

A LONG THE KROMMERUN

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The Machine Aesthetic in Joyce and *De Stijl*

David Spurr

Abstract

The casual associations between Joyce and certain collaborators with *De Stijl* remind us that he was working in an artistic environment that extended beyond the world of letters, and that much of the artistic experimentation taking place around him was concerned with the forms of a newly constructed and functional modernity. The celebration of the machine in the pages of *De Stijl* finds an inherently aesthetic value in the forms of industrial production. In Joyce there is a dialogic relation between human bodies and machines, in which human movement owes as much to machine production as machines owe to human design. Joyce's work brings out the point of tension between human desire and technological invention in a manner symptomatic of modernity at large.

De Stijl was the name given by Theo van Doesburg to the review he founded and published in collaboration with the painter Piet Mondrian, the architects J.J. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, and other artists during the years 1917–1931. Among the contributors to the review and “principal collaborators” in the movement as listed in the 1927 Jubilee number of *De Stijl*¹ were the composer George Antheil and the sculptor Constantin Brancusi, both of whom Joyce knew in Paris. Richard Ellmann tells us how in 1929 Brancusi, after several attempts at sketching Joyce, finally produced a “symbol” of Joyce for the frontispiece of the Black Sun edition of *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun*. The design conforms to the geometrical abstraction of *De Stijl*, found in everything from Mondrian's paintings to Van Doesburg's furniture and Rietveld's Schröder House in Utrecht. Brancusi's spiral, like a coiled spring, is intended to express the “sense of push” which the artist found in Joyce. We also know that in 1923 Joyce attended more than one performance of Antheil's musical pieces, including the *Ballet mécanique*, which Antheil described in the pages of *De Stijl* as “the first piece of music that has been composed OUT OF and FOR machines, ON EARTH”.² Antheil's music served as the score for the film version of the *Ballet mécanique* by Fernand

1 Hans Jaffé, *De Stijl* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1967), 142.

2 George Antheil, “My Ballet mécanique,” *De Stijl* 6, no. 12 (1925).

Léger (1924), who also became Joyce's friend (*Letters III* 304).³ These casual associations between Joyce and certain collaborators with *De Stijl* remind us that Joyce was working in an artistic environment that extended beyond the world of letters, and that much of the artistic experimentation taking place around him was concerned with the forms of a newly constructed and functional modernity.

The artists and architects of *De Stijl* were at the forefront of this experimentation in its most radical, abstracted form. According to the movement's first manifesto in 1918, *De Stijl's* aim was to bring about a revolution in human consciousness and society by destroying the Romantic pre-eminence of the individual and the organic, in order to restore a proper balance between nature and spirit. Its aesthetic, called Neoplasticism, called for the abstraction of form in every artistic field, with an emphasis on the straight line and the right-angled geometric shape.

In an article written for *De Stijl* in 1922, Mondrian notes a series of progressive deteriorations in the cultural fabric brought about by modern modes of production: architecture has become mere construction, handicraft has been dissolved into industrial design, the theatre is replaced by cinema, live music by the phonograph, literature is largely "practical", as in journalism, while as poetry it has become "increasingly ridiculous". He deplores this vulgarisation of art into mere material value: "Our surroundings and our life show poverty in their incompleteness and stark utilitarianism".⁴ The remedy is not for art to escape from this environment into fantasy and self-reflection, but rather to adapt to it, and to strive for equilibrium between "what is in us and what is around us".⁵ The ultimate goal of the evolution of art will then be the disappearance of art as such, in the material realisation of life as aesthetically pure, ordered, and harmonious. As for literature, "it will have no further reason to exist as 'art,' but will become simply use-and-beauty" without the lyrical trappings.⁶ In other words, by extending its aesthetic from the traditional media of painting and sculpture into those of architecture and industrial design, the aim of *De Stijl*⁷ was not just

3 A precedent to the Chaplinesque mechanical figure of Léger's film was Vilmos Huszár's "Mechanical Dancing Figure", which was projected on a screen during the "Dutch Dada-tour" made by Huszár, Van Doesburg, Nelly van Moorsel, and Kurt Schwitters in early 1923. In 1921 Huszár produced a puppet show called "Mechanical Plastic Drama". Cf. Sjaarel Ex, "Vilmos Huszár," in Carel Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl: The Formative Years, 1917–1922*, trans. Charlotte I. Loeb and Arthur L. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 109.

