

The New Modernist Studies

Expanding Modernism

IN OUR INTRODUCTION TO *BAD MODERNISMS*, WE TRACED THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW MODERNIST STUDIES, WHICH WAS BORN ON OR

about 1999 with the invention of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) and its annual conferences; with the provision of exciting new forums for exchange in the journals *Modernism/Modernity* and (later) *Modernist Cultures*; and with the publication of books, anthologies, and articles that took modernist scholarship in new methodological directions. When we offered that survey, one of our principal interests was to situate these events in a longer critical history of modernism in the arts. In the present report, we want to attend more closely to one or two recent developments that may be suggestive about the present and the immediate future of the study of modernist literature. Part of the empirical, though certainly far from scientific, basis of our considerations lies in our recent service on the MSA Book Prize committee (Walkowitz in 2005, Mao in 2006), through which we became acquainted with dozens of recent contributions to the field.

Were one seeking a single word to sum up transformations in modernist literary scholarship over the past decade or two, one could do worse than light on *expansion*. In its expansive tendency, the field is hardly unique: all period-centered areas of literary scholarship have broadened in scope, and this in what we might think of as temporal, spatial, and vertical directions. As scholars demonstrate the fertility of questioning rigid temporal delimitations, periods seem inevitably to get bigger (one might think of “the long eighteenth century” or “the age of empire”). Meanwhile, interrogations of the politics, historical validity, and aesthetic value of exclusive focus on the literatures of Europe and North America have spurred the study (in the North American academy) of texts produced in other quarters of the world or by hitherto little-recognized enclaves in the privileged areas. In addition to these temporal and spatial expansions, there has been what we are calling here a vertical one, in which once

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quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; in which canons have been critiqued and reconfigured; in which works by members of marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception.

Temporal expansion has certainly been important in the study of literary modernism: the purview of modernist scholarship now encompasses, sometimes tendentiously but often illuminatingly, artifacts from the middle of the nineteenth century and the years after the middle of the twentieth as well as works from the core period of about 1890 to 1945. But the spatial and vertical expansions have been more momentous. Spatial broadening has meant not only that scholars now attend to works produced in, say, Asia and Australia but also that they investigate complex intellectual and economic transactions among, for example, Europe, Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean. In concert with the temporal enlargement, this spatial one has led to an extremely fruitful rethinking of relations among the key terms *modernism*, *modernization*, and *modernity*. Meanwhile, the vertical reconfiguration exerts a kind or degree of disruptive force on modernist studies that it may not on any other period-based field, since for many years modernism was understood as, precisely, a movement by and for a certain kind of high (cultured mandarins) as against a certain kind of low (the masses, variously regarded as duped by the “culture industry,” admirably free of elitist self-absorption, or simply awaiting the education that would make the community of cognoscenti a universal one).

To be sure, these three strands of expansion—temporal, spatial, and vertical—often overlap. Scholars argue that modernism reveals itself to be a more global practice once we extend the historical period to the late twentieth century or even as far back as the

early seventeenth. Those who believe that getting to know a work of literature means becoming acquainted with its editions and translations will more readily conceive of it as belonging to more than one moment and more than one place. Literary historians are revealing how attention to continuities or discontinuities of time and space transform our conceptions of what counts as literary production and of the actors, collaborators, and media involved in it. In the sections that follow, we focus on two developments in the study of modernist literature, one associated preeminently with the spatial axis of change, the other with the vertical, but it should be clear that these developments by their nature do not restrict themselves to a single axis.

The two currents we have chosen to spotlight are by no means to be understood as *the* future of the field. On the contrary, questions pertaining to literary form, intraliterary influence, narratology, affect, gender, sexuality, racial dynamics, psychoanalysis, science, and more continue to propel important scholarly endeavors, and we might reasonably have chosen other directions to dwell on here. We also want to make clear, especially for the benefit of readers outside the field, that the two developments considered here are by no means equal in scale or in recognition by modernist scholars. The increasing emphasis on transnational exchange is widely seen as crucially transformative and will certainly remain so for many years, whereas the concentration of work around mass media rhetorics pertains to a smaller body of publication, has been little remarked so far, and may turn out to be not the leading edge of a major trend but only a momentary convergence—albeit a highly instructive one—of individual scholarly projects.

