Introduction

One of the many anecdotes Gertrude Stein told about her friendship with Pablo Picasso recounts an occasion when, while on a walk together, the painter pointed to the face of what he identified as a "learned man" and said, "Look at that face, it is as old as the world, all faces are as old as the world."[1] Stein used the anecdote to foreground the fact that Picasso's painting, which in many such anecdotes functioned as a foil to her own aesthetic project, was invested in the form of the face – a face as old as the world but in search of new framing. Stein emphasized that Picasso struggled to retrain his vision so that he could learn to see such a face: "Picasso knows faces as a child."[2] The implication is that a child would see the face reduced to a bare-bones form. Art, Picasso's painting, would strive to crystallize this form. In turn, Stein's writing would attempt to capture its literary counterpoint. In both cases, the face becomes the site of a modernist struggle over form. This book tells the story of this struggle.

Literary modernism offers a rich archive for this story. One might be tempted to believe that representations of faces are rarer after the waning of realist literary impulses, but modernism is fascinated with faces. This fascination works in conjunction with literary modernism's intermedial relation to the visual arts – painting, photography, and cinema. A crucial dimension of this fascination remains modernist writers' ambivalent interest in the old science of physiognomy. Having fallen into disrepute by the end of the nineteenth century, physiognomy operated under the assumption that one can read the interiority of a person from outward appearance, particularly from the face. Aware of its pitfalls and suspicious of its methods, the modernist arts refashioned physiognomy. A range of modernist writers engaged in a revised mode of physiognomic representation. Faces, in this body of literature, no longer functioned as the mirror of the soul, but they continued to serve as sites of interpretation.

As art historian Margaret Werth writes, "Around 1900, the face took on new forms, functions, and meanings ... the face was a privileged form

within the transformations of modernity."[3] The visual arts dramatized what they saw as a crisis of the face through a range of forms.[4] So did literary modernism. In this book, I propose a reading of Virginia Woolf's famous statement, "On or around December 1910, human character changed," as a version of "On or around December 1910, the human *face* changed."[5] Writing about a fictional Mrs. Brown, whom Woolf posited as a different character from her nineteenth-century realist predecessors, Woolf suggested that "her solidity disappears; her features crumble."[6] Woolf wanted the modernist author to seize the loss of such solidity and "create characters that are real" – away from nineteenth-century realism.[7] My argument is that the features of characters like Mrs. Brown did not fully crumble. Modernist characters shrank; they became more minimalist, fragmented and unstable; but their profile *as* characters remained entangled with a particular semiotics of the face.

Physiognomy offers an entry point into this semiotics. Written at a time when physiognomic ideas have resurfaced in contemporary conversations about facial recognition technologies and COVID-19 masking, this book reframes the role of physiognomy in modern perception. Most scholarship on physiognomy and literature focuses on the nineteenth century, which is considered the age of physiognomy.[8] It was during this time that the work of Swiss theologian Johann Caspar Lavater was popularized, with long-term consequences and ramifications. Published in four volumes under the title *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniss und Menschenliebe* between 1775 and 1778 and translated into English as *Essays on Physiognomy, for the Promotion of the Knowledge and Love of Mankind*, Lavater's work defined physiognomy as "the talent of discovering the interior man by the exterior appearance."[9] Lavater claimed the status of science for the branch of knowledge that would endeavor to impart this talent: "Confined to a more restricted sense, physiognomy simply implies the air of the face; and physiognomy the science of the knowledge of the features or lineaments, and of their different expression in the human countenance." Accompanied by a large number of well-executed illustrations, "the science of sciences" claimed to offer a visual semiotics of the natural world.[10] It imagined itself as a pedagogical exercise: Readers would learn to decipher physiognomic signs. Extremely popular and influential, physiognomy functioned as an education in seeing and interpreting faces. It popularized the idea of physiognomic tact – the faith that one can cultivate skills of physiognomic perception to the point of their becoming automatic, a form of intuition. Although physiognomy has its origins in the classical world and enjoyed a resurgence in the medieval period, and

although versions of physiognomy developed in China, Japan, and the Arabic world, the wide circulation of Lavater's work propelled it into the center of modern scientific debate in the Euro-Atlantic world.[11] Lorraine Daston has traced the concept of physiognomy in nineteenth-century European science, with a focus on meteorology, or *cloud physiognomy*. The most important metaphor for this science: "the face of the sky." More broadly, Daston and Peter Galison argue that the "sciences of the eye" relied on physiognomic taxonomy, which became embedded in the very history of perception.[12] One of Daston's takeaways: "When it came to clouds, art and science faced similar challenges."[13]

While there is a growing body of literature on the history of physiognomy, it is often viewed as a curiosity in the history of science. This book reassesses this view, arguing that, as physiognomy lost ground in the scientific community, it acquired enduring capital in the popular imagination. This popularity led to its infiltration of other realms of knowledge and creativity – European nineteenth-century literature, in particular. The most influential phase in the history of physiognomy unfolded between the 1770s and the 1880s.[14] This wave of physiognomy ended, therefore, before the modernist moment. But while physiognomy waned in modernism, it did not disappear.[15] Rather, modernism reconfigured physiognomy, along multiple axes. As in other respects, modernism's desire to "make it new" functioned in conjunction with varieties of "the old."[16] And so, I must concur with Marion Zilio when she writes: "The face now seems more like the return of the repressed."[17] My aim is to unearth and analyze a modernist form of physiognomy, already a return of the repressed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Some of physiognomy's most pernicious tenets spread like fire, spurred by anxieties about modern life, especially urban life.[18] While historians of physiognomy and the European novel often sidestep questions of race, arguing that physiognomy is not inherently racist, this study reveals modernist physiognomy often sliding into racialized perception.[19] This, then, is a project analogous to what Frederic J. Schwartz has undertaken in art history, revisiting concepts like physiognomy so they can be "reinvested with the contingency of their own formation."[20] Schwartz argues that when modernist cultural critics like Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno wrote on physiognomy, they were exploring "enemy territory."[21] The figures in this book straddle the threshold between an awareness of physiognomy as enemy territory and the risk of reproducing and refashioning some of physiognomy's most insidious tenets.

