Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency: Ideology and Fiction. By Evelyn Cobley. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 352 pp. $65.00 cloth.

Evelyn Cobley's *Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency: Ideology and Fiction* opens with an anecdote about a visit to Dachau, signaling that her analysis of literature and the discourse of efficiency will explore the darker ramifications of a scientifically ordered society. Cobley investigates how British literary modernism responded to a triumphant ideology of efficiency that originated in American business practices. With this work Cobley joins recent critics like Donald J. Childs, Sharon Corwin, and Suzanne Raitt in their explorations of efficiency, eugenics, and social engineering. Cobley succeeds in her project, presenting a compelling case for the necessity of understanding efficiency discourse. However, since the historical background of her work is British, American, and German, and covers roughly 1850-1950, her decision to analyze only English modernist texts is not self-evident, as she acknowledges in her introduction. Cobley also gives scant attention to the efficiencies of literary forms—a surprising omission given the links between industrial and modernist production—focusing instead on the ideas and societal forces that inform her chosen texts. Nevertheless, these lapses do not undermine her analysis. Through ideological mappings of the texts, theoretically informed by Weber, Foucault, Althusser, and especially Marshall Berman, she substantiates efficiency as a societal, but not necessarily aesthetic, concern.

Cobley asserts, "the everyday investment in efficiency as a rational means for achieving aims we deem desirable also carries with it risks that are too often disavowed" (3). We hail the time-saving developments in technology and the social sphere, even as we recognize "how efficiency is taking over our lives" (4). This disconnect is the result of efficiency's triumph as a way of life: "[c]onceived as an ideology, efficiency can be seen to be 'working by itself'; it is an 'obviousness' that deserves to be analyzed and deconstructed" (5). In response, her work "concentrates on the ideological implications of our cultural commitment to efficiency by focusing on its most salient features in both socio-economic and literary registers" (5). By recognizing the early responses to an efficient society, Cobley argues, we can demystify our own relationship to it.

Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency is divided into two parts. The first, "The Culture of Efficiency in Society," traces the discourse of efficiency from its birth in the Victorian industrial revolution (specifically

London's Great Exhibition of 1851) to its full emergence in the Ford Motor Company's assembly lines, F. W. Taylor's "ef.ciency expert" and systemic ordering of labor time, Auschwitz's twisted logic of efficient murder, and the planned homogenization of American suburbia.

One of the most important of Cobley's achievements is the decoupling of Fordism from Taylorism. Fused in the popular imagination, the two concepts actually differ in their priorities for maximizing efficiency. Henry Ford, having pioneered the assembly line process for his Detroit Model T factory, became increasingly enamored of efficiency for its own sake. For Ford, efficiency could be measured in total output: the less waste generated, the more cars produced. The price paid for this efficiency was an acceleration of the worker's alienation that Marx had charted a generation earlier, as auto workers in Detroit became nearly indistinguishable from the machines they operated. Ford wanted to make his Model Ts cheap so that everyone could afford them, and believed that to do so he had to employ violent means to suppress resistance to his workplace methods, hiring thugs to break strikes and establishing a private surveillance network to monitor the moral uprightness of his workers.

F. W. Taylor, on the other hand, concocted a utopian means for alleviating the class conflict he saw as contributing to workplace wastefulness, and Cobley sees this as a more insidious application of enforced efficiency. A self-described progressive, he recognized that a factory "is not a machine but a social space" (44), and argued that if an equilibrium could be struck between capital and labor, the economic payoff would be beneficial for all. His solution to workplace conflict was the "efficiency expert," usually a college-educated young man with a stopwatch, who designed systems intended to ensure optimal equilibrium between management and workers. Taylor replaced Ford's thugs and spies with a seemingly neutral system. "Whereas Ford's assembly line conjures up images of workers oppressed by external forces, Taylor's principles of management compel human beings to reify their consciousness by internalizing the ideology of efficiency" (39). Taylor stressed the importance of *management* as opposed to engineering, but failed to take into account the imbalance of power in any labor environment. The result was the linking of his name to dehumanizing images of assembly-line production (and, like Ford, an unflattering appearance in John Dos Passos's novel *The Big Money*).

Cobley's distinction between Ford and Taylor serves her well as she enters into the second part of her work, "The Culture of Efficiency in Fiction," in which she traces the response of canonical modernist texts to efficiency as an ideology. By distinguishing Fordism from Taylorism she unearths not only conventional anxieties concerning the repressive nature of efficiency, but more interestingly its prevalence as an internalized ideology: even the "alternative social models remain complicit" with capitalism and

efficiency (206). Most of the writers she analyzes are openly hostile to the ideology of efficiency; Cobley chooses George Orwell, E. M. Forster, Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley to illustrate her claim that what most moderns

> deplore[d] above all is the loss of a nourishing inner life, the failure of meaningful personal relationships, the separation [of humanity] from nature, and the decline in the appreciation of cultural traditions. Modern life seemed to most of the authors and their characters to be superficial, utilitarian, materialistic, and rootless. (15)

However, Cobley complicates the field by demonstrating how Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells actually reacted positively to efficiency discourse, even supporting eugenicist theories of social engineering. (Joseph Conrad responded with characteristic ambivalence.)

While most moderns reacted against a Fordist ideology, Cobley argues that their alternatives often demonstrate the internalization of Taylorist systematizing. In a particularly strong chapter on *Howards End*, Cobley illustrates how the protagonist, Margaret's, liberal-humanist injunction to "only connect" is as dependent upon "the artificial integration of resistant fragments" as is the mechanization that Forster more aggressively symbolizes with the automobile (248). Huxley dramatizes this dilemma through *Brave New World*, in which the obvious dread of a Hobbesian society run like a Ford factory is complicated by the author's suspicions of the Rousseau-inspired resistance to such a society. The latter is equally predicated on ideological homogenization and "install[ing] disciplinary mechanisms designed to help subjects internalize their submission to the system" (305). Thus Cobley charts the predictable reaction to efficient systems in literary texts, but also shows how deeply informed by efficiency even the posed alternatives are.

Cobley states in her Introduction that she will not be "introducing readers to rediscovered illustrative material," but rather engaging with the logic of efficiency in the modernist canon (8). This is a sound strategy for proving the prevalence of efficiency in early twentieth-century thought. Still, her eight authors are all male, and gender is rarely addressed in her book. This is not to suggest that she include female authors for the sake of balance, but the prevalence of the concern with efficiency amongst male authors is an opportunity for a discussion of gender's role in efficiency. Critics will surely soon use her work to explore other sites of engagement with efficiency.

Possibly the greatest strength of *Modernism and the Culture of Efficiency* is its urgent topicality. Efficiency now permeates our lives—not just our workday—as portable devices keep us wired to a worldwide system

that maximizes the speed and breadth with which we absorb data, network, and socialize. As Nicholas Carr argues in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to our Brains* (Norton, 2011), recent technologies change not only our behavior, but also our brain function, evidence of Taylorism's triumph. Cobley's clear writing makes her work accessible to undergraduates, born into a web-dependent world, who would benefit greatly from the defamiliarizing of efficiency.

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