4 Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 164.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 165.

7 I refer to Van Doesburg's publication as *De Stijl*, and to the movement as *De Stijl*.

to adapt to the conditions of modernity, but also to transform the modern world into a universal work of art, thereby rendering superfluous the production of art as an autonomous activity. In his manifesto of 1926 entitled “The End of Art”, Van Doesburg writes:

Let’s refresh ourselves with things that are not Art: the bathroom, the w.c., the bathtub, the telescope, the bicycle, the auto, the subways, the flat-iron. There are many people who know how to make such good unartistic things. But they are hindered by the priests of Art. Art, whose function nobody knows, hinders the function of life. For the sake of progress we must destroy Art.⁸

De Stijl thus shares with other artistic movements of the period (Futurism, Imagism, Surrealism, and *Neue Sachlichkeit*) a doctrine, utopian objectives, a universalising impulse, and a totalising vision of modern civilisation. In addition, De Stijl shares with those movements a tendency to remove the conventional barriers between different art forms, as well as between what has traditionally been called art and what has not. We can recognise many of these same features in Joyce’s work. If Joyce’s aesthetic doctrine and his utopian aims are at best implicit, there can be little doubt of the universalising impulse and the totalising vision of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Of course, the labyrinthine complexity of Joyce’s work is aesthetically opposed to the geometrical purity of Mondrian’s, but both artists share an impulse to occupy the entire space in which they are given to work. Beckett’s remark that “no painting is more replete than Mondrian’s”⁹ can also be applied to Joyce’s written work. As an aesthetic principle, Joyce has in common with Mondrian the exhaustive articulation of the elements of composition in relation to one another, as well as their mutual relation of non-hierarchical difference. This was true of architecture as well. Van Doesburg writes that “the new architecture has made ‘front’, ‘back’, ‘right’, and possibly ‘above’ and ‘below’ equal in value.”¹⁰ Joyce’s language shares this abolition of hierarchy, while it moves towards a condition in which, as in the art of Mondrian and Van Doesburg, the signifying function of the elements of composition derives not from their relation to an external referent, but from their difference to one another.¹¹

8 Paul Overy, *De Stijl* (London: Dutton, 1969), 94.

9 Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1989), 124.

10 “Towards a Plastic Architecture,” in Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 78–83.

11 Bois, “Prise de vue,” 2.

The expansive impulse in this aesthetic is related to a tendency to extend the form and content of art beyond previously conceived limits, but also implicitly to call into question the notion of art's autonomous realm. To do so is not to suggest that art be subordinated to material or utilitarian ends, but rather to see the machinery of civilisation as potentially a vast art form in itself. It is in this perspective that I propose to focus on the context of modern urban industrialisation, with its remarkable advances in technology, as a historical background for both *De Stijl* and Joyce's writing.

For the Marxist critic Manfredo Tafuri, the De Stijl movement does not merely celebrate modern material reality. Rather, the modern industrial landscape is seen by the members of this movement as chaotic and spiritually impoverished. It has to be reduced to its most basic elements in order to be transformed into new value through artistic sublimation: "De Stijl became a method of control of the technical universe".¹² The technique of this control, the decomposition of complex into elementary forms, corresponded to the discovery that the "new richness" of spirit could not be sought outside the "new poverty" assumed by mechanical civilisation.¹³ With respect to the world of industrial production, De Stijl as the ideal of pure form works in tandem with its antithesis, Dada, as the artistic sublimation of the absurdity brought about in daily life by the conditions of industrial capitalism. "Dada, by means of the absurd, demonstrated – without naming it – the necessity of a plan",¹⁴ and the principle of pure form advanced by De Stijl answered this need. "Thus it is not surprising that Dadaist anarchy and De Stijl order converged and mingled from 1922 on", where "the main concern was that of working out the means of a new synthesis".¹⁵

My thesis is that Joyce's work embodies in literary form the uneasy alliance between movements such as De Stijl and Dada. That is, the explosive opposition, in the face of modern urban reality, between the impulse towards chaos and the impulse towards purity of form. Van Doesburg, to take one example, attempted to solve this problem by relying on the grid as a means of containment against the arbitrary nature of the sign.¹⁶ Joyce makes a similar gesture, though not without irony, in the catechistic form of "Ithaca" and in the systematic plan of the

12 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 92.

