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DOROTHY RICHARDSON'S SINGULAR MODERNITY

Jesse Matz

A few years ago I set out to write an introductory book on the modern novel. I wanted the book to be truly introductory. I wanted to present basic definitions, the key characteristics, along with essential examples; but I had a hard time with the examples. I did engineer a serviceable and capacious working definition of the modern novel and it was easy enough to name the signature forms and themes. But I found that few texts - or rather few whole texts - fitted the definition or matched up adequately to the list of signature features. Most important works of modern fiction were also examples of something else. They were really romantic, or essentially works of social realism after all. They ventured into the postmodern, or were more properly existential than modern. Even more difficult was finding exemplary writers. If these texts slipped the knot, their writers were more slippery still, showing all kinds of anti-modernisms, living at all the wrong times, and, worst of all, evolving over the course of a single career from pre-modernist traditionalism through modernism and out the other side - from the Victorian to the modern to postmodernism. Virginia Woolf, for example, perhaps the most modern of the moderns, she nevertheless writes fairly traditionally in her second novel, *Night and Day*, verges on postmodernity in *Orlando*, reverts again to social realism in *The Years*, and then goes all in with postmodern performativity in *Between the Acts*. A better example perhaps is Joyce who goes postmodern over the course of *Ulysses* alone - a book which may be said to have its first foot in late aestheticism. Forster is Austenian, Stein is Jamesian at first and then a language poet, Conrad is really a late romantic. . .

I shouldn't overstate the case - of course these writers are mainly modernists and 'modernism' surely can take in the departures I've mentioned. It is, as we now say, a matter of modernisms. Not only do we now insist upon modernism's definitive diversity, we insist

that no account of modernism that does not reflect 'polycentric' locations and priorities can do justice to the many different ways modernism made its entries into the worlds of culture. And yet these modernisms become so plural that anything like a definitive example of the modern novel or the modern novelist becomes hard to find. What is surely true at the level of comprehensive definitions causes problems at the level of introductory ones. Where to start? Or, more importantly, how do you exemplify a modernism that is essentially plural? Is it not necessary at least to begin, or even perhaps to focus, on a writer, text, or phenomenon that does exemplify the modern in some complete way? Even Susan Stanford Friedman, who is responsible for the term 'polycentric modernisms' and demands that we recognise the way modernist practices vary across space and time, stresses the need for a well-defined concept of modernism.¹ How to give modernism an adequate conceptual definition without falsifying the diversity of its practices?

These were the questions that made it difficult for me to write my introduction to the modern novel. In the end I didn't choose any whole texts to serve as examples. Instead, I took them in bits and pieces, cobbling together a kind of composite modernist text that could at once serve a neat conceptual definition and respect modernism's real heterogeneity.

I see now, however, that I might have focused my introduction to the modern novel entirely on the work of Dorothy Richardson. Unlike her contemporaries, Richardson was exclusively modern. When I speak of her 'singular modernity', I refer to her rare orthodoxy - to it and not to Fredric Jameson's book by this title (although Jameson will make a brief appearance later in this article). I refer to a modernity singular in several senses. Richardson is singularly modern in that she is only modern - without those other styles or attitudes that make her contemporaries imperfect examples of the modern mode - which

¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 8, 3 (September 2001): 493-513.

makes her singular in another way: Richardson alone is solely modern; she is the singular modernist. This is singular indeed - both marvellous and strange. Whether or not it compels us to single Richardson out for special praise, it does tell us a lot about her, and it tells us a lot about the modernism she solely represents. Finally, I'll want to argue, it tells us something unusual about the politics of modernism.

What makes up Richardson's modernity, and what makes her modern alone? Is her modernity really so singular? What are the modern elements in Richardson's work and how do they exclude all else, and set her apart?

