprisingly for the author of a book called *Reification* [2002], does not appear in *Free Indirect*). When we begin from the

thought of the novel, all conventional schemas of history (and literary history) come to seem insufficient. Because the novel is not a form or a genre but rather a problem or a logic – ‘a condition of thought in which form and content are for the first time radically heterogeneous’ (73) – its development proceeds not primarily with reference to the world but by (re)discovering its own fundamental conditions. Bewes’s technique in reading contemporary novels is therefore to home in on an isolated passage or phrase that he presents as characterising the singular logic of the whole work. Such parsimony in discussing content can make it feel as if any subject matter in contemporary novels – any connection to a recognisable world beyond their pages – is overwhelmed by their form (or, more strictly, by their thought). *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*, the cri de coeur of deconstruction, sometimes seems to characterise *Free Indirect*’s message in a way that goes beyond what even Derrida could have imagined.

In Bewes’s book, the novel is always new but also seems – to put it again in Derridean terms – to be *always already* what it is. In his outline of Deleuze’s theory of cinema, Bewes observes that ‘If the sensorimotor break takes place, it is because it had already taken place long ago, with the discovery of the cinematographic image itself’ (202). But the analogy with the novel here raises, at least for me, a final question of periodisation. When was the novel, or the novelistic, ‘discovered’? The ‘postfictional age’ announced in the subtitle of *Free Indirect* – an age when the instantiation relation no longer subtends the novel – may be ‘less a new idea than a new order of legibility, of thinkability’ (76), but it still implies that there was a ‘fictional age’, and perhaps a ‘prefictional age’ too. In discussing Catherine Gallagher’s seminal essay ‘The Rise of Fictionality’ (2006), Bewes claims that her definition of fiction – ‘a nonreferentiality that could be seen as a greater referentiality’ (qtd. 26) – can equally define the instantiation relation, which would therefore seem to emerge along with the category of fiction. But can the Bakhtinian theory of the novel that is otherwise privileged in *Free Indirect* – where the key event is a process of ‘novelization’ that stretches back to ancient times, in every period confronting authoritative discourse with its subversive other – be compatible with a theory of the novel’s *modernity* that sees it emerging only in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century? To put it another way, is the invention of fictionality in the novel simply the rediscovery of what ‘had already taken place long ago’, and is the shift to postfictionality just another rediscovery of this kind? Was there a novel before the instantiation relation, just as there seems to be a novel after it? Of all the stimulating questions I am left with by *Free Indirect*, it is these to which I would most like answers. Over to you, Professor Bewes.

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## The Novel's Destination: A Response to Leonid Bilmes, Laura A. Zander, Alex Houen, and Adam Kelly

Timothy Bewes

I'm grateful for the penetrating readings and challenges posed by the reviews of *Free Indirect* commissioned by *C21 Literature*, and to the journal's editors for the opportunity to respond to them. All four pieces have given me much to think about. First, I have to thank Leonid Bilmes profoundly for giving my arguments a clarified and extended Heideggerian framing, and for his sympathetic and insightful attention to the distinctive temporality of my account of the novel: my insistence on the novel as a destination, or better, an immanent tendency. This directionality is for me explained most compellingly by Mikhail Bakhtin as a progression in dialogicality. In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin speaks of a 'deepening' of the novel's dialogical essence, as dialogue 'moves into [the novel's] deepest molecular and, ultimately, subatomic levels' (300). I'll come back to that passage in Bakhtin later in this response. The Heideggerian framing that Bilmes offers is mostly his, not mine. But justification is provided for it in my book when I refer briefly to Heidegger's conception of thinking as a procedure that lacks 'the assurance of its own appointed course' (19).

