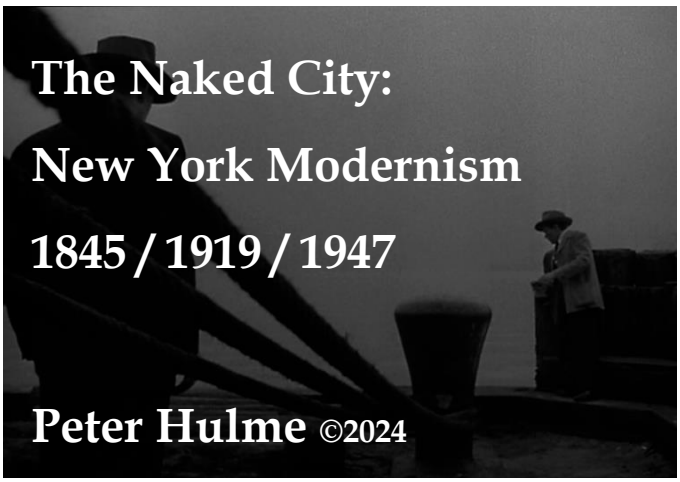


One way of describing this paper would be to say that it results from an effort to rein in a word that over the last 50 years has ballooned from a quite specialised literary term into one which sometimes seems to encompass the whole of literary and artistic production from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The starting point for this essay is, then, that the idea that it might make sense to hold on to the origins and early appearances of the key terms within the critical discourse of modernism, which I take to be 'modernism' itself, 'modernity', and 'modernist'. There is, so the argument goes, something to be said for an historicist attempt to understand how the words were used when they were first used, particularly where those usages differ from the ones deployed by a later—in some cases much later—critical establishment. The precedent for thinking that such a move might be useful is the attention paid many years ago by Walter Benjamin to Baudelaire's invention—if indeed invention it was—of the term 'modernité' in his essay *La peintre de la vie moderne*.[1] To focus on that invention made a great deal of sense given Benjamin's promotion of the idea that Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century.

'Modern*ist*' makes some late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century appearances, mostly in theological debates, but its first unequivocal usage in a literary critical context is usually seen as being in the title of a book called *Survey of Modernist Poetry* published in 1927.[2] But one earlier and seemingly highly relevant example was a short-lived journal published in New York in 1919, just called *The Modernist*. If anything is going to give us a sense of what it meant to be a modernist in 1919 one might think it would be a journal with that word as its very title, but in fact the journal has been largely ignored, principally, it seems, because its content doesn't correspond with what the later critical establishment regards as 'modernist' in the 'proper' sense of the word. So what I'm trying to do here is to break the circle of that argument by illuminating at least one aspect of what 'modernist' might have

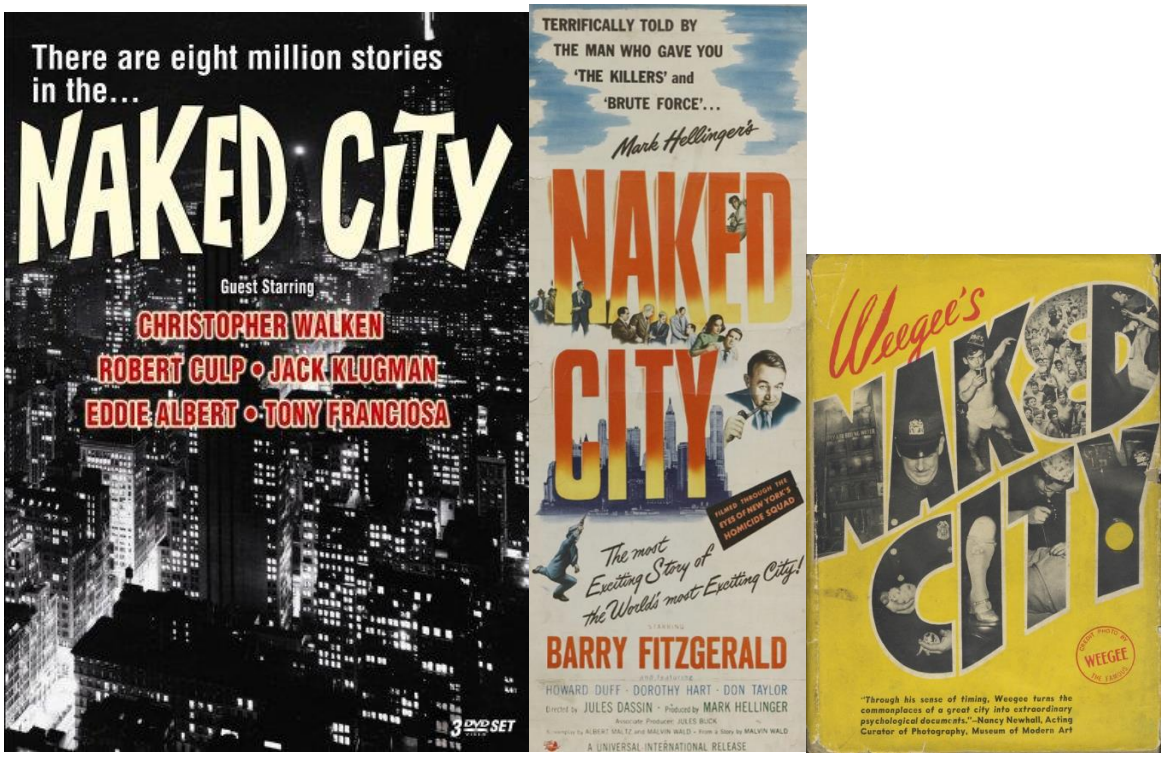
[1] The fourth section of the essay "Le peintre de la vie moderne" [1863/69] is calld "La modernité": see Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne, 2nd. ed., London: Phaidon, 1995, and Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London: NLB, 1973.