A new concept of 'consciousness' and all that it entails - subjectivism, interiority, idealism, psychologism, relativism, impressionism, and an aleatory, fragmented, and dispersed selfhood - is Richardson's main claim to modernity, but it is by no means the extent of it. For Richardson is modern also for her feminism and her sexuality, her cosmopolitanism, her radical politics, her immersion in metropolitan perception, her sense of alienation, her appearances in little reviews, her struggles to overcome the limitations of language and to 'reconfigure the map of fiction'² through radical plotlessness, through temporal experiment, and through the revolutionary being of her autobiographical character. Miriam Henderson is a woman without qualities, searching for the basic identity most characters can take for granted, asking essential questions about being itself, and about the discrepancies between appearance and reality. At the same time, she smokes in front of her mother, attends numerous lectures and meetings of free-thinking organisations, inquires into the conditions of nationalism, and experiences lesbian love. To write that Richardson is a leading modernist for these reasons is to say nothing new. At least since Bonnie Kime Scott's *Gender of Modernism*, Richardson has taken her place at the centre of the movement, and the aesthetic significance attributed to her by Richardsonians as early as May Sinclair and John Cowper Powys

² Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fiction: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1995), p.78.

has long been recognised as adequate to make her a leading modernist figure.³ But I want to argue that these modernities subsist without the competition or complexities that might make her anything other than a modernist writer. In other words, I want to argue that she is even more of a modernist than even her most ardent champions have allowed.

Before I begin to argue for this singular modernity, I should say I am well aware that much about *Pilgrimage* is conventional enough - fairly unmodern. Corsets and quaintness and pastoral places are but a few of the things that might make it absurd to call Richardson exclusively modern. Indeed Gloria Fromm must be right to say that Richardson is 'caught between the Victorian and the modern' and Howard Finn may be right to place her 'at the margins of modernism' in more ways than one.⁴ But I think that Richardson's Victorianisms are nothing next to her modernity - superficial, inessential, and vestigial when compared to the fundamental, comprehensive ways she pursues modern objectives. I should also say that its 'singular modernity' does not mean that *Pilgrimage* is uniform. Of course Richardson's style evolves and her thematic concerns change. Much recent Richardson criticism has taken pains to discredit 'totalizing readings' that insist upon 'the closure of unitary aims'.⁵ But if *Pilgrimage* evolves and changes, it does so well within - uniquely within - the range of central modernist possibilities and preoccupations.

Such as metropolitan experience: city life enraptures Miriam Henderson much as it did Baudelaire. She loves the pleasure of 'being a permitted co-operating part of the traffic',⁶ of its 'trooping succession', and knows that 'to have the freedom of London was a

³ Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁴ Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* [1977], (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), p.338; Howard Finn, 'At the Margins of Modernism', *Women: A Cultural Review* 11, 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2000): 135-160.

⁵ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p.133.

⁶ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, Vol.2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p.374 (references in text from here on).

life in itself' (III 106). This part of London is the outer form to her mind at its best. She is, as Deborah Parson notes, the *flâneuse* par excellence.⁷ London is to her what Dublin was to Joyce, what Berlin was to Georg Simmel and Alfred Döblin. And yet city life is not really for her what it is for these other modernist figures. Joyce's Bloom finds Dublin both stimulating and horrible; it gives him the chance to glimpse a flash of leg and pursue it down the street, but it also deals death when its streets darken in shadow. Simmel of course saw metropolitan perception both ways - as a new acuity and also in terms of the deadness of blasé.⁸ Miriam does also find herself 'between fear and joy' when out in the city streets but only at first and only because she is young and provincial (II 76). Once old enough she entirely adores it - even when her nervous breakdown has compelled her to relocate to Sussex. Joyce and Simmel, as well as Woolf, Hemingway, Larsen, and any number of others, are ambivalent about urban experience. Their ambivalence sets up a certain dialectic in the modernist position and usually destabilises it: Nella Larsen's Harlem, for example, is no place her heroine can stay. In *Quicksand*, Helga Crane's departure corresponds to the triumphant traditionalism that ends her up a rural preacher's wife. If Miriam makes a similar move when she takes up with the Quakers, if she loves the country, she nevertheless never strays from a modernist urbanism. As Jean Radford also notes, London remains her centre, her singular location, and her fidelity to it and what it represents indicates an exclusively modernist commitment to metropolitan experience.⁹ This commitment, however, does not go too far: Richardson is not Dos Passos, for example, and she does not allow the city to take over her style of representation, to wrench it out of the space of individual subjectivity into the larger world of spatial forms. To do that would be to give up on the truth-claims of individual subjectivity and to depart modernism for something

⁷ Deborah Parsons, 'The "Passante" as "Flâneuse" in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', in V. Tinkler-Villani (ed.), *Babylon or the New Jerusalem?: Perceptions of the City in Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp.155-167.