The history of the face and its entanglements with physiognomy offers an eloquent entry point into debates about modernity and modernism.

Most importantly, as Sander Gilman writes, "facial aesthetics is the aesthetics of race."[22] The texts in the archive of this book reveal a troubled relation between modernist experimentation with gender and sexuality – an ongoing preoccupation in modernist studies – and a racialized facial aesthetics. Witness Woolf's framing of *Orlando* as a portrait of a queer Vita Sackville-West, which opens with a scene of a young Orlando playing with a Moor's skull. Or Thomas Mann's reflections on aesthetics in *Death in Venice*, which takes as its exemplary work of art an eroticized young Polish boy's face, against the background of a gallery of racialized faces of minor characters. Or Marcel Proust's staging of Swann's relation to Odette, the latter a character with a history of cross-dressing, whose home is curated as a collection of Oriental objects. Or Picasso's portrait of a masculine Stein, using an Andalusian mask that functions as a threshold onto the painter's use of African masks. The stakes of this thread in the book crystallize in the conclusion to Chapter 4, which rereads Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929) as a response to the modernist transatlantic investment in the face. Reacting to Stein's "Melanchtha," in particular, written at the time when Stein sat for Picasso's portrait, the opening scene in Larsen's novel frames her passing characters putting on the face of a sexually charged whiteness. "Nobody can [tell race]. Not by looking," insists one character, claiming a right to facial opacity.[23]

The stakes in a revised account of modernism's relation to physiognomy are high: Contemporary practices of racial profiling in policing have a genealogy in physiognomic criminology.[24] Perceptions of facial inscrutability, with a long history of Orientalism, go back to physiognomy.[25] Discourses of disability often enlist physiognomic notions of deformity. Queerness has at times been read physiognomically.[26] The emergence of visual technologies – from photography to cinema to facial recognition – has been imbricated with physiognomy.[27] As Roger Cooter argues, "it often appears that between the sociology of collective behavior and the history of scientific ideas there exists a veritable wasteland."[28] This book's reevaluation of the literary dimensions of modernist physiognomy aims to demonstrate how consequential such a wasteland can be.

Claudia Schmölders's *Hitler's Face: The Biography of an Image* has documented the genocidal consequences of a "culture of the face" that saw physiognomy join forces with eugenics in the years leading up to World War II.[29] Through carefully staged and marketed photographs, Hitler became the face of the nation. In turn, the other was imagined as a racial type – with race legible prominently on the face. But the entire population was catalogued following physiognomic taxonomies. The

history of physiognomy in the twentieth century is far from linear and includes physiognomic moments imbued with ambivalence when it comes to the politics of the face, but it remains paramount to foreground the uses of the face in various fascisms, past and present.

The Face as Form

Modernist Faces builds on research I did for *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (2010). As I worked on that book, I carved out a space for the burst of laughter as an object of study. I was intrigued by a series of explicit or implicit prohibitions on loud, excessive laughter at various historical junctures. What anchored these prohibitions, so often framed in both moral and aesthetic terms? One explanation rested in the perception that the excessive burst of laughter bursts the form of the face – laughter deforms the face. Alongside Georges Bataille, who occupied a central place in my study of laughter, I came to think about questions of form along the lines of the face.[30] This insight helped me understand that the face is indeed a form, which is why the concept of the formless finds its image in defacement.[31] I also understood that the face – and the formalism that attends to it – has an eloquent and consequential history. In the same way the body has a history, the face has a history – as part of the body and separate from it.[32] Portraiture offers one entry point into this history, but the history of the face is more encompassing than that of portraiture and the visual arts more generally.

I wrote about Laurent Joubert's *Treatise on Laughter* (1579), an early modern reference point for the history of laughter. Joubert's starting point, however, was the face. Joubert imagined a contest between different parts of the human body – a contest won by the face. "No animal but man has a face," he wrote, reproducing an early modern version of a discourse that posits a human facial exceptionalism anchored in the defacialization of the animal. "Only man," added Joubert, "carries it [the face] high, looking into the sky, as if into his mirror, for he sees and recognizes himself in it."[33] Importantly, for Joubert, the nation had a face: Racialized practices of inclusion/exclusion tacitly followed from this premise, delineating belonging and unbelonging, humanity and its denial. Given that the face was considered the seat of emotion, it was also the guarantee of sincerity and trustworthiness; the risk of moralizing and criminalization followed. For Joubert, the face was simultaneously the seat of beauty, anchoring a discourse about the aesthetics of the face. Art, according to Joubert, focused primarily on the face: "One is content to paint or sculpt the face

as the total or principal mark of this individual."[34] In turn, modern portraiture, visual and verbal, took on a subjectivizing role.

I knew as I worked on the book on laughter that literature had its own investment in the face. The trope of the face as book is probably as old as literature.[35] So is the idea that looking at a face constitutes a mode of reading.[36] Importantly, the concept of literary character has emerged and developed in conjunction with the history of the face, within a physiognomic conceptual constellation. "A face indexed character," writes Deidre Shauna Lynch about one node in the history of character, adding that, "reading a face was the most basic sort of reading."[37] To be sure, literary texts staged the overloading of the face with a lot of ambivalence and often as a mode of comedy. Think of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Man of the Crowd" (1840), which has its narrator read the faces in a London crowd, only to be stumped by an opaque face that refuses to be read.[38] Or Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Times* (1840), which posits face reading as a central method of character building but in the same move invokes physiognomy as a form of prejudice.[39] Or Charles Dickens, in whose work faces multiply to the point that door knockers have faces, at the same time as physiognomy takes on comedic overtones.[40] Or, of course, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), with its ambivalent dramatization of the relation between a face and its physiognomic representation.