[2] Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modern Poetry* (1927). For background see Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers, *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

meant at the time—that time being 1919—as opposed to what a later critical consensus has supposed it to mean.

So 1919 is the starting point for this essay and it forms the central panel in a triptych of years, the others being 1845 and 1947. Tracking down the early appearances of particular words is one thing; stating where modernism actually begins is something else altogether: clearly a complete fool's errand. Modernism *really* began in lower Manhattan in 1845. Just as it ended in 1947 a few blocks away from where it started, and a few blocks away indeed from where the journal *The Modernist* was published in 1919. So although this might seem like a very large topic, in fact it's also just a neighborhood story.

The title of the essay—"The Naked City"—refers to a US TV series first shown in the UK between 1959 and 1964, which was where I saw my first images of the streets of New York. The TV series was based on a 1948 Hollywood film, which had itself taken its title from a book of photographs by the New York photographer Arthur Fellig, better known as Weegee, who was renowned for arriving at crime scenes before the police got there.[3] And this is very much an essay about crime scenes.



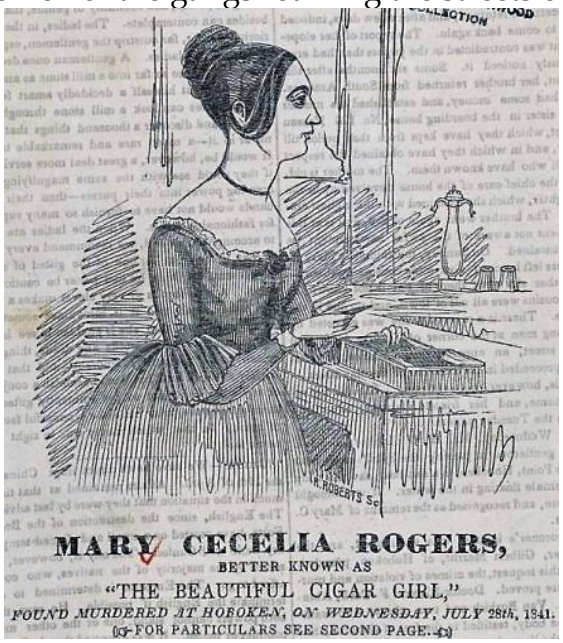
The Beginning of Modernism

If Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century, then New York was the capital of the twentieth. But of course that sequence is also misleading, since New York modernism didn't just follow Parisian modernism: Baudelaire only acknowledged one predecessor, Edgar Allan Poe. So modernism begins in a general sense with three stories by Poe written between 1840 and 1845: "The Man of the Crowd", "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", and "The Mystery of Marie Roget". The first is set in

[3] *Naked City*, TV series (1958-1964); *Naked City*, dir. Jules Dassin (1948); Weegee [Arthur Fellig], *Naked City*, New York: Essential Books, 1945.

London, the other two in Paris, but all three are in fact New York stories, written out of Poe's experience of the city. Poe lived the latter part of his life, after 1844, in New York, eventually out in Fordham, where there is still preserved the Poe Cottage, sitting rather incongruously in the middle of the Bronx. But from February 1837 Poe had lived briefly in Greenwich Village, first on the corner of Waverly Place and Sixth Avenue, and then on Carmine Street, where his mother-in-law ran a boarding house. This is where modernism was incubated.

Only one of the three stories is open about its origins. Marie Roget was really Mary Cecilia Rogers, whose mutilated body was found floating in the Hudson River near Hoboken on the New Jersey shore on 28 July 1841. As always, the geography is interesting. Ferries ran from Desbrosses Street in Manhattan across the river to what was still the New Jersey countryside, as the names in the area suggest: the Elysian Fields, Castle Point, and Sybil's Cave. This is where people from Manhattan went on Sunday excursions. A piece of lace had been tied tightly round Mary Rogers' neck and there were bruising and abrasions in what the coroner called "the feminine region".[4] He concluded that Mary Rogers had been raped by several men, but that previously she had, quote, "evidently been a person of chastity and correct habits". It's not clear on what medical basis he made that last judgement, but it fitted into the initial newspaper narrative, which underlined the dangers to virtuous young women of the gangs roaming the streets of New York.