⁸ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in D. Levine (ed.), *On Individuality and Social Forms*, (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1972), p.331.

⁹ Jean Radford, *Dorothy Richardson* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.62.

else. Richardson's city is modernist enough to be modern but no more.

Her subjectivism, too, is singularly modernist. 'Anything that the mind can conceive is realized' (II 93). This stress on the full reality of subjective experience, this sense that 'there is no need to go out into the world', that 'everything is there without anything' (III 67), the view that 'life is a creation' and the ample proof that is *Pilgrimage* itself, demonstrates Richardson's adherence to the larger modernist tendency to give up objective fact in favour of what the individual mind makes up. She shares it of course with Woolf and with Stephen Dedalus, with Faulkner and with Proust. These other figures, however, pursue subjectivism so radically as to see it undermine itself. Woolf's subjectivist narrators always go wrong and must return to the world for more stable truths. Stephen Dedalus must admit that the world is in fact there without him, and Marcel discovers that subjectivity is nothing until writing transforms it. Miriam persists in an unmitigated subjectivism, and even when it verges on solipsism - when, for example, she only grudgingly allows that 'the world's weather cannot be arranged as a conversation with one small person' (IV 112), or when she confesses that she is 'too egoistic and self-centred to be observant' (IV 330), these observations do nothing to alter the mode of her mind. Whereas Stephen Dedalus' investigations into radical idealism necessarily give way to *Ulysses*' later resurgent empiricisms, whereas Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* tries to redeem a decadent subjectivism through recourse to transcendental forbearance, Miriam's exclusively inner life undergoes no essential change. It may deepen and complexify, but it remains that 'unmoving centre', unmoving and unmoved from its starting place in relation to meaning, 'immutable and independent', as Shirley Rose notes, based around what Shiv Kumar calls 'some sure centre'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Shiv Kumar, 'Dorothy Richardson and the Dilemma of "Being versus Becoming"', *Modern Language Notes*, 74, 6 (June 1959): 373; Shirley Rose, 'The Unmoving Centre: Consciousness in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Contemporary Literature*, 10, 3 (Summer 1969): 501.

The modern plotlessness of *Pilgrimage* is perfect - far more complete than that of other works that exemplify it. Set against *Pilgrimage*, narratives by Woolf, Lewis, Mansfield, and others seem Victorian in pattern; and yet Richardson's plotlessness does not give her text over to other structures of organisation or disorganisation. The abstract designs of significant form do not take over, as they do in Woolf. The point is not, as in some Lawrence or Lewis, to let will or desire restructure narrative into storyless compositions. Nor does Richardson predict postmodernism by turning from plot to tales about language or into ludic parody. Again she remains at the crux of the modern, giving her narrative no consequential event-based development across time, but giving it nothing else by way of artificial organisation. Instead, as she herself once put it, 'life is the design'.¹¹ Related to this perfectly modern plotlessness is Richardson's sense of time, indebted to Proust but much more certain of its rearrangement of past, present, and future. Proust undercuts chronology and so thoroughly changes his view of the significance of the past moment that his book quickly ceases simply to challenge conventional time. No strict duality distinguishes time in the mind from time on the clock; subjective events betray their own kind of falsity and submit to the time-schemes of representation. Indeed, the all-consuming temporal experiment at work in Proust is what justifies Gérard Genette's claims, in *Narrative Discourse*, that Proust destroys every temporal standard allegedly essential to narrative dynamics.¹² But Richardson pursues a mind-time consistent, first to last, in its refusals of linear hours, days, and years, its focus on the immediate present, its sense that 'life ceased when time moved on' (III 188) - one that is, because of its persistent resistance to public time, strictly a modernist phenomenon. If Richardson is Proustian in her sense of the interpenetrations of past, present, and future, or in her sense of the way the present makes the past, that revolutionary temporality forces no crisis of representation, and if Miriam like Marcel turns finally to writing, it is not out of any sense that the

¹¹ Cited in Winning, op. cit, p.15.

¹² Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.112.

life in time would be lost without it. Once again the difference has to do with a certain steadfastness. Proust's temporal mode occasions another, which finally partakes of a different theory of representation. Miriam may become aware of the temporality informing her orientation toward events, but this awareness does not pass into the reflexive textuality we find in Proust.