Beyond such thematic ambivalence, however, modern literature transformed a version of physiognomy into a principle of character construction. As Charles Baxter argues, it is difficult to imagine a literary character without a face – however minimalist or defaced this face might be.[41] The modernist novel deemphasized plot but retained character as a basic element of composition. And the face remained a constitutive element of character composition. Witness Woolf's fragment, "An Unwritten Novel," which theorizes a method for sketching a character starting from the observation of the face of a woman on a train.[42] Eventually, the face obfuscates legibility, but Woolf's text ultimately reinforces the premise of face reading as character construction. This is a consequential premise because, for Woolf, the concept of character bridges the inside and outside of the text, the encounter with the "character" of people in one's social life and with literary characters.[43] To this day, when literary scholars make arguments about the relevance of literature to the real world, their arguments are often anchored in an assumption that characters in fiction are *a little bit* like real people.[44] Faces of characters and persons are in a complex dialectic.

It is on this path – from *Laughter* to *Face and Form* – that I arrived at the hypothesis that the face functions as a literary form, adjacent to prosopopoeia but distinct from it. Prosopopoeia is the figure of speech that has historically been used to name the projection of a face on nonhuman or abstract objects. Prosopopoeia constructs a voice through a face or a mask. The speaker of a poem might be nonhuman (an animal, a landscape, a stone) insofar as the reader imagines a face. "Voice assumes mouth, eye and finally face," writes Paul de Man in an influential essay on prosopopoeia. The speaking "I" necessarily acquires a face.[45] Glossing de Man, Cynthia Chase argues that "voice is a fiction, arising from the figure of face."[46] Face, in other words, precedes voice. This insight is crucial to autobiography and life writing (no subject without a face), but also to literature more broadly conceived. The face belongs to a series of tropes of subjectivity; a face figures a subject. As we will see, modernist authors, *as* authors, are often identified with their faces. In this sense, *face* acquires qualities of an active verb; the face *facializes*. In the vocabulary developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the face becomes the foundation of a system of signification, an "abstract faciality machine [*machine abstraite de visagéité*]."[47] In modernism, as in the case of Picasso, the search for the face often leads to masking, defacement, or to the isolation of facial features. But it might well be that the face becomes most visible as a form at the point of its modernist vanishing in disfiguration.

The Modernist Face

Two historical texts anchor the theoretical framework of this project. The first is a short but highly influential essay published by German sociologist of modernity Georg Simmel in 1901, "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face." In conjunction with other writing on sociology and aesthetics published between 1901 and 1918, the essay ties Simmel's reflections on the face to his broader theory of modern life. The second is a futurist pamphlet published by British American poet Mina Loy in 1919, titled "Auto-Facial-Construction," an argument for the right to imagine and shape one's own face. While Simmel diagnoses the centrality of the face in modernity, framing it as a socio-aesthetic phenomenon, Loy proposes a range of creative strategies for reclaiming the face. Taken as two poles in a narrative arc that moves from diagnosis of the centrality of the face in modernity to creative appropriation, as well as two poles of a dialectical movement in the archive of this project, these texts provide a historical and conceptual framework for an analysis of the modernist face.

Concerned with a constellation of concepts that included capitalism, sociality, culture, and the senses, Simmel considered the human face a crucial entry point into his assessment of modernity. The modern world, in Simmel's sociology, is primarily visual, and the face is the first object of sight in human interaction.[48] Both material and theoretical, the face is "the geometrical location" of a series of "recognitions." In turn, the visual field has been reorganized on account of new modes of spatial encounter – modern subjects encounter themselves in the urban crowd and face each other on new means of transportation.[49] For Simmel, the face is a form; and a form is a relation between parts and whole. The analysis of the face thus constitutes a formalism, modeled on a formalist theory of society. Importantly, Simmel's sociology converges with European art history and aesthetics: "The universal problem of art is to elucidate the formal elements of things by relating them to one another."[50] As Simmel posits the "intrinsic aesthetic qualities of the face," it is via a formalism borrowed from art history that the face is to be analyzed.[51] Simply put, the face is an aesthetic form.

The aesthetic categories Simmel enlists in his analysis of the face are unity/synthesis and symmetry/balance. The classical category of symmetry acquires special relevance: The face is a symmetric form. Thus, Simmel writes, "As a whole, it [the face] realizes individualization; but it does so in the form of symmetry, which controls the relations among the parts."[52] The face unfolds as a dialectic of form and actualized individuation, which allows for minimalist but eloquent deviation from the principle of symmetry. Simmel writes, "In order to make this unity aesthetically effective, it is essential that the spatial relation among the facial elements be allowed to shift only within narrow limits. For aesthetic effect, a form must embrace its parts and hold them together."[53] Examples of facial shifts include "a curl of the lips, an upturning of the nose, a way of looking, a frown."[54] As we will see throughout this book, these facial "details" – minimalist deviations from the form of the face that nonetheless confirm its unity – become highly eloquent in modernist literature. For Simmel, the categories of the ugly and the repugnant constitute the underside of the symmetric face. Gaping, a variation on the human mouth, registers as an asymmetry of the face (as in excessive laughter). So does staring, a variation on the positioning of the eye. Since symmetry aligns with subjective control, excessive asymmetry becomes a sign of despiritualization, a loss of control. If individuation is actualized visually in the face, and the form of the face is necessarily symmetric, instances of facial asymmetry become exceptional case studies in individuation.