The popular press was a new cultural form in New York in the 1840s, peddling the same diet of sensation, crime, scandal, and moral outrage as their contemporary counterparts. For them, Mary Rogers was very much a local girl. All these newspapers were based on Printing House Square, one block from where Mary Rogers had lived, and just round the corner from where she'd worked, on Broadway, in a cigar store, which employed her precisely because of her good looks. The cigar store was a favourite meeting place for politicians, journalists, and financiers; and Poe himself had probably been there.

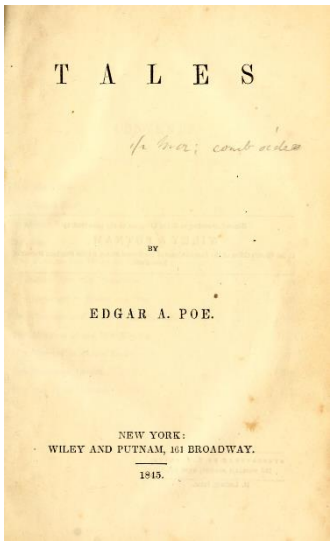
Poe became obsessed with the Mary Rogers case: the Parisian setting of "Marie Roget" just provides him with a fictional veil which he constantly and impatiently tears aside by pointing out the parallels for his readers. In that essay on Paris, Walter Benjamin wrote that it was "the unique provision of Baudelaire's poetry that the image of woman and the image of death intermingle in a third: that of Paris", but exactly the same could be said of Poe with the substitution of New York: he himself

[4] See John Walsh, *Poet the Detective: The Curious Circumstances Behind* The Mystery of Marie Roget, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1968, and David Stashower, *The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe, and the Invention of Murder*, New York: Berkley Books, 2007.

wrote in 1846: "The death… of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world".[5] Now he had such a death on his doorstep, and—as he saw it—he had a murder to solve.

Devouring the press reports and writing as his detective-character, Auguste Dupin, Poe dismissed the coroner's gang theory and pursued his own idea that the murderer was a secret lover, a naval officer who Mary met irregularly and who had killed her, or had her killed, when she refused to elope with him. Poe placed his story, incongruously, with the New York *Ladies' Companion*, otherwise full of fashion-plates and romances. The story was due to be serialised in three consecutive months in the winter of 1842, but then things started to get complicated.

To begin with, there was speculation in the press about Mary Rogers's sexual history. Everything that is depressingly familiar about the reporting of violence towards women today has its origins in New York in the early 1840s. A number of Mary's ex-lovers were identified; the last lover himself then died, a possible suicide; and then the owner of the inn on the New Jersey shore where Mary had been seen on the day of her death was shot in an accident and on her deathbed she confessed that Mary had died at the inn during a botched abortion, with her body dumped in the river to make it look like a murder. Hoboken may have been fairly pastoral, but it was also home to houses of assignation and abortion parlours. Poe postponed the last part of the serialisation, scrambled to rewrite his conclusion, and then made further changes before the final version of "The Mystery of Marie Roget" appeared in his collected *Tales* in 1845.

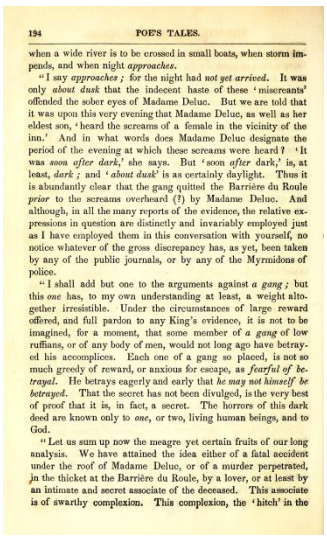

T A L E S

BY

EDGAR A. POE.

NEW YORK:
WILEY AND PUTNAM, 161 BROADWAY.

1845.


194 POE'S TALES.

when a wide river is to be crossed in small boats, when storm impends, and when night *approaches*.

"I say *approaches*; for the night had *not yet arrived*. It was only *about dusk* that the indecent haste of these 'miscreants' offended the sober eyes of Madame Deluc. But we are told that it was upon this very evening that Madame Deluc, as well as her eldest son, 'heard the screams of a female in the vicinity of the inn.' And in what words does Madame Deluc designate the period of the evening at which these screams were heard? 'It was *soon after dark*,' she says. But 'soon *after* dark,' is, at least, *dark*; and '*about dusk*' is as certainly daylight. Thus it is abundantly clear that the gang quitted the Barrière du Roule *prior* to the screams overheard (?) by Madame Deluc. And although, in all the many reports of the evidence, the relative expressions in question are distinctly and invariably employed just as I have employed them in this conversation with yourself, no notice whatever of the gross discrepancy has, as yet, been taken by any of the public journals, or by any of the Myrmidons of police.

"I shall add but one to the arguments against *a gang*; but this *one* has, to my own understanding at least, a weight altogether irresistible. Under the circumstances of large reward offered, and full pardon to any King's evidence, it is not to be imagined, for a moment, that some member *of a gang* of low ruffians, or of any body of men, would not long ago have betrayed his accomplices. Each one of a gang so placed, is not so much greedy of reward, or anxious for escape, as *fearful of betrayal*. He betrays eagerly and early that *he may not himself be betrayed*. That the secret has not been divulged, is the very best of proof that it is, in fact, a secret. The horrors of this dark deed are known only to *one*, or two, living human beings, and to God.