The comparison with Proust might raise another question and stress in a different way Richardson's stricter modernity. A perennial question in Richardson studies inquires into Miriam's final turn to writing. Is it a Proustian involution, one that finally casts the work as a whole as a product of writerly designs? Both Miriam and Marcel ultimately become writers and the vocation of writing is for both a resolution to the conflicts their texts exist to create. But just how comprehensive is Miriam's writing? Does it reframe *Pilgrimage*, in the way writing reframes *A la recherche*? The question is important not only for the way it might enable a comparison of the two writers, or for the way it might enable us to reckon with the significance of Miriam's last endeavours. Turning to writing, Proust turns away from modernism: the kind of reflexivity involved in making the writing of the work the subject of the work is more properly a postmodern quality - something possible, of course, in modernist texts, but more symptomatic of postmodern antifoundationalism, and postmodernism's fuller turn away from realist prerogatives. If Miriam's turn to writing falls short of Proustian reflexivity, important but not as fundamental to the work's endeavour as Proust's discovery of what writing enables, then Richardson is also well short of the postmodern turn. In this, we see once again how and why she remains within the boundaries of modernist priorities. Not reflexive in Proust's pre-postmodern way, Richardson treats writing the way modernists treat it: not as a formative aspect of the work in which it appears, but something more strictly thematic.

Miriam pursues the reality behind appearances. Always she asks, 'What was life?' (I 320), and recognises the wonder of pure being: 'the marvel of existence' (III 224). Other people 'only see the appearances of things, understanding nothing of their relationships' (III 100), but Miriam herself knows that 'somewhere

behind the mere statements, if she could but get through and discover it, there must be a revelation that would set the world going again' (III 205). Periodically, regularly, she does hear 'things speaking silently', and at key moments she gains 'this incomparable sense of being plumb at the centre of rejoicing' (III 288). What Miriam calls 'pure *life*' (II 405) is also the quarry of certain of Richardson's contemporaries - from James and Conrad, their aestheticisms and existentialisms, through to the ironised vision of Beckett and Barnes. And here we do have ambivalence - the kind of confusion that tends to hybridise other modernisms with other modes. 'Being versus becoming. Becoming versus being': uncertainty about the location of 'pure life' does complicate Miriam's 'conviction of the wonder of mere existence' (IV 635). And yet here again no dynamic drives Miriam through the stages that led others to, but then beyond, modernist questioning. 'Being versus becoming' does not set up a dialectic that raises new questions in their turn; indeed, if anything, Miriam settles the question in favour of being. Appearances clear away but then return to cover things over; Miriam feels, 'I'm in', but then she's out again, and these changes are movements of the same dilemma. Since this question - this question about appearances vs. essences, being vs. becoming, fact vs. vision - is perhaps the quintessential modernist dilemma, Richardson's persistence in it holds her to a modernist outlook even despite the ambivalence she dramatises.

I should pause to clarify the larger point these examples make. You might wonder why I write that ambivalences about the city, about plot, time, and appearances, tend to turn modernists into something else. Isn't modernism all about ambivalence? Isn't a mixed attitude toward urban experience just what we expect from a modernist? Indeed it is - and the point I'm trying to make has to do with the result of these mixed attitudes. Often, they set up a developmental sequence. The urban environment, for example, shocks and enraptures; it produces these modernist responses. But then the dialectic of shock and rapture itself provokes a new response - and that response in turn produces a self-consciousness or scepticism that entails a return to realism, perhaps, or a postmodern turn. But not in Richardson. She instead sustains modernism, remains within modernity, maintains that ambivalence

about 'being versus becoming', rather than moving on to next questions or subsequent theoretical frameworks. Ultimately I will argue that Richardson's steadfast modernity helps us understand modernism's larger tendency to undo itself - and to understand as well the political conditions necessary to its persistence. Modernism tends toward a dynamism that makes modernism unsustainable. When it does not, it is because certain social or political priorities sustain it, and, as we will see, that is what explains its singular persistence in Richardson's work.