Physiognomy lingers on the margins of Simmel's essay. It is present in the assumption that the face is a totality, within which each feature carries the essence of the whole. Or in the assumption that the face represents the mirror of the soul: "the soul, lying behind the features of the face and yet visible in them." Or that emotions sediment "lasting traces" into "permanent character."[55] In this physiognomic framework, "what we see in a person is what is lasting in that individual, what is drawn on the face, as in a cross-section of geological layers, the history of a person's life and what lies at the foundation of that person's nature as a timeless dowry."[56] These formulations become highly consequential given that Simmel is also the author of "The Stranger," which describes a "social type" that emerges in modernity, the person who does not come today and leave tomorrow, but rather comes today and stays tomorrow – the stranger within the community. As Namwali Serpell's recent *Stranger Faces* argues, "recalcitrant or unruly faces" are often racialized within a tradition that goes back to physiognomy, including elements that resurface in modernist sociology.[57] In this light, it becomes clear that Simmel's work does not signal a departure from physiognomy, but rather a shift toward a revised physiognomy. Important for this revision is Simmel's conclusion to his essay, arguing that the eye in modernity becomes "the interpreter of mere appearance, which knows no going back to any pure intellectuality behind appearance."[58] What we are left with is "appearance" in the flux of modern life; we might project a soul behind the face, but the eye only has access to appearance. The face nonetheless retains its centrality to modern semiotics as the medium of appearance and a surface for a range of fantasies about interiority.

Four tenets travel from a reading of Simmel's essay to the project of this book: The centrality of the face to the thinking of modernity, the "aesthetic" in the "aesthetic significance of the face," defacement as the flipside of the face as form, and the endurance, despite Simmel's qualifications, of physiognomy as a discourse of faciality. Simmel's name also functions as a radiating theoretical reference in the history of modernism this book traces. The sociologist mentored a group of scholars and writers who became modernist theorists of the face. His lectures were attended by Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Béla Balázs, Ernst Bloch, and Rainer Maria Rilke.[59] One crucial node in this intellectual history involves Balázs, who is credited with having articulated the first theory of cinema, a physiognomist modernist account anchored in the innovation of the close-up.[60] Another node involves the work of Kracauer, who developed a modernist notion of surface, with the face as a model.[61]

Bloch wrote a short fragment about a woman without a face, her facelessness a symptom of history's forgetfulness.[62] Benjamin identified the modernist figure of the flaneur as a physiognomist chasing faces in the crowd and he diagnosed photography's reinvention of the face.[63] Finally, Rilke dramatized what many modernist writers imagined as a new vision, with the face as a paradigmatic object: "I am learning how to see . . . I've never been properly aware of how many faces there are."[64] Simmel's "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face" thus functions as a handle on this generation's theoretical interest in the face – an interest that finds a counterpoint in contemporary theory.[65]

The second historical reference point for this project is Mina Loy's pamphlet, "Auto-Facial-Construction," published in 1919.[66] The text was produced in Florence, Italy, as an advertising pamphlet for an ironic method of facial reconstruction. Loy's pamphlet suggests that a reading of the face functions as a key to one's personality. Loy explicitly, if ironically, describes the genealogy of her thought process as coming from "years of specialized interest in physiognomy as an artist."[67] Loy's background was in the visual arts. She was interested in portraiture in particular; many of her drawings and paintings depict faces.[68] Against this background, Loy's pamphlet instructs readers to construct their own faces.[69] The pamphlet calls for an agential recuperation of the face. This call is framed in the language of rights: We have a "right not only to be ourselves but to look like ourselves."[70] Claiming such a right assumes reclaiming "facial destiny" in the name of "facial integrity."

The text posits a distinction between an "original form of the face" and its perversion. In one of her autobiographical writings, written in New York twenty years after "Auto-Facial-Construction," Loy dramatizes the child's discovery of the face: "I was seven years old when I found my particular face." From the beginning, the face the child discovers is something to be read: "[I]ts contour formed that scribble in the air that is a profile." The distance between the "I" and one's face suggests an always already alienated face: "[M]y own face filled me with the instant sympathy one might feel for an exile . . . surprised into unwarranted recognition, I stood as if being mesmerized by a face already held in trace by myself . . . The unreal distance between myself and 'it' disquieted me."[71] In other words, the "original form for the face" is, from one's first encounter with it, very much not one's own. In "Auto-Facial-Construction," Loy nonetheless bemoans the amplified facial alienation that occurs alongside "new interests and activities of modern life." Auto-facial-construction implies a return to a youthful face, but it is clear that such reconstruction is not a

regression. Rather than functioning as a screen for revelation, the face is the medium of ongoing creation.

"Auto-Facial-Construction" is framed as a marketing pamphlet, a pitch for a commercial business, announcing the modernist blurring of the line between art and capitalist enterprise. Loy's project involves a method of self-facialization, the reconstruction of one's face as an aesthetic project. "Auto-Facial-Construction" bridges the popular and the highbrow, and it enlists consumer culture and its standards of beauty. Photography is central to such creative construction (in Loy's novel *Insel*, a literary portrait of a painter, a photograph is projected onto the main character's face).[72] So is "film-face," which enlists cinema and the star system in everyday processes of facialization.[73] So is makeup, a strategy central to the performance of gender and sexuality.