"Let us sum up now the meagre yet certain fruits of our long analysis. We have attained the idea either of a fatal accident under the roof of Madame Deluc, or of a murder perpetrated, in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule, by a lover, or at least by an intimate and secret associate of the deceased. This associate is of swarthy complexion. This complexion, the 'hitch' in the

Poe is usually seen as creating the modern detective story—an archetypally modern genre, but not a modernist one. In many ways, this is indeed what he does: Auguste Dupin—brilliant, vain, eccentric, asexual—is the model for Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and many others. Poe establishes the pattern of the dogged friend and often narrator, as well as the incompetent policeman who has to seek the detective's help. He invents various motifs such as the sealed room in which the crime is mysteriously committed and the devious criminal who seems to share many characteristics with the detective. Yet of Poe's stories only "The Purloined Letter"—which isn't a New York story—completely works in terms of these generic expectations. In "The Man of the Crowd" the players seem in place but no crime occurs; the murders in the Rue Morgue are not *really* murders because the

[5] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century <Exposé of 1935>", in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press, 1999, p. 10; Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", *Graham's American Monthly Magazine*, no. 1 (April 1846), pp. 163-167, at 163.

killings are committed by an orang-utan. In the case of "Marie Roget", Poe didn't want to let go of his pet theory, but he couldn't not recognise the likelihood that Mary Rogers did indeed die during an abortion, so he tried to have it both ways. The story ends with a mock interruption from a fictional editor to explain the failure to bring about a satisfactory conclusion. And then in 1845 he changed the original wording from "a murder perpetrated" to "either of a fatal accident… or a murder perpetrated".[6] "Marie Roget" seemed to be proceeding according to generic expectations, but then abortion intrudes and so it isn't a murder story at all. If one definition of modernism is the disruption of narrative, those words "either of a fatal accident" – by which Poe is forced to undermine his own murder story—are precisely where modernism begins. Poe's *Tales* were printed by Wiley & Putnam at 161 Broadway, one block north of the cigar store where Mary Rogers had worked.

A single stepping stone is needed to bridge the 70-odd years from Poe and Mary Rogers to 1919. The revelation that Mary Rogers had died during a botched abortion shifted the tone of newspaper reporting. Now Mary's fate came to be seen as a warning of the moral dangers of the modern city, with animus redirected at the abortionists. This involved some recalibration since New York newspapers had always eagerly accepted advertisements from abortion-providers; but recalibrate they did, putting themselves firmly in the forefront of a moral crusade against abortion. Fortunately, coincident with the story of Mary Rogers' murder was the trial of one of the city's best-known abortion-providers, known as Madame Restell, a French name being *de rigueur* in such matters, although Madame Restell—like all the best American villains—was in fact English, born in Gloucestershire: her real name was Ann Lohman.[7]


NATIONAL POLICE GAZETTE.

Vol. 2. No. 27—$2 A YEAR. NEW-YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 1847. FOUR CENTS A NUMBER.

THE FEMALE ABORTIONIST.

Contraception was a crude business in the 1830s. The first step was 'lunar pills', advertised as bringing on menstruation and therefore not to be used by pregnant women; with the implied message that they *were* to be used by pregnant women who didn't want to be pregnant. If the pills failed, which they usually did, the next step was piercing of the amniotic sac to bring about miscarriage. Hardly ideal, but for desperate women living in poverty with many mouths to feed, an experienced 'midwife' was better than the alternative of cheap gin and a knitting needle. Madame Restell also kept a lying-in hospital for women who *wished* to give birth. And no doubt with his wife's help, Charles Lohman wrote *The Married Woman's Private Medical Companion* under the name of Dr Mauriceau, a very unsensational plea for birth control, which

[6] Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales*, New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845, p. 194.

[7] Jennifer Wright, *Madame Restell: The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Old New York's Most Fabulous, Fearless, and Infamous Abortionist*, New York: Hachette Books, 2023. Restell is sympathetically portrayed in Kate Manning's novel, *My Notorious Life*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

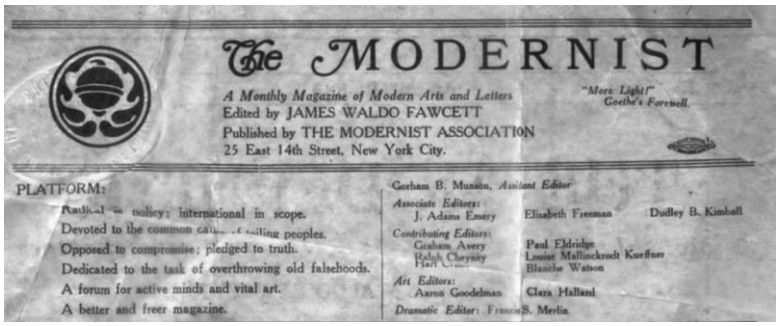
nonetheless resulted in his arrest for obscenity.[8] The press made continuous but futile efforts to link Restell with Mary Rogers' death.