First, more examples: I mentioned James's aestheticism - something Richardson shares. Her faith in art, in aesthetic perception, in the art of life, are central to *Pilgrimage*. Does she not therefore have affinities beyond modernism, since aestheticism does significantly precede it? To think as Miriam does in *The Trap*, 'style was something beyond good and evil', is surely to think in late-Victorian terms, to take part in the Decadence against which much of modernism reacts. Consider, however, Miriam's attitude toward Yeats's aestheticism, specifically her attitude toward his 'unconsidered detachment' (III 502). Consider her rejection of Bohemia - her dissatisfaction with the culture of aestheticism (II 367). A distinction must be made between her dedication to the aesthetic, and aestheticism. Aesthetic perception - artfully seeing the play of light in a room, intensely feeling the atmosphere of a place or person, perceiving the designs behind ordinary life - is everything to Miriam. She cares little for social distinction, in Bourdieu's sense, or for the objects and lifestyles associated with aestheticism as a movement. Which is to say that her version of the aesthetic is purer and more like the faith in art that becomes a creed in the modernist moment. Indeed this faith in art most cleanly isolates Richardson from what comes before and after modernism. She postdates the culture of aestheticism, and she does not venture far into the moment after modernism when aestheticism equates with barbarism.

Modern identity disperses. Stable characters give way to people who do not only develop over the course of a narrative or lyric sequence but fan out into different identities at once. Djuna Barnes's persons are hardly single selves; Stein's characters in *Three*

Lives have troubled relationships because they each bring so many people to them. Modernist plots are often quests for the stable identities earlier fictions might have taken for granted. Miriam, too, is a person of many 'I ams', as Stephen Heath has noted,¹³ looking for 'a real self that stayed the same through thing after thing' (II 101). She hopes for a distinction between 'the calm steady innermost part of her' and 'her other selves' (II 321). In other modernist texts, however, selfhood disperses beyond any such hope of integrity. These texts undermine themselves, they wear themselves out, by following out the implications of modernist selfhood. Miriam stays more durably multiple; her many selves wax and wane but never get too far away from that 'real self that stay[s] the same'. Or if that self is not always central, it emerges as such, in what Winning has called *Pilgrimage's* 'drama of the incoming I'.¹⁴ Other modernist texts undermine their modernism when they follow out the implications of modernist selfhood because those implications lead either to a more radical postmodern antifoundationalism or a return to the solidities of social realism. I have in mind the ending of *Orlando*, where the limited self-divisions of androgyny give way to a fugue of unpersonhood, or, by contrast, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where a radical dissolution of identity turns out to be a long interlude only, one finally reversed by last efforts at commitment. Dispersed selfhood is of course a very unstable situation and in most texts it cannot persist as such or be contained. Richardson manages to give us a myriad of selves all throughout, along with an 'innermost part' that is a centre which can hold. Once again it is important to stress the difference made by what becomes of dispersed selfhood. Elsewhere, it leads to other constructions; in Richardson, it somehow remains.

Usually, then, modernism cannot sustain itself. It is a self-consuming enterprise; its principles and properties are less definitive than self-defeating. Divided selves become dispersed ones and then no selves at all, so completely undoing identity that they enter into other conceptual and representational worlds. Aestheticism, as inherited from Decadence, usually undoes faith in

¹³ Cited in Winning, op. cit, p.31.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.29.

art altogether and invites the pastiche and parodies of postwar art. Pursuit of essences in modernism, the pursuit of 'life itself', never ends in any permanent transcendence, but nearly always in ironic ones, so that the next step is inevitably a postmodern irony. Modern plotlessness is unsustainable, usually, for some larger pattern almost always emerges even when the most dissociative of modernists put sentences together. What we find, when we think about the singular exception we get in *Pilgrimage*, is a certain rule of flux. We discover that modernism is less a cultural moment than a passing one, a time for pushing things through, of settings in motion things that don't stop until modernism is done. Of course any movement moves through its stages and necessarily gives way to something else, but this dynamic seems essential to modernism itself, when set against the curious case of modernist singularity in Richardson.