Four consequential theoretical tenets are embedded in Loy's pamphlet and its reverberations across her work: First, the face has a history; *fin de siècle* modernity constitutes a phase in that history. Second, as with Simmel, the face is an aesthetic form. Third, the face is intermedial, emerging at the crossroads of the visual and literary arts. Fourth, modern subjects can reassemble the face into a work of art, bridging the high and the low in its aesthetic framing. At stake is the impossible task of becoming the master of one's "facial destiny." This fourth tenet, auto-facial-construction, reappears cyclically in this book. We will see Mann's *Death in Venice* give Aschenbach a facial makeover, drawing on the tradition of the dandy and the discoveries of the cosmetic arts. We will see Proust endow his character Odette with the ability to invent her own physiognomy, which she designs in relation to her photographic portraits. We will see Stein style her own face using Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. And we will follow Kōbō Abe's protagonist in *The Face of Another* as he is building a mask, which doubles as a face transplant. In this constellation of texts, the modernist face is framed as a creative invention, but it remains a consequential surface for reading.

Of the many varieties of modernism recuperated by the New Modernist Studies, this book is invested in a modernism metonymically represented by Mina Loy.[74] Having moved between London, Munich, Paris, Florence, New York, and Mexico City, Loy's biography bears witness to a transnational mode of modernism.[75] She wrote with multilingual awareness and a strong sense of cultural mixing, which requires attention to its embedding in a modernist racial matrix. She was a writer, visual artist, and an art critic; she created verbal and visual portraits (Gertrude Stein, F. T. Marinetti, James Joyce, Marianne Moore, Carl van Vechten, Nancy

Cunard, Constantin Brancusi).[76] She was attuned to the impact of photography and chronophotography on the literary arts.[77] Her futurist period included meditations on technology, and she created patents for a number of technological innovations. Loy's work brings gender and sexuality to the forefront of an engagement with the face and with modernist canon formation (she was fascinated by Stein and the question of female genius). Adjacent to gender are questions of performativity; Loy was deeply aware of the power of photography – and the photographic pose – in relation to other arts.[78] Fashion was important to Loy as a mode of self-styling in the tradition of Wilde.[79] At the same time, Loy's modernism was attuned to capitalist modernity; she was fluent in marketing and the culture of celebrity.[80] She lived into the post-World War II period, creating a bridge between the high modernist moment and its afterlives.[81] As the new wave of scholarship on Loy attests, her work is forward looking, inviting arcs of relation to contemporary literature.[82] The Coda of this book will suggest that, in many ways, "auto-facial-construction" anticipates what Jia Tolentino calls "Instagram face."[83] In short, Loy's name metonymically announces the kind of modernism – intermedial, international, forward-looking, invested in questions of gender, sexuality, hybridity, and performance – this book aims to describe through the prism of the face.

In the following chapters, I propose an experiment in reading that sees the modernist predicament unfolding in a space between Simmel's and Loy's theories of the face – one diagnosing the aesthetics of the face in modernity, the other proposing to reclaim mastery over it. One of the tasks of the new modernist studies, as Susan Stanford Friedman articulates it, is revision – undertaken in conjunction with the twin task of expanding the modernist archive, both historically and geographically.[84] Friedman writes: "[T]he act of looking again, of defamiliarizing the familiar archive by looking anew through a different lens, asking new questions of 'high modernism': Picasso, Pound, Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, and so forth."[85] Read through the lens of the face, the work of the authors in this book (Mann, Woolf, Proust, Stein, and, in a different key, Abe) is defamiliarized. In the process, these authors might lose a few inches of their pedestal, especially through their association with rudiments of physiognomy, but they regain relevance in the context of new critical conversations.

The archive of this project is that of European and transatlantic literary modernism, which I engage alongside debates in global modernism and comparative literature.[86] The skull at the beginning of Woolf's novel *Orlando* calls for an engagement with the history of colonialism and

inter-imperiality (the British Empire and the Ottoman Empire) – and their racial formations. Mann's character in *Death in Venice* visits an Italian city, but Venice is very much a port linking Europe to the Middle East, and the minor characters the novella sketches slide into racial types. Proust's reliance on physiognomy both mocks and reproduces facial tropes associated with anti-Semitism, itself in relation to the history of colonialism. Picasso's portrait of Stein gives face to genius through a mask that inaugurates the painter's "African period." Finally, through a reading of Abe's 1964 novel *The Face of Another*, Chapter 5 of this book raises questions about the circulation of Western technologies of facial decoding, including physiognomy. If the face functions as text, the chapter asks, what happens to it in translation? Throughout, I build arcs of relation between the chapters while remaining attentive to the cultural geography of each text's conditions of production.[87]

A History of the Present

This book grew out of a reflection on five interrelated contemporary sets of debates, dramatizations of our time's struggle with the face: [T]he face as the site for the technologization of subjectivity, the face as a node of biometric surveillance, the face as a battleground for the politics of race, the face as a screen for the politics of the COVID-19 pandemic, the face as a capitalist commodity and contestations thereof. These ongoing, interrelated debates find a counterpoint in contemporary literature and art – often in a complex, intertextual relation to the modernist archive.

First, the face and the technologization of contemporary subjectivity. We often invoke the fact that, since the emergence and popularization of photography at the end of the nineteenth century, we have increasingly been immersed in a visual culture. Among the images we encounter, the face stands out; there are more images of faces than of any other object. From the *carte de visite* to the portrait, from the chronophotograph to the close-up, and from the mug shot to the selfie – faces are everywhere.[88] Photography produced a regime of visibility anchored in the face.[89] This visibility has been amplified in the digital age. Facebook to FaceTime, digital culture is facialized.[90] We are thought to be our faces more than ever.[91] In a world of emojis, affect is short-circuited as a range of variations on face.[92] There is nothing else we take with us into the metaverse aside from the biometric information of our faces. We are also increasingly subjected to power through our faces. Corporations are amassing a large database of faces, to be used for economic, political, and

social purposes.[93] Instead of a "pandemic of facelessness," a notion propelled by anonymous internet trolling, faces have multiplied.[94] In turn, human agency is more and more a function of interface.[95] This book argues that these developments occur in the long shadow of modernism. We inhabit a new era of what Charles Baudelaire called "the tyranny of the human face."[96] A return to the modernist moment and its own technological anxieties gives us a framework in which to better grapple with contemporary technologies of the face.