Partly as a result of the Mary Rogers case, the law against abortion was tightened in 1845, making it a criminal offence to be tried as manslaughter, and newspaper pressure on Restell increased. She was frequently arrested and tried, but served very little time in prison, partly because her services were also now sought by upper-class women as they started to want to both plan and limit the size of their families, and partly because the increasing wealth that resulted from all this new custom allowed Restell to buy off the police. The Restells moved to bigger and bigger premises, eventually purchasing a plot at Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street where they built an ostentatious mansion.

The mid- to late nineteenth century saw many movements to clean up New York—drives against prostitution, political corruption, rampant criminality. The move against birth control was one element of this larger campaign, but it was directed in particular against the fear that the easy availability of contraception would make it more difficult to police women's sexuality. And in the figures of Mary Rogers and indeed Ann Lohman could be glimpsed forerunners of what came to be called 'the new woman', threatening to take control of her own sexual and professional life.

The personification of moral outrage at this development was Anthony Comstock, the founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, bankrolled by Samuel Colgate the soap manufacturer. Comstock was determined to get Mme Restell, who for him was the personification of vice. In 1878 he eventually entrapped her into selling him pills supposedly intended for his wife. Finally facing a long prison term, Mme Restell cut her own throat, news which made the front page of the *New York Times*, ending the life of an outspoken, independent, and articulate woman who'd offered an open challenge to emerging nineteenth-century conventions about gender and social relations, which she saw as both hypocritical and damaging to women.[9]

The High Tide of Modernism

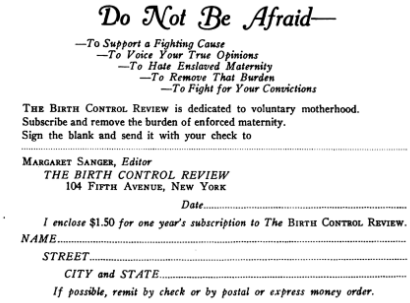


[8] A. M. Mauriceau, *The Married Woman's Private Medical Companion*, New York, 1847.

[9] "End of a Criminal Life", *New York Times*, 2 April 1878, p. 1.

In 1919, one bold and almost unique adoption of the 'modernist' label came with the founding of the Modernist Press, the publishing arm of the Modernist Association, whose journal was called *The Modernist*. However, very much in keeping with the spirit of the times, this impressive enterprise seems to have consisted of one man and his typewriter in a small apartment on East 14th Street. *The Modernist* lasted for precisely one issue. And the Modernist Press published just one book of poems.[10]

The Modernist journal was not without elements of what became orthodox modernism, particularly three early poems by Hart Crane and a sketch of the dancer Isadora Duncan by Abraham Walkowitz; but what seems to have eliminated the journal from serious consideration in the history of modernism is its social and political dimensions, summed up by two things: its platform—including "devoted to the common cause of toiling peoples"—and the advert which preceded the contents page, for the *Birth Control Review*.[11]



Do Not Be Afraid—

—To Support a Fighting Cause
—To Voice Your True Opinions
—To Hate Enslaved Maternity
—To Remove That Burden
—To Fight for Your Convictions

THE BIRTH CONTROL REVIEW is dedicated to voluntary motherhood. Subscribe and remove the burden of enforced maternity. Sign the blank and send it with your check to

MARGARET SANGER, *Editor*
THE BIRTH CONTROL REVIEW
104 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

Date.....

I enclose $1.50 for one year's subscription to The BIRTH CONTROL REVIEW.

NAME.....

STREET.....

CITY and STATE.....

If possible, remit by check or by postal or express money order.

Madame Restell has largely been forgotten. The editor of the *Birth Control Review*, Margaret Sanger, certainly hasn't. Sanger opened the first US birth control clinic in 1916—for which she was sent to prison for 30 days. In the USA she's a feminist icon and, as the founder of the organisation now called Planned Parenthood, she's a figure of hate to the so-called 'Pro-Life' movement.[12]

Margaret Sanger operated in a very different social context from Restell. By 1919 birth control had become a radical and feminist issue and Sanger was drawn into bohemian circles in New York, mixing with artists and writers. Her first magazine had been called *The Woman Rebel*, taking its motto "No Gods, No Masters" from the left-wing union, the Industrial Workers of the World [IWW]. In fact, the term 'birth control' itself was only five years old—coined by one of Sanger's associates late in 1914 as an alternative to clumsier formulations such as 'voluntary parenthood'—and it was so successful as a term no doubt because of the sense of *control* it offered women over what the advert calls "the burden of enforced maternity". New methods of birth control, particularly the Dutch cap, were now offered to replace more

Family Limitation—Old Style

[10] *The Modernist*, 1, no. 1 (Novemebr 1919). Louise Mallinckrodt Kueffner, *Moods of Manhattan*, New York: The Modernsit Press, 1920.

[11] *The Modernist* and *Birth Control Review* had reciprocal adverts, for *The Modernist* in *Birth Control Review*, 3, no. 7 (July 1919), p. 2, and 3, no. 8 (August 1919), p. 2.. In 1917 Fawcett had worked as Margaret Sanger's research assistant.

