This is not to say that surfiction is the ultimate mode of modern narrative, or that it realizes the fullest potential of the novel in motion. No matter what new sensations are generated, no matter what new territories of consciousness are opened, the novel yields less the more it reduces experience to a single plane. The surf of Federman’s fiction is thick with texture, which includes a wide range of allusions, a rich sense of humor, and the excitement of battling against traditional expectations. In Abish the language is a creative force rising, as it were, beyond the page as it compels us to make—and judge—connections between what we are reading and what we know or thought we knew about modern history, which, we discover, includes the power of Western language. But Sukenick, while generating a singular experience of motion and realizing its sensations of terror and exhilaration, sacrifices texture and traps us in an intelligent and wily but nonetheless limited consciousness. The experience of his achievement recalls the problem Faulkner encountered in Pylon, which (as I pointed out in the Introduction) extends the senseless motion of airplane races into the very texture of his novel but fails to realize the power of his later novels just because it lacks their richness.

Still, surfiction, especially as it develops in Sukenick, does carry the novel in motion to a limit. It does embody in its purest state the creative and destructive force that has dominated modern consciousness, and it may lead us toward a new perspective on the earlier achievements of modern fiction. From this perspective, we might reassess our judgment of Pylon; but, more important, we might reassess just what it was we thought were modern fiction's major achievements. We may even look back to see whether we have developed the best way to read modern fiction and realize its full value.
The modernist revolution has been seen as a rejection of restrictive causality and oppressive linearity as embodied in the traditional plot line and inherent in the traditional point of view and mode of characterization. Indeed, I have emphasized the fragmentation, shifting perspectives, dislocations, discontinuities, unpredictable transformations, kaleidoscopic simultaneity, and leveling that generate the experience of uncontrolled and uncontrollable motion. But what has replaced temporal linearity has been described by Virginia Woolf as a “transparent envelope,” by James Joyce as a mosaic, by Ezra Pound as “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time,” and by Joseph Frank in his enormously influential essay as “spatial form.” We have been led to read modern fiction to discover geometrical patterns that abrogate time, undermine authority, and liberate us from the inexorable plot line. If we reexamine this model from the perspective we have gained on the novel in motion, though, we will arrive at a description of the modernist revolution at once more conservative and more radical. We will restore a vital and major dimension of the reading experience that has been suppressed in the name of the modernist revolution. And we will discover that this very dimension is what generates the experience of terrifying but exhilarating movement from the known into the unknown.

SPACE HAS ITS LIMITS

As modernists and postmodernists, we are conspirators, accomplices, agents in the demolition of linearity. We take demonic joy in tearing up the track: in deconstructing the plot, in insisting that what happens next is not as important or as exciting as those patterns that abrogate time and are fashioned in terms of space. Our joy derives both from the Romantic urge to undermine causal necessity (like Dostoyevsky’s underground man, we must prove that we are not piano keys) and from the discovery of new possibilities in literature and human consciousness. Lessing to the contrary, writers can evoke simultaneity; sequence can yield to juxtaposition; the narrative line can turn into a circle or mobile. Joseph Frank’s essay on spatial form is as persuasive today as it was in 1945. Sharon Spencer’s concept of architectonics illuminates some of the most engaging novels of the twentieth century. We have even discovered new dimensions in traditional literature.

But the model of spatial form has suppressed a dimension that is found in the rudimentary sequence of events and in the movement from beginning to end. Even in a plotless work the reader
encounters one image, idea, event after another and experiences their forward movement; and a subsequent reading follows the event of the first. Even in a circular text the end is different from the beginning, since it trails the sequence of events and is pressed into existence by their forward movement. Even when the writer strives for simultaneity, the reader experiences sequence. In each case the primary effect and meaning derive from the movement of a unique succession.