Central to this contemporary predicament is the role of race in the representation of the face. Reading the transcript of the grand jury investigation of ex-police officer Darren Wilson's killing of Michael Brown in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri (close to where this book was written), Maryam Monalisa Gharavi observed that Wilson's account was largely "focused on the encounter between their faces."[97] In his highly choreographed testimony, Wilson described a threatening Black face, which he juxtaposed to his own presumably injured face. The murder of Brown, in Wilson's self-serving account, was motivated by the fear inspired by what he framed as a demonic face. "Never has the face been more of a battleground," concludes Gharavi, reading both Wilson's testimony and reactions to it, in the process reminding us that there is nothing straightforward about the descriptions of faces, an everyday practice imbued with racial history and in need of scrutiny.

The question of how the face filters questions of difference, especially racial difference, resurfaced with renewed force in 2020, as the US media reported on the use of facial recognition technologies in policing.[98] Social justice organizations reacted by asking for a ban on these technologies. Evidence of racial bias in facial recognition algorithms came to light.[99] There were reports of instances of facial misidentification. Activists and artists proposed strategies (face painting, reflecting glasses, oversized hats and masks, etc.) to evade face reading.[100] These events raised ethical questions pertaining to the use of "faceprints" in the justice system, the corporate world, and in public spaces. In the context of the contemporary conversation on AI's entanglements with physiognomy, the face has once again been described as a battleground.[101]

Over the last two years, as I worked on this book during the COVID-19 pandemic, what kind of society we have or want to build often seemed anchored in when and how we show our faces. The debate on facial recognition technologies unfolded concomitantly with a debate about the use of medical masks during the pandemic. Masked faces, as the argument went, led to strained social interaction and misrecognition.

Studies reported on children's cognitive difficulties. Depression was linked to facial alienation. In this conversation, being able to read faces and deduce emotional cues from faces was seen as necessary to a healthy life and to a functioning society. And yet, masking was necessary to fight a pandemic. Wearing a mask was seen as the mark of a good citizen. Returning to the legal principle that one should be able to face one's accuser in court, justice was invoked as a question of face.[102] The COVID-19 mask was seen as a sign of either power or loss thereof.[103] The debate rehearsed some of the leitmotifs invoked a few years before, in the debate about the ban on women's face coverings in France.[104] "Wear your face," read a sign circulated as a joke on Facebook, presumably as an alternative to wearing a mask. In response, many masks used images of faces. Demonstrations erupted on both sides of the mask divide, confirming the face as a node of social and political meaning making.[105]

Finally, this book grew out of a contemporary preoccupation with the face as commodity. "Face capital" functions as a version of sexual capital.[106] The contemporary beauty industry is an extremely profitable business – and the face is its privileged object. "Girls with [pretty] faces" was for a while a viral thread on Twitter (now X), foregrounding the use of the face as a means of amassing followers. The proliferation of online personas has seen a renewed investment in cosmetics; makeup tutorials (literally faces on a screen) are some of the most popular videos on YouTube and TikTok. During the COVID pandemic, "Zoom faces" became imbued with class status.[107] Plastic surgery has seen a "Zoom boom" – an expansion of the desire for facial surgery, across class difference. Although there is a growing market for men, women and girls remain the primary target of this industry, which capitalizes on their interpellation into a culture of the face.[108] Age, as it intersects gender and sexuality, often remains the stake of "auto-facial-construction" through a range of technologies.[109] At the same time, multiple strategies of contestation attempt to counter this industry's effects. They include the hacking of some of the same media that reproduce contemporary facial aesthetics.[110] Or the exposure of cases of abuse.[111]

Contemporary literature participates, comments on, and is shaped by these five interrelated debates on the face. As Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges propose, contemporary culture often returns to modernism to "consider the contemporary status of problems that have been seen as constitutive of modernism."[112] The face is such a "problem," a preoccupation at the heart of modernism that returns in the contemporary moment, often carrying its modernist baggage. Consider the first book

in "The Face" series published by the New York-based small publishing house Restless Books: Ruth Ozeki's *The Face: A Time Code* (2016).[113] As a writing experiment, Ozeki tries an exercise borrowed from art history: Sit in front of a mirror, look at your own face as if it were a painting, and write. The resulting self-portrait becomes a meditation on Ozeki's family and childhood. A short paragraph written by Jorge Luis Borges serves as a prompt for "The Face" series: "As the years go by, [the writer] peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face."[114] In her telling, Ozeki's face bears witness to a narrative about coming to writing against the background of a mixed-race childhood legible to others as a facial configuration ("What are you?" people repeatedly ask young Ozeki as they try to decipher her face). The subtitle of the book, "A Time Code," functions as a reminder of the face as code – and a long genealogy of attempts to decode meaning presumed to be embedded in the face. While the mirror functions as a technology for such experiments, today we encounter our faces on a range of mirroring screens.