For Laura Zander, also, my comments will not go much beyond an expression of gratitude; first, for registering the centrality of J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* to my argument and expanding my exposition of Coetzee's image of a bridge between two banks of fiction and nonfiction in such a thought-provoking direction, drawing out its performative ambiguities. Coetzee's image is constitutive of a conceptual gap that, as Zander describes, enters the novel as matter of innovative 'content'. But Zander is also (appropriately, I think) troubled that critical protocols that play close attention to such gaps risk exiling all philosophical and ethical inquiry from our critical concerns when it comes to the novel. For Zander, an important normative gap remains unaccounted for in my project – between its suggestive philosophical provocations and their 'consequences' for literary-critical practice. How does one follow through on such implications – on the critical page or in the classroom, for example?

I appreciate the insightfulness of the question and the challenge. I hope it will be considered an acknowledgement of its difficulty and substantiality if I say that only a formal or practical answer to this question is possible. That is, one of the implications of my work must involve a transformation in the critical relation to our objects of study. Any such transformation is not easily described or formulated in a register that itself remains untransformed. This statement, then, does not adequately resolve the issue,

which is real. And so I am thrown back onto a conventional answer: that in forthcoming work under way I attempt to model possible evolutions in critical practice precisely by reimagining the subject-object critical relation.

Alex Houen and Adam Kelly both do me the favour and honour of raising theoretical questions in a theoretical register, and in Kelly's case, posing questions to me directly. I will address the two pieces one at a time.

Houen's essay is concerned primarily with free indirect style or discourse and with a form of 'intrapersonal' or 'intrasubjective' dialogue that he thinks I have neglected in my account. He mentions an important essay by Vološinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art', which is also drawn on by Denise Riley in *The Force of Language* (co-authored with Jean-Jacques Lecercle). Houen's point is to insist that a form of novelistic thought that I locate at the margins or limits of novelistic form can actually be seen operating within – rather than at the boundaries of – the novel's representational economy. Such practices of representation exceed the limitations implied in an 'encapsulated self or other', or indeed the monologic formation of ideological unity, thus demonstrating a capaciousness to free indirect style and the representational possibilities of the novel that renders unnecessary some 'uninstantiated' space of thought that he takes me to be advocating (and, hence, any reorganisation of the critical enterprise like the one I gestured towards above in response to Zander). (I'm paraphrasing Houen quite liberally here, but I think this must be the tenor of his inquiry.)

I don't disagree with anything Houen says about the technical qualities of free indirect discourse, especially regarding its relevance to forms of 'inner speech'. Authors often depict characters representing their own thoughts to themselves in free indirect discourse, in effect pluralising their own subjectivities and revealing what I have elsewhere called 'a dialogicality internal to language' (Bewes 2017).<sup>3</sup> More banally, we know that the represented quality of all interior consciousness in the novel means that 'indirect discourse' proliferates in forms of direct speech also. 'What [Claudia] Rankine and other writers show with their innovations in indirect style is how diffusions and multiplicities of thoughts, feelings, and voices can be actively lived, felt, and refigured,' writes Houen. All this is true. However, it doesn't touch on the primary concerns of my book, which is the hypothesis of a dimension to the novel that is hypothesisable *precisely on account of the ubiquity and multiplicity, even the inexhaustibility, of speaking voices in the*

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<sup>3</sup> In my 2017 article – a precursor to the argument developed in *Free Indirect* – I address directly the dimension of free indirect discourse that Houen calls 'intrapersonal', which I refer to as the 'intra-subjective or intra-discursive' dimension of language.

novel, a dimension that, coexisting with that proliferation of represented subjectivities, is yet not reducible to them, indeed, that may be specifiable only negatively, insofar as it does not coincide with them. Vološinov himself alludes to this when, a few lines after the passages quoted by Houen, and with a tenor that is perfectly continuous with them, he says this:

Even the most intimate self-awareness is an attempt to translate oneself into the common code, to take stock of another's point of view, and, consequently, entails orientation towards a possible listener ... In this regard, consciousness, provided that we do not lose sight of its content, is *not just a psychological phenomenon* but also, and above all, an *ideological phenomenon, a product of social intercourse*. (2012: 192–93)