WHERE THE READER DRAWS THE LINE

"Everything should sound simultaneously," says Flaubert of the county fair scene in Madame Bovary. "One should hear the bellowing of the cattle, the whispering of the lovers, and the rhetoric of the officials all at the same time." According to Joseph Frank, Flaubert achieves simultaneity by halting the narrative's time flow and "cutting back and forth" between three spatial levels. On the street the mob mixes with the livestock, on the platform officials declaim bombastic platitudes, and upstairs in the town hall Rodolphe courts Emma with a rhetoric not too different from that of the officials. At the climax "Rodolphe's Chateaubriandesque phrases are read at almost the same moment as the names of prize winners for raising the best pigs." But does the crosscutting really achieve simultaneity? Does the comic effect come from our hearing Rodolphe and the president at almost the same time? Or does the scene depend foremost on the sequence of phrases and gestures—and on Flaubert's genius for timing?

"Take us, for instance," [Rodolphe] said, "how did we happen to meet? What chance willed it? It was because across infinite distances, like two streams uniting, our particular inclinations pushed us toward one another."

And he seized her hand; she did not withdraw it.

"First prize for general farming!" announced the president.

Crosscutting is a term aptly borrowed from film—a medium that achieved an immediate and universal attraction through its capacity for movement. Indeed, crosscutting is one of the primary means of realizing this capacity. As I have pointed out, both Griffith and Eisenstein recognized how Dickens heightened suspense by crosscutting—as in Oliver Twist when he cut back and forth between the capture of Oliver and the old man waiting with his watch. By accelerating the crosscuts and shooting from more radical angles, Griffith and Eisenstein both heightened the suspense and increased the tempo in their chase scenes—in Griffith's last-
minute rescues and in sequences like that on the Odessa Steps, where the hysterical crowd is chased by the orderly soldiers. Increased tempo and suspense are the most immediate effect of crosscutting, whether for the melodramatic purpose of the chase or the comic purpose of Flaubert's county fair. Simultaneity is a secondary effect, resulting from a quickly learned convention—although not so quickly learned as to preclude the apprehension expressed by Griffith's employers when he first proposed one.

When we speak of simultaneous dialogue in Flaubert, we are referring to a convention and to a metaphor. The same holds true for Pound's juxtaposition of images. Even in his famous example of an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," simultaneity is preceded by an experience of temporal succession and forward movement, and juxtaposition follows from a sequence that—no matter how illogical—is still linear:

In the Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The sequence of these lines—which includes the title—cannot be changed. The faces in the crowd are defined by the fact that the poet is in a Metro station, and the effect of the poem comes from our seeing the petals after the faces—just as the effect of Flaubert's passage comes from our hearing the president's announcement after hearing Rodolphe's speech on fate and seeing the couple join hands.

"Spatial form" is an evocative metaphor. It helped generate a new set of expectations and expand our reading habits, but taken literally it becomes misleading. Pound contributed to the critical confusion by heralding the Chinese ideograph, where simple images could be combined and presented simultaneously as a complex picture. Other writers and critics, influenced by cubist painting, compounded the confusion by adding the metaphor of "collage" to our critical lexicon. Except for the short "concrete" poem, where units can be apprehended at a glance, Western literature demands to be read sequentially. Even when surfiction writers break up the page with parallel columns or other patterns that undermine our reading habits, we read in patterns that are sequential. Yet, as I tried to show in the early chapters, modernist literature is visual in a way that earlier literature rarely approached, and primarily because of the influence of modern painting. Writers have evoked experiences of simultaneity and multiple
perspective. Novelists and playwrights have done away with the plot and have even turned the narrative line into a circle. Let me show how the narrative picture, even when fragmented or static, is dominated by a continuous forward movement; how multiple perspective in a timeless moment still yields a sequential scene; and how the circular plot is nonetheless linear. Then I will propose a model of temporal rather than spatial form that describes the modernist and postmodernist subversions of narrative time while preserving the major dimension of the reading experience and illuminating the singularly temporal dynamic of modern fiction.

REALIGNING THE FRAGMENTED PICTURE

In his essay on Dickens and Griffith, Eisenstein shows how the novelist captures the essence of Mr. Dombey in a remarkable description that fractures the normal, logical sequence of visual details.