13 *Ibid.*, 94.

14 *Ibid.*, 93.

15 *Ibid.*, 95.

16 Yves-Alain Bois, "Prise de vue," *Stijl (De)* (blog), *arc.hist.art*, March 25, 2013, <http://archistart9.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/de-stijl.pdf>, 3.

Linati schema, both of which can be read as artificial frameworks designed to give order to the essentially intractable material they contain. In terms of the larger question of art's relation to modern civilisation, T.S. Eliot famously describes *Ulysses* as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history".¹⁷ Eliot's call to "order and form"¹⁸ is echoed in the *De Stijl* manifestos of the same period. Such an imperative also points to the uneasy balance between formal purity and the anarchy of the sign characteristic of modern art in general and Joyce's work in particular. My reading of Joyce finds this opposition inherent in the figure of the machine, which represents both the rational order of a mechanical civilisation and the perverse effects of that order on the human organism. Joyce's representations of mechanical civilisation render these effects in complex and ambivalent ways.

The celebration of the machine in the pages of *De Stijl* tends to confirm the view that there is aesthetic value to be derived from the forms of industrial production. Writing in 1919, J.J. Oud, in condemning the use of ornament in architecture, writes that "the motor car [and the] machine ... correspond more closely to the socio-aesthetic tendencies of our age and the future than do the contemporary manifestations of architecture",¹⁹ and that "It is the miracle of technical perfection ('the grace of the machine') ... which brings about the aesthetic emotion ... in bringing the aesthetic to determinate beauty".²⁰ Oud's celebration of the machine is shared by Van Doesburg, who writes in 1931 that "the new spiritual artistic sensibility of the twentieth century has not only felt the beauty of the machine, but has also taken cognisance of its unlimited expressive possibilities for the arts".²¹ The machine embodied the purity of function, the geometric forms, and the smooth, hard-edged surfaces that constituted the dominant style of *De Stijl*.

In the early decades of the century, the most extended defence of the machine aesthetic was that of Fernand Léger, a figure close to the *De Stijl* movement. Léger's 1924 manifesto on "The Machine Aesthetic" noted that "modern man lives more and more in a preponderantly geometrical order", and that "all mechanical industrial and human creation is subject to geometric forces". Léger's manifesto resonates with those of *De Stijl*. He called for a new

17 T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 177.

18 *Ibid.*, 178.

19 Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 132.

20 *Ibid.*, 141.

21 Overy, *De Stijl*, 33.

architectural order called “*the architecture of the mechanical*”, which would resolve the problem of art by creating objects that were beautiful and useful at the same time.²² The architecture of the mechanical, or of the machine, eliminates the structural oppositions between inside and outside and between load and support, depending instead on a system of interlocking components. In Rietveld’s *Red and Blue Chair* (1917), for example, the red back is both supported (by a crossbar under the seat) and load bearing (of arm structure). His Schröder House in Utrecht is likewise conceived as a series of cantilevered and interlocking planes – a dynamic system of surfaces, from the moveable interior partitions to the planes extending outwards into space. Everything in this architecture rejects the centralised, enclosed forms of traditional architecture which forms a monolithic mass. As Van Doesburg writes in “Towards a Plastic Architecture” (1924):

The new architecture has broken through the wall and in so doing has completely eliminated the divorce of inside and out. The walls are non-load bearing; they are reduced to points of support. And as a result there is generated a new open plan, totally different from the classic because inside and outside space interpenetrate.²³