Richardson's impressionism is a classic case: atmospheric intensities seen or felt for their own sake; fleeting, transitory senses of things, appreciated as such; appearances that suggest realities; an interest in how things seem rather than what they actually are. These tendencies place *Pilgrimage* among the impressionisms of Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, and Katharine Mansfield, to name a few. In those impressionisms, however, there is what Fredric Jameson has identified as a fundamental conflict. Jameson argues that impressionism is a kind of utopian compensation for modern alienation: it restores to us a sense of experiential plenitude. In doing so, however, it enables the modern systems that dehumanise and diminish the world. Providing its compensations, it contents us with a world we should oppose, so that impressionism involves a profound ambiguity. In Jameson's account, impressionism is at once a pleasure and a scam, utopia and ideology, a restoration and a revocation. For this reason, its writers cannot sustain it. Conrad's characters suffer for it, or show us how dreams of experiential fulfilment are also nightmares of exploitation, vice, and self-deception.¹⁵ This ambivalence does not appear in Richardson. Surely, Miriam has her doubts, and sometimes discovers emptiness

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp.229, 236.

in scenes of beauty or is fooled when appearances misrepresent reality. But doubts never drive her to any Conradian crises. No critical moments expose impressionism for what it is. It persists from first to last as an available and viable experiential mode.

And then there are Miriam's struggles with language: 'Nothing that anybody says has any meaning' (II 255); 'Why would people insist on talking about things - when nothing can ever be communicated. . . . all statements are lies' (II 306); 'In speech she could produce only the things other people had said and with which she did not agree' (III 77); 'Anything that can be put into propositions is suspect' (IV 328). This quarrel with the conventionality of language might be the main motive of modernism - the specific cause of its actual linguistic innovations. Imagist poetics, Shklovsky's formalism, Stein's language games, the self-referential mimics of Harlem Renaissance poetry, all reflect this sense that ordinary words fail us. Once discovered, however, this resistance to linguistic convention leads right to more total theories of the 'problematics of language' all told. Roland Barthes' phrase refers to something that was for modernists first a reason for change and finally itself an object of inquiry.¹⁶ Before writers of Barthes' generation made it their subject, modernists found it to be their undoing, once they passed the point of trying simply to make it new. In other words, modernists who rebelled at first against conventional statements discovered that the problem was in language itself and not just in any older generation's outdated use of it; then they or their successors began to make the problem itself a field of new possibility. Richardson arrives at this problem. In *Interim* already - already in 1919 - Miriam knows that 'all statements are lies' and yet this observation never becomes a significant rebuke to her creator. Even if Miriam knows that 'nothing can ever be communicated', Richardson persists in forms of communication that changes only in style between 1919 and the 1930s and later. What accounts for this linguistic consistency?

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p.3.

And what, finally, accounts for the persistent individualism of *Pilgrimage*? Modernist egoism - largely inspired by Max Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* and reflected in Rebecca West's renaming of *The Freewoman* in 1914 - runs right through Richardson's work, so much so that Hypo Wilson is right to call Miriam 'the individual individualist' (IV 328). Individualism is Miriam's refuge from the boarding house's cosmopolitan flux, but also from the very problem of language: 'Anything that can be put into propositions is suspect. The only thing that isn't suspect is individuality' (IV 328). Most modernists would have agreed. Even so, they would have found themselves unable to resist attacks on individualism from two sides. The classic novel had always made individualism the target of Bildung: in Austen and Eliot, for example, radical individuality is never allowed to persist beyond a protagonist's immaturity. Modern novels rarely resist this force of Bildung; usually, they relapse into traditionalism when it comes time for their characters really to grow up. At the other end, individualism gives way either to nothingness or to the late-capitalist inhuman. As Michael Levenson and others have noted, the 'fate of individualism' is always before it - unless no individualism actually obtains at all.¹⁷ In other words, it is frayed by Victorian socialisation, at one end, and late-capitalist dehumanisation at the other. Alone holding fast to individualism - to what Miriam calls her 'indestructible individuality' - is Dorothy Richardson, and this indeed might be the most striking feature of Richardson's indestructible modernism. Moreover, it might *explain* and even *justify* her singular modernity. If Miriam is always an individualist, it is for excellent reasons, which might also be excellent reasons for Richardson to have persisted in her commitment to modernist methods.