He had already laid his hand upon the bell-rope to convey his usual summons to Richards, when his eye fell upon a writing-desk, belonging to his deceased wife, which had been taken, among other things, from a cabinet in her chamber. It was not the first time that his eye had lighted on it. He carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now—having previously locked the room door—with a well-accustomed hand.

The last sentence, Eisenstein comments, “arrests one’s attention” with its apparent awkwardness. The phrase *having previously locked the room door* is “‘fitted in’ as if recollected by the author in the middle of a later phrase, instead of being placed where it apparently should have been, in the consecutive order of the description, that is, before the words, *and he brought it to his table.*” Dickens’s choice was not fortuitous. “In this deliberate ‘montage’ displacement of the time-continuity of the description there is a brilliantly caught rendering of the transient thievery of the action, slipped between the preliminary action and the act of reading another’s letter, carried out with absolute ‘correctness’ of gentlemanly dignity which Mr. Dombey knows how to give to any behavior or action of his.” By fragmenting the narrative picture, Dickens causes us to see Mr. Dombey in surprising depth; but, as Eisenstein implies, what we see is even more the result of the new, surprising, and successfully calculated sequence.

“My task which I am trying to achieve,” wrote Joseph Conrad in words that D. W. Griffith would repeat ten years later and that
might be used as an epigraph to modernism, "is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see." The Nigger of the Narcissus, to which this declaration is prefaced, opens with a narrative picture that makes us see—indeed, engages us in the act of excited perception—through its fragmentation. Here the fragmentation is achieved not by breaking into the line of action but, as I have shown in chapter two, by a flashing of the narrative eye from one part of the ship to another, cutting back and forth in time, as well as from one close-up to another. My shot-by-shot analysis shows how the fragmentation is achieved by a succession of sharp changes in focus—and how the successive movements of the narrative eye, even more than the bustling activity, impart such vitality to Conrad's picture.

In contrast to Conrad's, Joyce's picture of E—C—and her companions contains very little movement. Boots prattle, mouths and eyes move gently, umbrellas are closed. But the narrative eye, flashing from point to point and fragmenting the scene more radically, competes with the subject for our attention. And in Faulkner's description of Dilsey, in the most static scene in The Sound and the Fury, the movement of the narrative eye overwhelms the subject. The narrator—trying to apprehend, comprehend, hold on to an experience that is both outrageous and awesome—shifts his focus so rapidly and fragments Dilsey so radically that she becomes almost unrecognizable.

In each case the movement of the narrative eye is irregular and unpredictable as it shifts its vantage and fragments the whole. But the narrative eye moves and refocuses successively, and we encounter one detail after another. This becomes strikingly clear when we transcribe such narrative pictures into shot-by-shot film scenarios. Indeed, the justification for these transcriptions is the sequential nature of both mediums. Therefore, no matter how erratic the scanning in space, one pictorial event succeeds another in time, creating the primary dynamic of both film and the reading experience.

REALIGNING THE FRACTURED SCENE

"What a lark! What a plunge!" Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway has plunged into the morning air. She has also plunged from London of 1923 to Bourton of 1891. Her thoughts as well as her body in continual motion, she has walked across Victoria Street, through
the park, and along Bond Street—thinking of tonight’s party, recalling her girlhood at Bourton, meeting an old Bourton friend, looking in the store windows, thinking of her daughter and of her tutor, the poor, embittered Miss Kilman, who has aroused a “brutal monster” of hatred within her. She pushes through the swinging doors of Mulberry’s florist. As she goes from jar to jar with Miss Pym, “choosing nonsense . . . this beauty, this scent, this colour,” the experience and Miss Pym’s affection are like a “wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster.” Suddenly there is the violent backfire of a motor car. Startled, she and Miss Pym go to the window. Now time is arrested, and we are given a bird’s-eye view—a multiple perspective from somewhere above the scene—of the general reaction, which includes the reaction of Mrs. Dalloway seen from the outside. Passersby stop and stare. A male hand draws the blind on the auto window. Rumors circulate. Edgar J. Watkiss announces, “The Prime Minister’s kyar.” Mrs. Dalloway comes to the window “with her arms full of sweet peas.” Lucrezia Smith wonders if it is the queen going shopping. Septimus Smith—having thought “some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames”—declares that he will kill himself.