We cannot assign to Joyce anything as precise as a machine aesthetic, but we can nonetheless observe the manner in which the form of his work adapts certain principles common to both the machine aesthetic and the architecture of *De Stijl*. All of his prose works are divided into related but discontinuous parts, like the intersecting planes of the Schröder House. Moreover, Oud’s observation that the objects of industrial production correspond to “the socio-aesthetic tendencies of our age”²⁴ resonates with a key strain in Joyce’s work. In “After the Race”, the automobile race itself announces a form of mechanical precision as yet little known in Ireland, as “through this channel of poverty and inaction the Continent sped its wealth and industry” (*D* 42). The “trimly built” cars “running evenly like pellets through the groove of the Naas Road” (*D* 42) are the objects of a certain aesthetic appreciation, as well as being the occasion for high spirits: “Rapid motion through space elates one; so does notoriety; so does the possession of money” (*D* 44). In appropriately telegraphic style, Joyce captures perfectly the euphoric relation between human subjectivity and the technological effects of industrial capitalism: “The journey laid a magical

22 Fernand Léger, *Functions of Painting*, ed. Edward F. Frye (New York: Viking, 1973), 53.

23 Mildred Friedman, ed., *De Stijl, 1917–1931: Visions of Utopia* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), 103.

24 Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 132.

finger on the genuine pulse of life and gallantly the machinery of human nerves strove to answer the bounding courses of the swift blue animal" (*D* 46). In figuring the machine as animal and the human body as machine-like, Joyce provides an early version of what some critics have come to call the "technological sublime".²⁵ In this particularly modern aesthetic experience, the sensation of euphoria is an effect of the machine's power to "challenge forth"²⁶ the human and to become one with the machine.

For Joyce there is a dialogic relation between the machine and the human in which human bodily movement and subjectivity owe as much to machine production as machines owe to human design. This relation to the machine figures particularly in the way *Ulysses* constitutes Joyce's writing of the modern city. The opening lines of the "Aeolus" episode recite in heroic fashion a catalogue of the names of tram lines moving outwards from the system's centre at Nelson's Pillar. The infrastructure and rolling stock of the Dublin United Tramway Company function as a synecdoche of the modern city as a great machine. Thus far, Joyce participates actively in one of the most ambitious projects of modern avant-garde movements, the redemption of the modern city from formlessness and chaos by means of an artistic vision that extracts from within the city its most progressive qualities. The scene "[b]efore Nelson's pillar" (*U* 7.01) thus heralds the new monumentality of the urban system, replacing the outmoded monumentality dedicated to the hero of Trafalgar. As if to celebrate this new form of heroism, Joyce arranges the names of the destinations according to poetic metre, beginning with a series of trimeter trochees, "Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey, Clonskea, Rathgar and Terenure", followed by a series of choriamb: "Palmerston Park and Upper Rathmines, Sandymount Green", etc. The metrical ringing of names follows closely the mechanical precision of the trams' movements, which themselves constitute the action of the scene: "Right and left parallel clanging ringing a double-decker and a singledeck moved from their railheads, swerved to the down line, glided parallel" (*U* 7.10–12). These movements are in turn directed by the Dublin United Tramway Company's timekeeper, whose bawling voice repeats aloud the names just listed, providing vocal

25 Cf. Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964; John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Grossman, 1976); and David S. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

26 The phrase "challenge forth" is borrowed from William Lovitt's translation of Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper, 1969), 14. Heidegger's word is *herausfordern*.

accompaniment to the metallic clamour of the trams. On one hand, the effect is to synthesise poetic metre with mechanical movement, as Van Doesburg does in the poems he published in *De Stijl* under the name of I.K. Bonset.²⁷ On the other hand, Joyce brings about a fusion of the human voice with the machine, a theme on which the remainder of the chapter will play several variations.

From the great machine of the tramway system we follow Bloom into the printing room of the *Freeman's Journal*, where the floorboards reverberate to the sound of the presses: "Thumping. Thumping. Thumping. Thump" (*U* 7.72–79). Bloom witnesses what he takes to be the printing of the news of Patrick Dignam's death:

Machines. Smash a man to atoms if they got him caught. Rule the world today. His machineries are pegging away too. Like these, got out of hand: fermenting.

U 7.80–82

Two things are worth noticing in Bloom's thoughts. First, a version of the technological sublime in the supreme power of the machine, capable of smashing a man to atoms: the machine as death. Second, the metaphor of machine power used to evoke the decomposition of Dignam's body: death as the machine. What Joyce called in *Dubliners* the "machinery of human nerves" (*D* 46) has become the organic process in death and life. Both instances belong to a distinctly modern vision of the fusion of the organic and the machine, one on which Joyce plays in the headline to the next section, "HOW A GREAT DAILY ORGAN IS TURNED OUT" (*U* 7.84).