To say, finally, why Richardson might have persisted in this commitment, I would like to make a new version of the old comparison between Richardson and Woolf. Richardson's egoism was of course what made Woolf underrate Richardson's work. Woolf felt that Richardson, like Joyce, pursued modern

¹⁷ Michael Levenson, *The Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

subjectivity to the point of an ironically traditional authorial self-involvement. Her own contrasting styles and themes - her migratory consciousness, her perpetual reflections on the failures of single-mindedness - are Woolf's ways of departing from monolithic modernism or at least critiquing some modernist principles. But what made Woolf willing and able to abandon egoistic subjectivism where Richardson would or could not? Why would Richardson pursue the same egoistic mode book after book, when Woolf would try it only in short fiction before departing from it - decentering the egoistic self in *Jacob's Room*, dramatising the terrors of overweening subjectivism in *Mrs. Dalloway*, threading together multiple minds in *To the Lighthouse*, and finally making selfhood a matter of public performativity in *Between the Acts*? Unfair to contrast the two writers this way, unless it be to make a fairly subtle distinction between the valid ways the two women dealt with the *problem* of individuality. For both women it was a precarious state: both women were compelled for personal reasons to explore it. Woolf chose to extenuate the impossibility of individual selfhood in large part to make a public virtue of her own psychological diversity. By contrast, Richardson chose to dig in her heels against that impossibility - to challenge the difficulty of maintaining individual selfhood, especially for a woman, by holding fast to the single mind. Each choice was made at the centre of modernist discovery. Woolf's choice, however, could only make a departure from it, whereas Richardson's was a choice to remain.

There is a peculiar reversal at work here. Woolf went all in, and for that reason, found her way out: she gave way to the implications of modernism's subjective turn, and those implications patterned her out into aesthetic culture's next phases. Richardson resisted and therefore remained a modernist; by not committing herself fully to following out the implications of modernist theory, she stayed more fully committed to the mode. This reversal will enable us finally to draw some useful conclusions. We might now get a critical purchase on modernism's tendency to undo itself by noting where in *Pilgrimage* it most significantly does not. And we might now appreciate Richardson's peculiar persistence by seeing it is an inspired way of making modernism work.

Woolf's career seems to illustrate a free unfolding of aesthetic developments. Subjectivism in her work leads from one form to another, in the patterns I've been describing. Richardson's career illustrates something by contrast more socially and politically determined. If Richardson holds fast to individualism, holds fast to modernism, it is for political reasons. Her guiding objectives are feminist ones and this political agenda maintains modernism, in her career if not in the world at large. For in the world at large, modernism was notoriously not a political aesthetic. Richardson conceived it as one from the start. Therefore, she had to sustain it; therefore, she produced a uniquely sustainable modernism.

We know that writing consciousness was for Richardson a feminist endeavour. Not only did she innovate her way of writing the mind in order to present a female alternative to masculine realism, but consciousness in *Pilgrimage* perpetually makes a feminist argument. So often Miriam's thoughts are 'vociferations of the mind' - to revise a phrase she herself uses to describe a habit of protestation against male arrogance. Society presumes that women have nothing to say; their relative silence reads like nothing; but they are 'silently raging', for inside, Richardson's method indicates, they have much more going on. Richardson's stream or pool or fountain of consciousness often amounts to an effort to show the world just how much. It is always a feminist argument, all the more when what Miriam calls the 'width' of her consciousness shows itself to be so much broader than that of the masculine mind. Because consciousness in Richardson is not just a matter of form or philosophy but a thematic and political argument, it persists. Had Richardson chosen as Woolf did to widen consciousness beyond the individual woman, she would have failed the feminist argument, as some feminists think Woolf did. She would have left women in a lurch, so she chooses instead to stand by the pool of consciousness, and thus to stand by womanhood. Politics are behind this singular modernity. Or rather, her modernism is a political aesthetic, and is singular for that.

This is to extend the feminist critique of modernism. Rita Felski, Marianne DeKoven, Bonnie Kime Scott, and others have explored the gender of modernity and found it female to the extent that preoccupations of and with women modernised culture.¹⁸ My argument adds to them by noting that feminism not only creates but sustains modernism, at least where it is allowed to flourish. Lynette Felber has called *Pilgrimage* a ‘manifesto for feminine modernism’.¹⁹ Gillian Hanscombe has amply explored the work’s associations of aesthetic forms and feminist subjectivity. Their work explains Richardson’s singular modernity, by showing us just how much Richardson’s feminism had to realise itself in modernist forms. We might go further to say that Richardson’s case perfectly typifies what is true about women modernists more generally in the feminist critique of modernism. Two main preoccupations characterise that critique: the oneness of modernist and feminist aims; and the oddly contradictory exclusion of women from the modernist mainstream. Richardson shows us the perhaps the most total possible overlap of modernist and feminist aims, and she has also suffered more than her share of exclusion. How is it that the leading innovator of ‘stream of consciousness’ writing, for example, get so little credit for it? Once we note that Richardson’s feminism was a key source of that mode, and once we recognise the sexism behind the little credit she gets for it, she must be singled out as the feminist critique’s paradigmatic case.