[12] On Sanger, see Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007.

desperate measures of family limitation that the impoverished women of the Lower East Side had sometimes been forced into.

The presence of this advert, right at the front of a journal called *The Modernist*, raises important questions. What happens if we put birth control at the centre of modernism? Does that make any sense at all? An argument can be made. To begin with, birth control does feature elsewhere within even 'orthodox' modernism. *The Little Review* was one of modernism's most important journals: Ezra Pound was for several years its foreign editor; and the journal's editor, Margaret Anderson, published a protest against the entrapment and arrest of Margaret Sanger's husband, William, for giving to an undercover detective a copy of a pamphlet called *Family Limitation*. "I have seen that pamphlet", Anderson wrote. "There is not an obscene word in it, naturally. Margaret Sanger couldn't be obscene—she's a gentle, serious, well-informed woman writing in a way that any high-minded physician might."[13] In the title of Anderson's piece—"Mr. Comstock and the Resourceful Police"—can be seen one connection between the two periods: Anthony Comstock and his Society for the Suppression of Vice. Madame Restell had been one of his early victims, and he went after Margaret Sanger too. Comstock died that year, 1915, but his successor carried on the struggle. Part of Comstock's significance is that he worked for the US Post Office and the prime piece of legislation he employed—which is usually referred to as the Comstock Act—is aimed at his obsession, which was obscenity. In a peculiar way, it was less the practice of birth control that he objected to than advertising for it: he prosecuted for the publication of anything—leaflets, mail order forms, or literature—which his 1876 act defined as obscene:

> Every obscene, lewd, or lascivious, and every filthy, book, pamphlet, picture, paper, letter, writing, print, or other publication of an indecent character … and every article, instrument, substance, drug, medicine, or thing which is advertised or described in a manner calculated to lead another to use or apply it for preventing conception or producing abortion, … is hereby declared to be non-mailable matter.[14]

By 1919 this act was at the very centre of US cultural life because as well as being used to harrass Margaret Sanger and her associates, it was being deployed against modernist literary texts. On three occasions between March 1918 and January 1920 the US postal authorities in New York denied *The Little Review* access to the mails, and when one issue actually got through the post, it was then prosecuted for obscenity. The first of these four cases concerned a story by Wyndham Lewis, the other three chapters of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which *The Little Review* was bravely publishing, the last and most famous case relating to the part of the "Nausicaa" chapter where Gertie MacDowell leans back to assist Leopold Bloom with the view up her skirt while he's covertly masturbating—a scene that produced the great set-

[13] Margaret Anderson, ""Mr. Comstock and the Resourceful Police", *The Little Review*, 2, no. 2 (April 1915), pp. 2-5 , at 2.

[14] Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use (Section 211), 3 March 1873.

piece obscenity trial of modernism in New York.[15] The editors were found guilty of publishing "indecent material" and the novel was banned.

So modernist literature and birth control were inextricably linked, brought together by Anthony Comstock and the law on obscenity he'd helped frame. People like James Waldo Fawcett, the editor of *The Modernist*, and Margaret Anderson, editor of *The Little Review*, *were* thinking about modernism and birth control within the same frame, as part of the same struggle.[16] But others took a different view. Ezra Pound, who was the midwife for *Ulysses*, was outraged not so much by the Comstock law as such as by the fact of its failure to recognise the distinctive features of literature. In letters to John Quinn, who was both a patron to modernist artists and the lawyer defending *The Little Review*, Pound objected to what he called "the statute which lumps literature and instruments for abortion into one clause", writing: "ONLY for gods sake get my POINT which is that I object to a campaign for free literature being mixed up with a campaign for Mrs Sanger, birth control, etc." and "I thoroughly agree with you that a fight against it [that statute] should be DISASSOCIATED from the aroma of Washington Square, and the general imbecilities of people who as you put it 'want to spit in the eye' of existing executives".[17]

Just what 'Washington Square' meant to Pound and Quinn is spelled out in an earlier letter from Quinn:

> [Washington Square] is a vulgar, disgusting conglomerate of second- and third-rate artists and would-be artists, of I.W.W. agitators, of sluts kept or casual, clean and unclean, of Socialists and near Socialists, of poetasters and pimps, of fornicators and dancers and those who dance to enable them to fornicate – But hell, words fail me to express my contempt for the whole damned bunch.[18]

One wonders what he might have said if words *had not* failed him.

In these years Washington Square was home to writers like Willa Cather, Hart Crane, and Djuna Barnes, and of meeting places like Mabel Dodge's apartment where writers would rub shoulders with political figures like Bill Hayward, the leader of the IWW, and John Reed, recently returned from reporting on the Russian Revolution, or the top of the Washington Square arch where the artists John Sloan and Marcel Duchamp had declared the independence of Greenwich Village, or the Provincetown Theatre where Eugene O'Neill's early plays were performed, or the Liberal Club where issues like feminism and birth control were debated by people like Margaret Sanger. This was New York modernism in 1919: not too shabby a collection of what Quinn called "second- and third-rate artists". But this was an

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[15] See Paul Vanderham, *James Joyce and Censorship: The Trials of 'Ulysses'*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998; and Adam Parkes, "'Literature and instruments of abortion': 'Nausicaa' and the *Little Review* Trial", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 34, no. 2 (1997), pp. 283-302.