In this section, as the machines continue to clank on "in threefour time" (*U* 7.101), Bloom reflects on the particular relation between the foreman and the machine he operates: "Now if he got paralysed there and no-one knew how to stop them they'd clank on and on the same, print it over and over and up and back" (*U* 7.102–03). To the immense power of the machine is added its potentially uncontrollable operation in time, a modern version of the enchanted brooms in Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797). Bloom's reflections anticipate Léger's *Ballet mécanique*, where an animated version of Charlie Chaplin is fragmented into geometric pieces while moving in a mechanical universe.

²⁷ See, for example, the "Anthologie Bonset" in *De Stijl* 4, no. 11 (1921). Also under the pseudonym I.K. Bonset, Van Doesburg published four numbers of the magazine *Mécano* from 1922–24 as a supplement to *De Stijl*. These were titled respectively *Geel*, *Blauw*, *Rood*, and *Wit* (Yellow, Blue, Red, and White).

Jacques Rancière sees the *Ballet mécanique* as symptomatic of a new universe of the senses, in which machines simultaneously accomplish and negate human ends because they lend themselves to human endeavours only through “la répétition entêtée d’un mouvement dont la perfection propre est de ne rien vouloir par lui-même” (the ceaseless repetition of a movement of whose perfection consists in wanting nothing for itself; my translation).²⁸ In contrast to Léger’s celebration of the machine, Rancière suggests that there is an inherent inertia in the perpetual movement of the machine from which the willed nature of human endeavour is fundamentally alienated. Joyce’s image of the paralysed human body, confronted with the machine out of control, gives concrete expression to this view.

Joyce also shows the degree to which human movement becomes mechanical as a function of the machine environment. Approaching Joseph Patrick Nannetti amid a “hell of a racket” caused by the presses, Bloom notes that the foreman printer has become insensate to the clamour: “He doesn’t hear it. Nannan. Iron nerves” (*U* 7.128–29). Like the corpse of Dignam, Nannetti’s body has become a machine-like organism, such that even his name, shorn of its final syllable, mimics the repetitive noise of the presses: “Clank it. Clank it” (*U* 7.136). This impression is reinforced by Nannetti’s slowness to respond to Bloom’s address, by his sallow complexion, and above all by the repetitive gesture in which he absently scratches himself: first “slowly in the armpit of his alpaca jacket” (*U* 7.131), then moving “his scratching hand to his lower ribs and scratch[ing] there quietly” (*U* 7.147–48). In the din, Bloom is forced to slip his words “deftly into the pauses of the clanking” (*U* 7.139). While Nannetti accompanies the rhythm of the presses with a reflexive mechanical gesture, Bloom’s speech is adapted to the interstices of the same rhythmic sequence. If machines rule the world, as Bloom thinks, then that rule extends in this case to the very movements of the human body and its voice.

However, just as human bodies become machine-like in this episode, the machines take on human qualities. As Bloom is speaking with Nannetti, the typesetter brings him a “limp galley page” (*U* 7.161), like a tired limb. Standing by, Bloom hears the “loud throbs of clanks, watching the silent typesetters at their cases” (*U* 7.162–63). The organic motion of “throbs” is made not by the typesetters, silent at their task, but by the machines themselves, as if suddenly given a heart. By the same token they are given voice as they deliver the first batch of printed and folded papers: “Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak... Everything speaks in its own way. Sllt”

28 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 26.

(*U* 7.175–77). In the inmost chamber of the Hibernian metropolis, body and machine become as one. Except, of course, when the machinery stops, as happens at the end of the “Aeolus” episode when a power failure brings the entire tram system to a halt, “becalmed in short circuit” (*U* 7.1047). On one hand, the moment seems to confirm Rancière’s point that, however much the human body adapts to the movement of the machine, the inherent inertia of the machine alienates it from the fundamental impulses of human will. Machines break down. On the other hand, the city has become sufficiently a machine in itself that its other moving parts remain in motion: “Hackney cars, cabs, delivery waggons, mail-vans, private broughams, aerated mineral water floats with rattling crates of bottles, rattled, lolled, horsedrawn, rapidly” (*U* 7.1047–49).