My question to Houen is whether there is a dimension to the novel that escapes this 'ideological' phenomenon and 'product of social discourse'? I happen to think that the term 'impersona', coined in Houen's 2021 article, captures this dimension well. Houen applies it to both poetic (Rankine) and novelistic (Ben Lerner) works, where it denotes a composite of 'imaginary projections, introjections, and identifications that intermix first-, second-, and third-person voices' (Houen 2021: 1050). But I would add that the concept seems to me stronger (and more faithfully Vološinovan) if one accepts the possibility of a point of view located not only 'within the confines of an individual psyche' (an author, a narrator, a character, a critic, a reader) but, as Vološinov himself puts it, 'within the confines of one and the same linguistic construction' (1986: 155).

Adam Kelly's generous review begins by putting my book into conversation with more sociological approaches prevalent in the field of contemporary literary studies (Brouillette, Sinykin, McGurl) and then, more provocatively, with Derrida. He is not the first to do so. In an exchange at Oxford University in 2021, a few months before *Free Indirect* was published, David Cunningham asked me whether *Free Indirect* was my 'deconstructive book'. At that point, somewhat resistant, I had to accept that Derrida was a significant unnamed presence in my work. Now, I take it as a high compliment that Kelly compares the critical procedures of *Free Indirect* to those of deconstruction, and especially that he supplies the claim with examples that he glosses in such a way as to bring out their emblematic quality within the aims of my book.

I will focus on Kelly's questions. The first concerns periodisation, in particular, the long period of literary history between *Howards End* and *The Emigrants*, which saw the publication of *Ulysses*, *Molloy/Malone Dies/The Unnamable*, and the large historical formation that we refer to as postmodernism, designating such radically heterogeneous practices as those of Thomas Pynchon, E. L. Doctorow, Martin Amis, Angela Carter,

Salman Rushdie, Paul Auster, Jeannette Winterson, and Robert Coover. ‘Can we point to some happening in the world that led to the replacement of Dickens’s faith in connections and Flaubert’s aesthetics of implication with Sebald’s disconnection and Coetzee’s arbitrary bridge?’ asks Kelly.

The several questions he directs to me at the end of his piece are closely related to this, and they seem to amount to a single concern which I will try to paraphrase as follows: what is the status of the historical shift implicit in the transition from (i) a novel in which fiction (and, inseparably from this, instantiation) continues to be a plausible organizing principle for critical reading, to (ii) a ‘postfictional’ novel (or a postfictional method) that is no longer satisfied with such interpretive principles – where fiction itself, indeed instantiation relations, appear as conventions to be contained, surpassed, and/or refused?

In answer to the first question, I have never accepted the hypothesis of a distinct postmodern novel like that theorised by Linda Hutcheon (*The Poetics of Postmodernism*) or Fredric Jameson (*Postmodernism*), characterized by formal features such as ‘metafiction’, ‘intertextuality’, ‘irony’, ‘double-coding’, or the ‘waning of affect’. Using such terms, the postmodernism hypothesis prematurely concludes the critical adventure known as the history and theory of the novel with a narrative of its termination. Jameson’s verdict on the postmodern as the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism’, for all its theoretical brilliance, effectively obliterated the most radically subsisting features of the novel (dialogicality; the ubiquity of ‘represented speech and thought’; what Lukács called a formal ‘dissonance’) from our critical narratives about the period – an obliteration that I have tried to undo in other work by demonstrating the salience of Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* to precisely that period in the history of the novel that is largely read as announcing its end (Bewes 2004). Beckett’s trilogy of novels published in 1950, 1951, and 1955, for example, remains for me within the terms of the novel put forward in Lukács’s understanding: an epic for an age ‘in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality’ (56); but the same goes for the works of Paul Auster and Dennis Cooper that I have discussed within this framework.