Within contemporary literature, as is the case with Ozeki, it is often the genre of autobiography that takes up the face. An important node in this literature sees autobiography engaging questions of disability. Lucy Grealy's celebrated *Autobiography of a Face* (1994) consequentially framed disability as a question of face, revealing the imbrication of form and deformity. "Everything led to it," Grealy writes, "everything receded from it – my face as personal vanishing point."[115] Sarah Ruhl's recent *Smile: The Story of a Face* (2021) tells a similar autobiographical story about an asymmetric face.[116] When contemporary fiction turns to the face, it often does so through a faux autobiographical, first-person narrative. Jennifer Eagan's *Look at Me* (2001) stands out, a novel about the aftermath of an accident that destroys the face of a model, who subsequently discovers the centrality of the face to social and economic life in capitalism.[117] In these instances, contemporary literature registers shifts and turns in the recent history of the face, often in an intertextual relation, thematic and formal, to the modernist literature framed by this project. Writers and artists often plot a dialogue with modernist predecessors on account of a sense of selective affinity with their theorization of the face. As the editors of *The Contemporaneity of Modernism* argue, "modernism occupies a crucial role in the general effort to critically engage with our present as history."[118] In an effort to capture this dynamic, each of the chapters that follow builds an arc of relation between a modernist and a contemporary artwork.

The Chapters

What is the archive of the face as an object of study? An intermedial, multidimensional, technologized object, the face can only be studied across disciplines. Simmel theorizes the face from within debates in sociology; so does Erving Goffman.[119] Michael Taussig takes on the face – and defacement – within anthropology.[120] In psychology, the work of Silvan Tompkins and Paul Ekman remains important to an understanding of the face as the site of affect and the negotiation of what Rei Terada calls the "death of the expressive subject."[121] Within political science, Jenny Edkins has documented the political uses of the face.[122] In turn, face transplants and prosopagnosia (face blindness) are studied at the intersection of the humanities and the history of science.[123] The distribution of this scholarship across the disciplines functions as a reminder of the consequences of the fragmentation of modern knowledge, including knowledge pertaining to everyday human phenomena and activities. Ongoing calls for interdisciplinarity attempt to overcome this fragmentation, but also risk becoming a cyclical, instrumentalized leitmotif in the politics of contemporary academic institutions.

Two nodes of interdisciplinarity are particularly important to this project. The first sees the convergence of literature and philosophy in the framing of the face. The name of Emmanuel Levinas is tied to an influential concept of face as the mode of appearance of the other.[124] Following Levinas, ethics is an openness toward the face of the other. Modeled after the Hebrew *panim*, for Levinas, the face of the other comes before the subject and constitutes the subject's ethical horizon. A generation of theorists have placed the face within a conceptual constellation that includes appearance, presence, and otherness.[125] Setting the tone for a post-Levinasian reflection on the face, Deleuze and Guattari questioned the autonomy of the face, framing it as the site of technological and ideological production. "The face is not a universal," they countered.[126] Deleuze and Guattari coined the terms *faciality* (*visagéité*) and *facialization* (*visagéification*) to describe a modern mode of subjectivization anchored in an all-encompassing "faciality machine." Their conclusion: "[T]he signifier is facialized."[127] The possibility of facial ethics is placated by Deleuze and Guattari with "the face, what a horror [*visage, quelle horreur*]."[128] The framework developed by Deleuze and Guattari, equally influential, has been deployed in recent years to ask questions about "the epoch of the face" and the Anthropocene,[129] and about the facialization of digital cultures.[130] The chapters that follow invoke these philosophical reflections

on the face while reestablishing their modernist literary precedent: Deleuze and Guattari developed their notion of faciality reading Proust.

The second node of interdisciplinarity the archive of this book foregrounds is that between literature and visual culture. Werth has written a field-defining essay on the place of the face in modernity and modern art.[131] Jessica's Helfand's *Face: A Visual Odyssey* provides a superb overview of the arts of the face.[132] Hans Belting's *Face and Mask* accounts for the use of the recurrent trope of the mask in the visual history of the face.[133] There is an extensive scholarship on the genre of the portrait, in the tradition of David Piper's *The English Face*.[134] Zilio's *Faceworld: The Face in the Twenty-First Century* historicizes the photographic portrait, adding to a body of scholarship initiated by Tom Gunning. The cinematic close-up as a technique of facialization has returned in recent years in Paul Coates's *Screening the Face* and Noa Steimatsky's *The Face on Film*, themselves in dialogue with foundational work on the close-up by Roland Barthes, Jacques Aumont, and Mary Ann Doane.[135] Finally, a growing body of scholarship – by Massimo Leone, Abraham Geil, and Tomáš Jirsa – thinks through the tribulations of the digital face.[136] This book builds a dialogue with this extensive scholarship in an effort to isolate the specificity of the contribution modernist literature has made to the framing of what is, essentially, an intermedial face. In this spirit, the book does not include illustrations, a choice further explained in Chapter 4. The focus on literary modernism cannot but enlist visual images of faces – many literary faces are visual themselves – but the challenge here is to frame the literary value of thinking about the face in modernism.

This project's most immediate contribution is to modernist studies. The story of the modern literary face can be traced from an enduring faith in the reading of faces to their effacement, followed by a cyclical return of the face. The scholarly literature in modernist studies foregrounds the constructedness of the face (Hogler Pausch) and various strategies of effacement (Kamila Pawlikowska).[137] Maurizia Boscagli and Enda Duffy's essay, "Joyce's Face," offered an early assessment of the modernist culture of celebrity.[138] Rochelle Rives's recent *The New Physiognomy: Face, Form, and Modern Expression* is closest to the project of this book, in its exploration of questions of form and affect in relation to the faciality of Anglophone modernism.[139] Through a series of interconnected close readings, I build a dialogue with this important scholarship, as well as work on individual modernist authors in each chapter. Methodologically, the project implicitly asks what mode of close reading (an interpretative practice with a modernist pedigree) can best frame the face as an object of analysis.[140]

Chapter 1, "Aschenbach's Makeover: Physiognomic Faces in *Death in Venice*," analyzes Thomas Mann's engagement with physiognomic culture in his 1912 novella. The aesthetics of the face staged by Mann conjure a physiognomic hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy, one finds the character of Tadzio portrayed as a neoclassical sculpture. The mechanism for this projection is ekphrasis. At the bottom of the hierarchy, Mann's novella constructs a series of racialized minor characters identified as facial types. The text nonetheless destabilizes this hierarchy through the figure of the barber, who gives Aschenbach a consequential makeover – a version of Loy's "auto-facial-construction," in this case relying on makeup. The chapter places the discussion of Tadzio's "perfect face" in relation to the recent reassessment of Luchino Visconti's cinematic adaptation of Mann's text in Kristina Lindström and Kristian Petri's documentary, *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World* (2021). The conclusion: The veneration of a youthful, perfect face comes at a cost.