In comparing the overall structure of *Ulysses* to that of a machine, I have pointed out the manner in which it is made up of related but discontinuous parts. The best example of this structure in microcosm is the “Wandering Rocks” episode, whose art is designated by the Linati scheme as that of “mechanics”. The episode is constructed as a system of moving parts, each of which makes contact with one or more of the other parts in synchronous fashion, so that the chapter as a whole metaphorically embodies the modern city as a dynamically functioning machine. It begins with Father Conmee’s journey from the presbytery in Gardiner Street Upper to Artane, part of which he makes by riding the Dollymount tram from Newcomen Bridge to Howth Road.²⁹ This initial, outward thrust of the episode is countered by the return to the city centre in the next section, but the details of Conmee’s journey occur as interpellations in three succeeding sections (*U* 10.213, 10.264, 10.842), as well as in “Oxen of the Sun” (*U* 14.1154–59). These interpellations function like the gear-teeth connecting one wheel to another in the mechanism of the episode as a whole.

If “Wandering Rocks” functions like a machine, it nonetheless represents the actual machines of Dublin in somewhat ambivalent terms. While Stephen walks past the “powerhouse”, i.e. the Dublin Electric Light Station in Fleet Street, “The whirr of flapping leather bands and hum of dynamos ... urged Stephen to be on” (*U* 10.821–22). Stephen’s thoughts are recorded:

29 Dollymount was the end station of the Clontarf line, operated by the Clontarf and Hill of Howth Tramway Company. In our picture of Dublin’s transport system, this line should be added to those named in the opening of “Aeolus” which belong to the Dublin United Tramways Company. Curiously, both Father Conmee (*U* 10.74) and Bloom (*U* 4.109) remark on the absence of a tramline on the North Circular Road. In “Circe”, running a tramline from the cattle market on the North Circular Road to the river is part of Bloom’s platform in the mayoral election (*U* 15.1367–68). In “Ithaca” (*U* 17.1726–30), Bloom contemplates an elaborate scheme to remedy this lack.

Beingless beings. Stop! throb always without you and the throb always within. Your heart you sing of. I between them. Where?

U 10.822–24

These enigmatic words are apparently addressed, in the first instance, to the hellish creatures that arose in Stephen's imagination a moment before, as he peered through the dusty, cobwebbed window of the lapidary's shop. But in the more immediate context they can be read as addressed to the ceaseless dynamos of the powerhouse, "throbbing" in the manner of the presses in "Aeolus", and so creating confusion between the murky depths of Stephen's imagination, darkly stirred by the lapidary's ancient art, and the powerful machinery of the city. He feels lost between these two worlds.³⁰

If the whirring dynamos of the powerhouse represent the awesome *Herausfordern* of modern technology, another machine described in this chapter operates more closely to the level of farce. Tom Rochford's invention of a mechanical "programme indicator", designed to inform members of a music hall audience as to which act is currently being performed, looks like a forerunner to the comical machines of Rube Goldberg.³¹ Joyce's prose mimics the sound and motion of Rochford's disk as it is inserted into the mechanism: "He slid in a disk ... and watched it shoot, wobble, ogle, stop: four. Turn Now On" (*U* 10.481–82). Eamon Finn has located the actual patent for this machine, which, being less efficient and above all less visible than other instruments designed for the purpose, was never adopted by the music halls of Dublin.³² As Joyce's "mechanics" chapter, "Wandering Rocks" thus runs the gamut from the technological sublime of the powerhouse to the comic eccentricity of Rochford's laborious invention.

In exploring Joyce's machine aesthetic I have sought to show that his work embodies a historical tension in modernism characterised by the opposition between De Stijl's purity of form and Dada's release of chaotic energies. If the mechanical structure of "Wandering Rocks" corresponds in some ways to the first of these movements, then its Dadaist antithesis is to be found in the "Circe" episode, which functions as a kind of return of the repressed for all the human

30 Enda Duffy cites Stephen words in the epigraph to his essay, "Ulysses Becomes Electra: Electric Energy in Joyce's Novel," *James Joyce Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2011): 407.

31 Rube Goldberg (1883–1970) was an American cartoonist who designed machines excessively complex for the simple tasks they were to perform.