[16] *The Modernist* was advertised in *The Little Review*, 6, no. 2 (June 1919) and 6, no. 5 (September 1919).

[17] "Letter of Ezra Pound to John Quinn" (31 October 1920), in *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn, 1915-1924*, ed. Timothy Materer, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 199.

[18] "Letter of John Quinn to Ezra Pound" (1917), quoted from B. L. Reid, *The Man from New York: John Quinn and His Friends*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 285.

anarchist, feminist, socialist, and queer New York modernism, which was not what Quinn and Pound wanted. Their modernism was hard-edged and very masculine. Pound was living in Kensington, a world away. That summer of 1919 his friend T. S. Eliot began the process of writing official modernist literary history in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent". There was, according to Eliot, a main *current* within literary history: it didn't include Washington Square, and it certainly didn't include birth control. There's just that one echo in the public house scene at the end of the second part of *The Waste Land*, held up like some rather distasteful anthropological exhibit: "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. / (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)"[19]

The End of Modernism

In June 1919 one of those 'Washington Square' artists despised by Quinn and Pound left New York for France having two years previously produced what is often now seen as the archetypal modernist work, based, coincidentally or not, on a piece of men-only plumbing, which Marcel Duchamp bought from the J. L. Mott Iron Works showroom at 118 Fifth Avenue, right across the street—as it happens—from the offices of the *Birth Control Review*.[20]

Twenty-eight years later, on 15 January 1947, just as Marcel Duchamp was leaving France to return to New York, the body of a young woman called Elizabeth Short was discovered on a vacant lot in Los Angeles. The body had been drained of blood and segmented. The passer-by who discovered the body actually reported it to the police as a broken mannequin left by the side of the road. One newspaper called the victim the Black Dahlia, in an echo of the recent film, *The Blue Dahlia*, written by Raymond Chandler, and the name stuck. Elizabeth Short's murder is still officially unsolved. There've been many books written about it, most notably from a literary point of view James Ellroy's 1987 novel.[21]

In 2003 an ex-LAPD cop called Steve Hodel published the results of his investigation of the case, proving—to his own satisfaction—that Elizabeth Short's murderer had been none other than his own father, George Hodel, a prominent LA physician, who'd died of natural causes in 1999.[22] Unknown to Steve when he started his investigation, George Hodel had indeed been the prime suspect at the time, so the claim wasn't simply fanciful. One of Steve Hodel's passing suggestions, which was then more fully pursued by two art historians, was that the murder had been intended as a kind of macabre surrealist art work.[23] Dr Hodel certainly belonged to that mid-century Hollywood world where film and art and criminality

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[19] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent",, *The Egoist*, 6, no. 4 (September 1919), pp. 54-55 & no. 5 (December 1919), pp. 72-73; *The Waste Land*, New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922, p. 25.

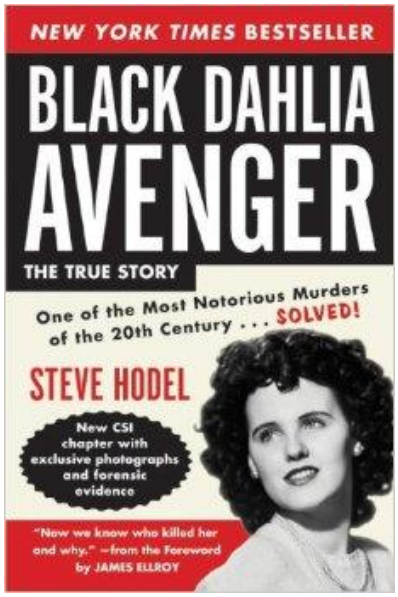
[20] See Thierry de Duve, *Duchamp's Telegram: From Beaux-Arts to Art-in-General*, London: Reaktion Books, 2023.

[21] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Given: 1º Art 2 º Crime: Modernity, Murder and Mass Culture*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007; James Ellroy, *The Black Dahlia*, New York: Mysterious Press, 1987.

[22] Steve Hodel, *Black Dahlia Avenger*, New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003.

[23] Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss, *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder*, New York: Bullfinch Press, 2006.

overlapped. Hodel had been something of a childhood prodigy—an accomplished photographer who'd briefly published his own surrealist magazine. At his Hollywood mansion, modelled on a Mayan temple, Hodel entertained writers like Henry Miller and Kenneth Rexroth. Hodel's first girl-friend became John Huston's first wife—and then Hodel's wife after she left Huston. In December 1949, two years after the Elizabeth Short murder, Hodel was put on trial for raping his own fourteen-year-old daughter. Supposedly present at the time of the rape was Hodel's friend the sculptor Fred Sexton, who'd made the eponymous statuette of the Maltese falcon in John Huston's 1941 film. Hodel was acquitted of rape after his lawyer convinced the jury that the daughter was unhinged; and all the material gathered about Hodel in connection with the Black Dahlia killing mysteriously disappeared. One of Hodel's positions was venereal disease control officer for LA county, which made him privy to a lot of information that some very powerful people didn't want made public. He also used his VD clinic as a cover for performing abortions, which were illegal at that time in California.