But when Clarissa emerges from the shop wearing “a look of extreme dignity,” we realize that a great deal has happened during this arrested moment—and we see much more in Mrs. Dalloway than we did when she entered. That is, while time was arrested and we saw what was happening simultaneously in different places, a sequence of events was building to a climax.

The “brutal monster” stirring in Clarissa’s breast was her hatred of Miss Kilman, who was “one of those spectres with which one battles in the night.” What she hated was the puritanic seriousness and honesty, which caused Miss Kilman to be dismissed from her school during the war. This seriousness highlights the “nonsense” of Clarissa’s life and—like the thought of Mrs. Foxcroft still “eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed” in the war—darkens Clarissa’s day. Turning to the flowers, she suppresses the “brutal monster.” The backfire—in those days when cars were few—startles her. But the backfire is more than a social disturbance: it is a “pistol shot,” a “violent explosion,” and it causes a violent shift in perspective. The motor car, with its blind drawn by an anonymous hand, is ominous. Yet all of the reactions, including Clarissa’s coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, are oblivious to the threats. All except for Sep
timus's, which brings forth a note of terror—recalling the reality of a war experience not long past, and giving resonance to what had been incongruous epithets characterizing the backfire, a "pistol shot," a "violent explosion." This terror had been kept barely beneath the surface by Mrs. Dalloway as she put its stimuli in their social place, turned back to her girlhood and forward to her party. Now, more fully realized in the mind of the reader, it is suppressed again as she identifies with the occupant of the motor car, whom she too thinks is the queen, and steps out into the public eye wearing "a look of extreme dignity."

Septimus’s reaction is a new and unexpected event in the sequence of events captured in the arrested moment. It is tinged by the sequence of events leading up to it—on the one hand by the pastoral and social events with which it contrasts, and on the other by Clarissa's dark thoughts and the disproportionately warlike images of the backfire. His reaction also gives meaning to those earlier events, as does any climax of a sequence, retroactively changing their quality. It illuminates a dimension of terror we did not feel when they were first described, and also a dimension of Clarissa's consciousness far deeper than her social concerns and even her fear of aging. That Clarissa's mind remains beyond our view during the arrested moment, and that she emerges from the florist so much more fully characterized, attest to the power of the sequence—which, despite the arresting of time, is nonetheless temporal, and which dominates the reading experience. A second reading of the novel gives the scene even more meaning. This is partly because we can now go back and forth in the time of the novel and “spatially” relate Clarissa’s brutal monster to Dr. Holmes, whom Septimus sees as a brute; because we can relate the impersonal and ominous motor car to that of Dr. Bradshaw, who is also impersonal and ominous; because Septimus does actually kill himself and Clarissa identifies with him. But even more so, the scene takes on a fuller meaning because the second reading follows the first, and the reader’s experience develops in a new sequence.

"Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged," says Virginia Woolf—meaning that human time is not a succession of equal, discrete, and static moments, and that the novelist should not be bound by the mechanics of the well-made plot. It is "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." But her images of the halo or envelope do not do justice to the dynamic quality of her
work, or that of Joyce or Faulkner, who convey the movement from moment to moment in a more complex consciousness than the traditional novelist could imagine. Their scenes are not like a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged to illuminate a mechanically causal sequence, but they do portray a sequence and convey a powerful sense of sequentiality in the mind of the reader. What we may look for, then, is a way to describe this sequence, or temporality, that would preserve the dynamic quality of its elements. Before we do so, let us move from the picture and scene to the largest narrative element.