Chapter 2, "A Personal Style of Face: Proust and the Physiognomy of Women," traces the development of the character of Odette in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. If in "Swann in Love" Odette functions as an ekphrastic projection of Swann's desire (a Botticelli fresco), in "At Mme Swann's" she reclaims her face, creating a "new, personal style of face."[141] The text describes a process of facialization as a mode of self-invention, with the help of photography. Thus reinvented, Odette is the only character in the novel who does not age, providing a narrative continuity for the arc of the novel. A reading of the concluding scene in which a gallery of aged characters appear as masks of their younger selves foregrounds Proust's preoccupation with time and memory. The paradigmatic object of memory retrieval is the face.

Doubling as a theorist of literary character, Virginia Woolf was invested in the tribulations of the modern face, which she approached through the twin genres of portraiture and biography. Chapter 3, "The Biography of a Face: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," revolves around Woolf's staging of the modernist face in her novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). Woolf's novel registers a change in the history of the physiognomic face in modernity – from Orlando's memorable face-to-face with Queen Elizabeth in the early modern period to her search for meaning in the faces around her in London in 1928. At the same time, Woolf's novel functions as a portrait of Vita Sackville-West, introducing a queer woman into the gallery of memorable historical characters, which Woolf visualized in relation to the all-male National Portrait Gallery in London. Through an engagement with Paul Mpagi Sepuya's recent photographic reflections on *Orlando*,

developed as a response to the racialized opening of the novel, the chapter frames modernist faciality's mediation by racial difference.

Chapter 4, "The Face of a Genius: Picasso, Stein, and the Struggle with Facial Form," revists the collaboration between Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso in the making of the 1906 portrait of Stein as a struggle over the modernist representation of the face. Having started the portrait with the sitter in front of him, Picasso famously erased Stein's likeness and subsequently replaced it with a mask. Stein self-styled herself as an author and celebrity using Picasso's portrait as a prop – as if it were a photograph. In turn, Stein's literary portraits of Picasso attest to a desire for a radical erasure of the face, from memory and representation alike. The face nonetheless returns in the invocation of the proper name Picasso and through the intermedial dimensions of Stein's portraiture writing. The chapter concludes by revisiting Nella Larsen's use of the mask, specifically as the mask of whiteness, in her novel *Passing* (1929), a consequential rewriting of Stein's and Picasso's experimentation with the racial dynamics of the mask.

Chapter 5, "Translated Faces: Kōbō Abe's *The Face of Another*," extends the analysis of the modernist face to Abe's 1964 novel, which it considers a text of global modernism. The novel is framed by the conventions of science fiction: The protagonist, a Japanese scientist, has an accident that destroys his face. Studying physiognomic manuals that draw on both Western and Japanese traditions of physiognomy, he builds a new face, which takes the form of an all-powerful mask. This mask acquires a life of its own, prompting philosophical speculation on facial alienation and the ethics of the face. The chapter traces a dialogue between Abe's novel and Kōjin Karatani's *Origins of Japanese Literature* (1980) on the "invention" of the face in Japanese literature. For both novelist and theorist, literature offers an infrastructure for the global travels of the face as a system of signification.

The book's coda, "Instagram Face," draws out the implications of modernist physiognomy for our contemporary moment. As we move from nineteenth-century physiognomy to modernist physiognomy, we encounter more minimalist descriptions of faces – facial sketches, outlines. We encounter faces reduced to a minimalist form. This form is taken up by contemporary facial recognition technologies. Across the scholarly literature on facial recognition technologies, there is a growing awareness of bias: Technology is biased because training sets are biased. As Cathy O'Neil writes, "data embeds the dark past."[142] This book will have aimed to historicize a fragment of the past: Algorithmic data embeds the long

history of the face, including elements of modernist physiognomy. At the conclusion of this book, the Coda frames its contribution to the call issued by Soshana Zuboff in *Surveillance Capitalism*: "If the digital future is to be our home, then it is we who must make it so."[143]

The Face and Its Secret

Writing in the wake of the modernist moment, Antonin Artaud – writer, painter, and actor – staged the struggle over the framing of the face in a poem titled "The Human Face" (1947), written for the opening of his *Portraits and Drawings* exhibit.[144] The poem includes a formulation reminiscent of Stein's invocation of Picasso at the beginning of this introduction:

> For thousands and thousands of years indeed,
> the human face has talked
> and breathed
> and one is under the impression still
> that it has not begun to
> say what it is and what it knows.

The face, as old as the world, has "spoken," and yet it has not revealed what it knows. The face is, in fact, still in search of a form: "the human visage / hasn't yet found *the* face," a formulation facilitated by the two words for *face* in many languages (visage/face).[145] The poem's speaker is posing as a visual artist, a portraitist (the images in *Portraits and Drawings* include both visual and textual elements). He needs to remember to attach a mouth or a nose or eyes to a face defamiliarized beyond recognition. In a familiar move, the artist taking on the challenge of the human face has to do away with art – its conventions – and remain loyal only to "the sincerity and spontaneity of the stroke." Ultimately, however, the face retains its secret. But Artaud's poem functions as a reminder that the face constitutes nothing less than "the theater of a war" – a premise many modernists shared.[146]