If anyone in the pantheon of postmodern theory understood this clearly, it was Jean-François Lyotard, whose characterisation of postmodern aesthetics always sounds to me closer to early Lukács than to, say, Ihab Hassan or Hutcheon.<sup>4</sup> This is

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Joyce allows the unrepresentable to become perceptible in his writing itself, in the signifier ... The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, ... that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable’ (Lyotard: 80 and 81).

why, when I try to think in terms of historical paradigm, I find myself aligning with Jacques Rancière, whose conception of the aesthetic regime comprehends the various traditions that, with an excessive historical sense, we separate into periods of realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

That said, something has happened – not necessarily in literary practice, but certainly in the kinds of critical readings that are possible and whose viability I have tried to illustrate and dramatise in my work. (Can we be certain that the definitive shift takes place in one sphere – say, criticism – rather than the other – say, literary production – or vice versa? Well, no, no more than we can be sure that a person we are conversing with really means what they say.) But what has happened? asks Kelly at the end of his article. It is a presupposition of my work, and a point of conviction, that the novel *thinks* (the point with which Bilmes began his review). Another way of stating this is that a consistent principle of the novel, evident from the beginning, is that something takes place in the novel that is not what is articulated within it: represented thought, or ideology. That event is tied to the novel's actuality as a form, able, like no other practice, to represent speech and thoughts artistically. In doing so, the novel sets itself off from that field of representation, precisely as a thinking subject. This is why we can be absolutely confident that *Madame Bovary* is not an ideological vehicle for the views of Emma Bovary or any other character in Flaubert's novel. Perhaps it is an ideological vehicle for Gustave Flaubert, but if so, we can nevertheless be certain that it is more than that, for Flaubert's consciousness, in its private, most intimate dimension, is also 'an ideological phenomenon, a product of social intercourse'.

If there is a shift, it is not primarily in the autonomous formal evolution of the novel (there is no such thing) but in the condition, which is to say, the historical environment, in which the novel thinks, that is, maintains itself as a nonideological subject. In our own present, ideology has invaded the domain of personal subjectivity to an unprecedented degree such that interiority itself, our very forms of grasping and conceptualizing the world, and ourselves, represents an ever more permeable frontier. This is the historical context in which the novel finds itself 'deepening' its dialogic essence (to return to Bakhtin's formulation), drawing into dialogue the very enterprise of representing the world to ourselves – including our beliefs, motivations, and desires as subjects – and of allowing those representations to stand as affirmations of meaningful connection. The novel 'is the only developing genre', Bakhtin teaches us (1981: 4), which means that its capacity for 'indeterminacy', for 'semantic open-endedness' (7), will always be expressed at the site of a society's most indisputable 'truths'. In our own period, such 'truths' might be stated as follows: that our private thoughts count as thinking; that, as subjects of advanced capitalist economies, we

know what we want and what we think about things; that our actions, undertaken in the service of beliefs and interests, have a coherence that expresses subjective unity and wholeness; that ‘connections’ among such unified subjects are in themselves beneficial and meaningful.

In a fascinating passage in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Vološinov refers to ‘behavioral ideology’, which he defines as ‘that atmosphere of unsystematized and unfixed inner and outer speech which endows our every instance of behavior and action and our every “conscious” state with meaning’ (1986: 91).<sup>5</sup> Vološinov insists that a work that managed to break its connection with behavioural ideology would cease to exist, since at that moment ‘it ceases to be experienced as something ideologically meaningful’. What has changed in the historical situation, then, is the emergence of a new viability, indeed political necessity, to a kind of work located at the breaking-point of the connection to behavioural ideology, one that brings novelistic attention to regions of existence for which such connections are neither essential nor even meaningful.

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<sup>5</sup> Although an exposition lies beyond the scope of this response, I believe that what Vološinov calls ‘behavioral ideology’ is nothing other than what Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* refers to as the ‘sensorimotor schema’.

### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### Author Contributions

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