32 Eamon Finn, "'My turn now on' (*U* 15:1263): Rochford's Invention Turns Up," *James Joyce Broadsheet* 80 (2008): 1.

impulses excluded by the ideal of formal purity. The opening lines of “Circe” introduce a distorted and sinister mechanical scene, consisting of “an uncobbled transiding with skeleton tracks, red and green will-o-the wisps and danger signals” (*U* 15.2–3). The oneiric perspective has transformed the red and green signal lights into elements of the supernatural. As if confirming the sense of danger evoked here, later in the same scene a “dragon sandstrewer” comes out of the fog towards the bewildered Bloom. It “slews heavily down upon him, its huge red headlight winking, its trolley hissing on the wire” as the motorman bangs his gong: “Bang Bang Bla Bak Blud Bugg Bloo” (*U* 15.185–89). Bloom has already observed that “everything speaks in its own way” (*U* 7.177), but in these successive detonations, the speech of the dragon sandstrewer is a good deal more violent than the sibilants of the presses in “Aeolus”: “Sllt ... sllt” (*U* 7.175–77). Bloom’s earlier thought that machines could “smash a man to atoms if they got him caught” (*U* 7.81) is particularly apt in the present situation.

The sandstrewer is all the more menacing in that, as it bears down on Bloom it seems to speak his name with the intention of smashing him like a bug: “Bugg Bloo” (*U* 15.189). This is more violent, but not more disturbing to Bloom’s peace of mind than the sound of the brass quoits of the bed at No. 7 Eccles Street, now heard all the way across town, “Jigjag. Jigajiga. Jigjag” (*U* 15.1138), and echoing the sound of Boylan’s carriage four chapters earlier: “Jingle jingle jaunted jingling” (*U* 11.15). As if in time with such motions at Bella Cohen’s, Bloom’s response to the seductions of Zoe Higgins is merely that of “mechanically caressing her right bub with a flat awkward hand” (*U* 15.1343–44). The mechanical caress seems the only possible kind given the artificial setting, the nature of the exchange, and Bloom’s trancelike distraction. In the brothel we are at the heart of the modern city’s spiritual impoverishment, as the movements of mechanical civilisation are extended to the realm of bodily gesture in an abortive sexual transaction. The scene recalls the gesture of the typist in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, who, at her casual lover’s departure, “Smooths her hair with automatic hand,/and puts a record on the gramophone”.³³

In “Ithaca”, Bloom famously meditates on “one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder ... with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life” (*U* 17.1770–74). Such an advertisement is very much in keeping with the design principles of *De Stijl* in its purity of form, its efficiency, and its congruity with the time and space of everyday life. Moreover, the synthesis of functionality with aesthetic

33 *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 63.

value is underlined by its striking effect on passers-by. Advertisements like the one Bloom imagines were in fact designed by *De Stijl* collaborators such as Bart van der Leek (for the Batavier steamship line from Rotterdam to London) and Vilmos Huszár (for Miss Blanche Virginia cigarettes). More generally, the production of such images in advertising and in the form of consumer products represents the utopian ideal of the disappearance of art as such as it becomes wholly integrated with the forms of society. Bloom's meditated advertisement is also emblematic of *Ulysses* insofar as, in its uniqueness, it excites wonder while being entirely congruous with the rhythms of modern life. In looking back on the history of the modernist avant-garde in general, it is difficult not to feel a sense of nostalgia for the idealism of a movement which sought to transform modern civilisation through art, to reconcile industrial labour with aesthetic production, and commerce with artistic dissemination. As Kenneth Frampton points out of *De Stijl* and movements related to it, "there was the prevalent concept that constructive universal culture, acting alone, could transcend the tragic antipathy between the extremes of capitalism and socialism".³⁴ Things have not exactly turned out that way. One wonders, moreover, what Mondrian might have thought of the liberal use of his designs for handbags, dresses, and nail polish. Would he have seen in such objects the realisation of *De Stijl's* utopian synthesis of art and industry, or would he have deplored once more the impoverishment of modern life by the relentless commodification of image and object?

34 Kenneth Frampton, "Neoplasticism and Architecture: Formation and Transformation," in Bock et al., *De Stijl: 1917–1931*, 105.