REALIGNING THE CIRCULAR PLOT

The most static experience and the most circular plot I can think of are contained in Samuel Beckett's *Play*, and since plot functions similarly in drama and fiction, let me use *Play* for its graphic exemplification. Throughout the entire forty minutes of this drama, we see three identical gray urns, about a yard high and touching one another. From each urn protrudes a head, facing "undeviatingly front" and looking "so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of [the] urn." In the center is a man; on each side is a woman. Their speech is provoked by a sharply focused spot light, which turns on and off without any apparent design, most often spotting a single face but occasionally spotting all three and provoking a chorus of simultaneous but different lines. Although the urns touch, the characters are unaware of each other's presence and speak broken monologues. The gratuitous spotlight compels them to break into one another's monologue, sometimes in a way to maintain the narrative, sometimes in a way to confuse it. From separate points of view, each character recalls his or her relationship in the triangle, which remains agonizing even after the man leaves each woman thinking he is with the other. Then each character speaks of the present, which, though consciousness is kept painfully alive, is better than the past. After the final chorus the entire play is repeated.

There is no time in Beckett's hell; the unremitting spotlight keeps the past always present and maintains the agonizing isolation. The characters repeat their lines twice; and we are made to feel that they will continue repeating them. But when we hear the first woman begin for the second time—"I said to him, Give her up."—we only first understand her. We first understand her refer-
ence to the earthly triangle, since the relationship had only become clear halfway through the first recitation. Moreover, we first understand that he can never give her up, that none of the characters can give the others up. And when we hear the man's final line—"We were not long together."—the irony is quantitatively and qualitatively different from the irony we first experienced, for we have now known a segment of their time. And the "we" now includes us. Beckett's hell is timeless in that the characters' past is always present, and the present is always being repeated. But his hell does have duration—which is the key to Play. On the one hand, "duration" means "to last" and derives from the same root as "durance," which is "imprisonment." On the other hand, it is defined by Henri Bergson as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."10 Despite Beckett's circular plot—which creates an experience of lasting and being imprisoned forever in the same state of separate agony—the events as they occur and recur form a continuous line, each succeeding event being both old and new, swelling as it brings the past into the present, and looking forward to a new future.11 Beckett gives Dante's motto singular power by dramatizing a circle of the inferno—but even more, by dramatizing the experience of time moving from the past through the present and into the future with absolutely no hope.

BRING BACK THAT LINE, BRING BACK THAT TIME

Pierre Menard "did not want to compose another Don Quixote—which would be easy—but the Don Quixote." To do so, Borges's character did not try to learn seventeenth-century Spanish, re-embrace the Catholic faith, or forget the three hundred years of European history and literature that followed Cervantes's accomplishment. Nor did he copy Don Quixote word for word. Rather he used each of Cervantes's words in Cervantes's sequence—but as a novelist of the twentieth century influenced by Coleridge, Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry. So that to read the Menard Quixote would be to read Cervantes's words with entirely new associations and within an entirely new context—a context including the event of the original. "This technique, with its infinite applications, urges us to run through the Odyssey as if it were written after the Aeneid" and "would fill the dullest books with adventure. Would not the attributing of The Imitation of Christ to Louis Ferdinand Céline or James Joyce be a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual counsels?"12
Borges illuminates the temporal, sequential dynamic of the reading experience—which is heightened rather than suppressed as modern writers reject, deconstruct, transform, displace the time-line of the traditional plot. This is the line of continuous forward movement that—even more than the narrative time-line and often despite it—presses the past into the present and makes each event new. Borges makes us feel the movement of the past into the present by creating a dynamic line from the event of Cervantes’s publication through three hundred years of European history, a line that culminates in an audacious and new creative act.

Writers and critics who rebelled against the well-made plot and discovered ways of abrogating the narrative time-line were reacting to the mechanization of a time-dominated consciousness—to quantification, uniformity, and causality, or the reduction of time into a series of discrete, identical, and irreducible moments, following one another in an inexorable sequence. Ironically, they were reacting to a spatial view of time based on the movement of clock hands, on the turning of calendar pages, on the time-governed conveyer belts that reduced products and people to replaceable parts, on the scientific measurements of time against distance on the lines of a coordinate graph.

