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## Modernism and the Specter of Psychologism

Martin Jay

Modernism/modernity

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 3, Number 2, April 1996

pp. 93-111

10.1353/mod.1996.0037

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## Modernism and the Specter of Psychologism

*Martin Jay (bio)*

No genealogist of the complex and heterogeneous cultural field we have come to call aesthetic modernism can fail to acknowledge its multiple intersections with that other richly articulated field known as modern

psychology. In both cases, an unprecedented preoccupation with the interior landscape of the subject, a no longer self-confident self functioning with increased difficulty in the larger world outside its threatened and vulnerable boundaries, led to voyages of scientific and artistic discovery whose endpoints have yet been reached. Whether it be the empiricist tradition of Ernst Mach, Franz Brentano and William James recently foregrounded by Judith Ryan in *The Vanishing Subject*,<sup>1</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot's investigations of hysteria inspirational for such modernist movements as Surrealism, or Freudian psychoanalysis, whose importance for modernism is evident in such accounts as Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*,<sup>2</sup> the story of aesthetic innovation has seemed impossible to narrate without reference to the no less radical developments in psychology happening at virtually the same time. What Ryan calls the "complex intertextuality"<sup>3</sup> between modernism and psychology has perhaps reached its zenith in Louis Sass's recent *Madness and Modernism*, which boldly seeks to understand such familiar aspects of the modernist temper as perspectivism, dehumanization, alienation, ironic detachment, hyperreflexivity, and spatialized form precisely by finding affinities with the workings of the schizophrenic mind, which was itself first labeled in the 1890s and quickly became, he tells us, "the quintessential form of madness in our time."<sup>4</sup> [End Page 93]

Cultural fields, however, not only intersect and parallel each other, producing reinforcements, homologies, and elective affinities, but also sometimes interact through repulsions and negations, achieving their fragile definitions by means of abjecting the other. In the case of modernism and psychology, I want to argue, such a process of negative exclusion did, in fact, occur, a process which overlapped and sometimes interfered with the more positive interaction that has been explored by other scholars. In particular, I want to show that what the philosophers of this period called "psychologism" and which many sought mightily to banish from their search for truth also emerged as a source of anxiety at certain key moments in the genesis of aesthetic modernism as well.<sup>5</sup> My evidence will come from both literary and visual instances of this anxiety.

<sup>6</sup> Although I do not want to be understood as saying modernism was

essentially a repudiation of psychologism, let alone unrelated to developments in the psychological sciences per se, no understanding of its emergence can afford to ignore the haunting presence of this stigmatized “-ism” as a specter that refused to be effortlessly exorcised.

The philosophical critique of psychologism can be traced at least as far back as Kant’s claim that:

in logic we do not want to know how understanding is and thinks and how it hitherto has proceeded in thinking, but how it ought to proceed in thinking. Logic must teach us the correct use of the understanding, i.e. that in which it is in agreement with itself.<sup>7</sup>

His transcendental deduction was thus explicitly distinguished between the *questio facti* of the “physiological derivation” of a priori ideas and the *questio juris* of their validity. The most elaborate and influential development of the critique, however, appeared after a period in which psychologism gained ground among philosophers and the upstart discipline of experimental psychology had emerged to challenge philosophy as the royal road to unlocking the mysteries of the mind.<sup>8</sup> Although there were rumblings throughout the nineteenth century, only at its end did psychologism emerge as a primary target of a philosophical counterattack. In 1884, Gottlob Frege published *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, which vigorously criticized attempts by philosophers such as Friedrich Beneke, Jakob Fries, John Stuart Mill, and Franz Brentano to reduce the mind, in particular its logical function, to the psyche.<sup>9</sup> More radical psychologizers like Nietzsche were beneath Frege’s consideration.<sup>10</sup>

Husserl, although himself initially indebted to Brentano, was putatively won over to Frege’s position by a devastating review the latter wrote of Husserl’s early work *The Foundations of Arithmetic* in 1894.<sup>11</sup> By his *Logical Investigations* of 1900...



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