



Spirals: The Whirled Image in Twentieth-Century Literature and Art (Modernist Latitudes)

Nico Israel

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In this elegantly written and beautifully illustrated book, Nico Israel reveals how spirals are at the heart of the most significant literature and visual art of the twentieth century. Juxtaposing the work of writers and artists—including W. B. Yeats and Vladimir Tatlin, James Joyce and Marcel Duchamp, and Samuel Beckett and Robert Smithson—he argues that spirals provide a crucial frame for understanding the mutual involvement of modernity, history, and geopolitics, complicating the spatio-temporal logic of literary and artistic genres and of scholarly disciplines.

The book takes the spiral not only as its topic but as its method. Drawing on the writings of Walter Benjamin and Alain Badiou, Israel theorizes a way of reading spirals, responding to their dual-directionality as well as their affective power. The sensations associated with spirals—flying, falling, drowning, being smothered—reflect the anxieties of limits tested or breached, and Israel charts these limits as they widen from the local to the global and recoil back. Chapters mix literary and art history to explore 'pataphysics, Futurism, Vorticism, Dada and Surrealism, "Concentrisme," minimalism, and entropic earth art; a coda considers the work of novelist W. G. Sebald and contemporary artist William Kentridge. In *Spirals*, Israel offers a refreshingly original approach to the history of modernism and its aftermaths, one that gives modernist studies, comparative literature, and art criticism an important new spin.

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