Despite the temporal and kinetic impulses of impressionism, futurism, the movies, jazz, Henry Adams’s heralding of the dynamo, Ezra Pound’s call to “make it new,” and recent experiences of “future shock,” our literary critical consciousness is still shackled by the spatial metaphors of rational nineteenth-century thought. This is partly because critical terms are metaphors, and most metaphors are pictorial or spatial. There are metaphors, however, that are not spatial and that describe the modernist subversions of narrative time while preserving the temporal dynamic. Modern physicists have been singularly beset by the problem of pictorial or spatial metaphors as they have come to see time, and not space, as the primary element of the universe. Mileč Čapek points out that they now use the term “event” to define what were classically called “particles,” or the primary elements of physical reality.13 And we might well follow their example by seeing words, images, dialogues, ideas, and actions as events—thereby recognizing the temporal, linear dynamic that affects us more strongly than the story’s actual time-line.14 Indeed, we would be recognizing the events as they follow one another on the printed page as the actuality of fiction.

Čapek also provides a model for the physical universe—based on musical progression—that also illuminates the temporal, lin-
ear dynamic of narrative events. Every tone in a melody or polyphony is discrete and irreducible. But each tone is “tinged” by the sequence of prior tones and, retrospectively, changes the quality of the tones that formed the sequence. Here we have a linearity that is not mechanical but organic, that is ultimately formed by not discrete but continuous elements, that retains the uniqueness of each element while maintaining their mutuality. Here we have a movement that, although not unidimensional, reaches forward to an end that is always different from the beginning, and that gives the sequence its effect and meaning. Two events may occur simultaneously, but as one follows another in the narrative dynamic, the second gives resonance and meaning to the first. The flashback—on the screen or in the stream of a character’s consciousness—is always present for the first time, having swollen and changed with accumulated associations. There are no circular plots, for there are no repetitions of either acts or words. The second part of Play is different from the first. And Menard has written a new Quixote.

Despite their arguments or intentions, our best modern and postmodern writers have heightened the temporality of the reading experience by building a dynamic linearity into the very substance of their pictures, their scenes, and their plots—no matter how fragmented, timeless, or circular. Modern fiction begins with the urge to see, which is an urge toward immediacy—or a continuous engagement in the present that grows out of the past but also refigures it as it reaches into the future and becomes radically new. And as modern fiction develops, the experience of this movement becomes more immediate. When the narrator engages us in the act of excited perception, he compels us to discover not what happened but what is happening, not what he arranged for us but what is there in the now of his story. Eventually, what is there and what is now come to include the event of the story being told and formed on the printed page. Faulkner’s narrator may be focusing on the past, but he catches us up in his present as he shifts from one perspective to another and weaves his voice in and out of his storytellers’ voices, trying to grasp the senseless dynamic of what happened. The “ineluctable modality” of Joyce’s medium in Ulysses becomes a gratuitous force, causing us to leap back and forth between modern and Homeric times, intruding between us and what happened to the characters, threatening them and us with its capricious presence. The narrative voice of Beckett’s trilogy usurps the narrating characters, denying them their pasts as
well as any assurance of their existence in the present; and we become engaged in their heroic effort to go on. Nabokov undermines our security with the gaps in his narrative, which draw us from the possibilities of what happened to the possibilities of what may happen. Pynchon leads us through a series of radical transformations, one moment succeeding another as in a quantum jump. Coover engages us in a kaleidoscopic spectacle that is both wide in compass and long in duration, and where the action goes in all directions at once. Federman, Abish, and ultimately Sukenick bring everything into the surf of their fiction until there is nothing but its movement—which is an experience of sheer temporality.

All these writers fracture and displace narrative time. But in their different ways they engage us in a narrative sequence that, far more than the traditional novelist’s, is an experience of moving through time and history. And it is precisely in their exploitation of the traditional novel’s most essential dimension—the rudimentary sequence of events and the movement from beginning to end—that they engage us in the most radical experiences of modern consciousness. They continually upset our equilibrium by generating sensations of dislocation, discontinuity, shifting perspectives, directionless motion, unpredictable transformation, and leveling. But they continually situate us in the moment when the past joins with the future, where what happens refigures what happened and leads from the known into the unknown. They engage us in a temporal and historical motion that is ungoverned, ungovernable, and threatening—but also full of possibilities. And by denying us the security of a frame as well as the stability of a center, they compel us to take full responsibility for our perceptions, sensations, and judgments.