Critics have also noted a close affinity between modernism and lesbian sexuality. I might sharpen my point by arguing more specifically that lesbian advocacy accounts for Richardson’s singular modernity. Modernism and lesbian sexuality coincide because they share key objectives: obliquity, complexity, iconoclasm, certain physical materialisms and limited challenges to unified subjectivity work in the service both of modernist innovation and lesbian self-discovery. This coincidence is

¹⁸ See Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Marianne DeKoven *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991); Kime Scott op. cit.

¹⁹ Lynette Felber, ‘A Manifesto for Feminine Modernism: Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*’, in L. Rado (ed.), *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1994) pp.23-39.

strongest, perhaps, in *Pilgrimage*, where, as Winning has argued, innovation of lesbian subjectivity is the overarching goal. Precisely because Richardson commits herself to the long slow promotion of lesbian identity, she commits herself to modernist representation. Her contemporaries made other choices. Stein, for example, matches her commitment in certain ways, but Stein seems to have preferred to depart far further into the problematics of language. She discovered that preoccupation largely through her lesbianism, but then came to prefer the linguistic version of subversive pleasure, or to make language itself pleasure's more inclusive category. Richardson alone kept the balance between sexual politics and modernist aesthetics. She alone dedicated herself entirely to the gains each could make for the other.

Diane Gillespie writes, 'Political aesthetics . . . means tangible declarations of the value of individual inner lives, especially those of women, in forms that challenge prevailing social and aesthetic criteria'.²⁰ Gillespie also argues that 'Richardson's challenge [in this regard] was more thoroughgoing than Woolf's', but she argues that both women far outstripped their male contemporaries in this tendency fundamentally to unite objectives so often separate in this period. Political aesthetics have become topical lately, for example in Isobel Armstrong's theory of the 'radical aesthetic', which attributes political responsibility and political power to art.²¹ Political aesthetics are rarest in modernism, or, as Tyrus Miller has recently noted, hardest to characterise.²² But lately the effort here too has been to affix political value to aesthetic forms. That effort might get the best help from the case of Dorothy Richardson. Put it this way: perhaps the problem has always been not that modernism was essentially apolitical or ideological; perhaps the problem was that it required an energy of political commitment most of its writers could not sustain. They could not sustain it

²⁰ Diane Gillespie, 'Political Aesthetics: Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson', in J. Marcus (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983), p.148.

²¹ See Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), 2000.

²² Tyrus Miller, 'Politics', in D. Bradshaw and K. J. H. Dettmar (eds), *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.29.

because modernist forms and principles were so self-consuming. Politics might have led to certain forms and theories, but then those forms and theories led elsewhere, leaving politics behind unless strong political resolve held them steady - as in the case of Richardson. Modernism only looks like political failure until we see that a truly singular modernity is a truly political aesthetic.

If I generalise - if I generalise not only about modernism but about Richardson, totalising her work; if I argue singularly broadly - it is to try to see a bigger picture in which Richardson might centrally figure. The several senses in which Richardson is singular - her surprising and sole steadfast modernism - cover so much ground, too much perhaps for a single argument. Much of that ground is not covered here - other features of Richardson's modernity, including the critique of nationalism she presents, as what Jane Garrity calls a 'step-daughter of England';²³ her interest in cinema; the 'network of unanimous culture' she imagines in her version of Magic-Mountain cosmopolitanism. Rather than try to include everything, however, I will just conclude by saying I am well aware of a paradox that makes my whole argument not just possibly but definitely wrong. If indeed modernism is made up of these self-consuming forms and attitudes, if it is always giving up on itself, then Richardson, by maintaining these forms and attitudes, is no modernist at all. That is, if she persists in a modernism which itself never does persist, we might after all have to find for her a truly singular -ism of her own.

²³ Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003).