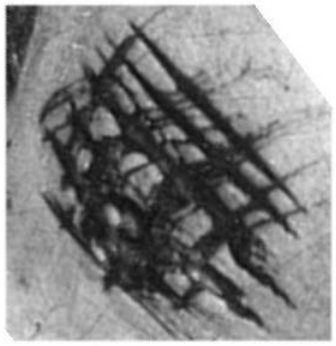
For current purposes, Hodel's relevant friendship in Los Angeles was with Emanuel Radnitsky, better known as Man Ray, who had been a central figure in modernism in New York in those years around 1919. He was involved in the one issue of *The Glebe*, which announced the arrival of Imagism, and indeed of Ezra Pound himself. He'd then been in Paris when *Ulysses* was published and had taken the publicity photographs. Forced to leave France in 1940, he'd gone to LA, where he formed part of that Hollywood set which included George Hodel and Henry Miller. And he took photographs of both Dorothy and George: he was a family friend of the Hodels.

In Paris Man Ray had been closely connected with the Surrealist movement. One recurrent topos within Surrealism had been the figure of the naked, sometimes mutilated, and often segmented woman. A whole Surrealist exhibition in 1938 curated by Marcel Duchamp had been built around mannequins, one attraction for the Surrealists being that momentary confusion they can cause in viewers as to whether the body is real or artificial, the confusion between the animate and the inanimate, based ultimately on Hoffman's story *The Sandman*, which had been at the heart of Freud's definition of the uncanny in his essay published—inevitably—in 1919. Man Ray's own work took various different turns. He painted figures of segmented women. He photographed women, and sometimes himself, like stills from a Hollywood *film noir*, or even as part of a fictional crime scene.[24] Powerful but very disturbing images. Etched onto Elizabeth Short's hip was a cross-hatch which is a close match to an element of Man Ray's painting *L'Equivoque*. Along with the reduction of the body to

[24] See Amy Lyford, "Man Ray, Lee Miller, and the Photography of Surrealist Sexuality", in her *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 00-00.

the form of a segmented mannequin, that cross-hatch is the firmest evidence that some kind of psychotic tribute to Surrealist imagery may have been behind the horrendous murder of Elizabeth Short.

All that is an LA story, not a New York story. But the hypothesis is that Man Ray, perhaps intrigued by the Surrealist aspects of the Black Dahlia murder, perhaps aware that his 'signature' had been found incised on the body, perhaps suspecting that his friend George Hodel was the murderer, and able through his contacts in the LAPD or in the press to get hold of the photographs from the crime scene, had sent these photographs to his friend Marcel Duchamp as a kind of bizarre 'welcome back to New York' present.



On 22 January 1947 Marcel Duchamp returned to New York and in his small apartments, first on West 14th Street and later on East 11th Street, he worked in secret for twenty years on his final artwork, only displayed in 1969 after his death. Art historians really don't know what to make of *Étants données*. It consists of a wooden door with two peepholes, one for each eye of the singular viewer—only one person at a time can see it—through which a tableau is glimpsed. The lamp seems to be held up, perhaps suggesting that the woman is alive, but she's certainly naked, vulnerable, and without a visible head. The first viewers all thought that it looked like a corpse. Duchamp's studies for the work showed the body with partial limbs, so the figure may have been initially based on photographs of the body of Elizabeth Short, but it could almost also be Mary Rogers after she was pulled out of the river: the background certainly recalls the pastoral scenery of Sybil's Cave. But this time, hidden behind a door, constructed with hyperreal detail, Duchamp has left the complexities of modernism behind. Modernism ends here: this is postmodernism.

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So modernism began with Edgar Allan Poe's thwarted attempt to turn the public death of a beautiful young woman into a detective story and it ended a century later but just a couple of dozen blocks away as Marcel Duchamp turned the public death of another beautiful young woman into a mysteriously glossy tableau. Between these two moments and between these two places, women sought the right to control their *own* bodies, but then found the story of that struggle removed from cultural history by the male gatekeepers of the new modernist orthodoxy.

Does all this make any sense? This essay has pulling at various threads to find out where they lead. At times I've felt like those two detectives pictured at the beginning of this essay, staring down at the dark waters of the Hudson from where the woman's body is recovered at the beginning of the film of the *Naked City*, just across the river from the New Jersey shore. What conclusions can be drawn? From the perspective of New York, modernism seems littered with the mutilated bodies of women. Birth-control was a *modernist* issue for women, but a distraction for male modernists. Women writers were for many years—and to a large extent still are—written out of the story of modernism. All those statements seem to me true. Whether they are as closely entangled as I've suggested, I'm not entirely sure. There are no doubt many versions. As the voiceover to the TV series always entoned at the end of each programme:- There are eight million stories in the naked city: this has been one of them.