The Transnational Turn

There can be no doubt that modernist studies is undergoing a transnational turn. This has produced at least three kinds of new work

in the field: scholarship that widens the modernist archive by arguing for the inclusion of a variety of alternative traditions (Brooker and Thacker; Chang; Doyle and Winkiel, “Global Horizons”; Friedman, “Periodizing”; Gaonkar; Joshi); scholarship that argues for the centrality of transnational circulation and translation in the production of modernist art (Edwards; Hayot, “Modernism’s Chinas”; Lewis, *Modernism*; Puchner; Santos; Schoenbach; Yao); and scholarship that examines how modernists responded to imperialism, engaged in projects of anticolonialism, and designed new models of transnational community (Begam and Moses; Berman, *Modernism*; Boehmer; Booth and Rigby; Brown; Cuddy-Keane; Gikandi; Pollard; Ramazani, “Modernist Bricolage”; Walkowitz).

Of course, it is not new to associate modernism with the milieu of “exiles and émigrés,” to recall the title of Terry Eagleton’s influential book from 1970. But while scholars working today under the umbrella of transnational modernism share the antiparochialism of an earlier scholarly tradition, they veer away from the old international modernism in several notable ways. For one thing, their work often aims to make modernism less Eurocentric by including or focusing on literary production outside Western Europe and the United States. For another, it engages with postcolonial theory and concerns itself with the interrelation of cultural, political, and economic transactions. And it emphasizes a variety of affiliations within and across national spaces rather than, as Jahan Ramazani puts it, “an ambient universe of denationalized, deracialized forms and discourses” (“Transnational Poetics” 350).

Many examples of the diversification of modernism’s places can be found in the September 2006 special issue of *Modernism/Modernity*, entitled *Modernism and Transnationalisms*; in the anthology *Crowds* (Schnapp and Tiews), which includes Sanskrit, Japanese, Hebrew, Chinese, and Hungarian (along

with English, Italian, French, and German) in its semantic histories of the modern crowd; and in Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s collection *Geomodernisms*, where modernist art is culled from Brazil, Lebanon, India, and Taiwan as well as the townships of Dublin and Native American communities in the United States. These volumes globalize modernism both by identifying new local strains in parts of the world not always associated with modernist production and by situating well-known modernist artifacts in a broader transnational past. This past is the primary subject of Doyle’s own *Geomodernisms* essay, which argues that the “key English-language vocabularies of Atlantic modernity” have their origin in the rhetoric of the English Civil War and the liberty narratives of the New World (“Liberty” 51). Situating Nella Larsen’s early-twentieth-century writing in a long “Atlantic story” that connects the modernism of Harlem to earlier political writing in New England, Britain, Africa, and the Caribbean (64), Doyle extends the time and place of modernism’s prehistory while holding the main narrative of modernism to familiar parameters. Her “Atlantic modernity” reaches back to the 1640s, but the literary production that forms the major analytic object of her essay comes from Larsen, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, Claude McKay, and other anglophone writers of the early twentieth century.

Doyle’s long genealogy may be contrasted with Susan Stanford Friedman’s emphasis on modernism’s ongoing emergence—her view that modernism’s spaces can be expanded properly only if we extend its temporality farther forward. In the opening essay of the special issue *Modernism and Transnationalisms*, Friedman asserts wittily that “declaring the end of modernism by 1950 is like trying to hear one hand clapping” and calls for the Modernist Studies Association “to expand the horizons of time” (“Periodizing” 427, 439). Her recent essays, in both *Geomodernisms* and *Modernism/Modernity*, have deployed a

strategy she calls “cultural parataxis,” which has involved pairing late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literary texts from Britain with later texts from India and the Sudan. Friedman regards E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924) and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), to take one such pairing, “each as a modernist text in its own right, reflecting the modernity of its time and place, as well as the textual and political unconscious of its distinctive geomodernism” (“Paranoia” 246–47).

Some critics now speak of postcolonial literature as a form of modernist literature, whereas others have been eager to hold the two traditions apart. With Friedman, Ramazani describes late-twentieth-century writers as modernists, though he distinguishes between “Euromodernists” and “postcolonial poets” who articulate “a cross-culturalism still more plural and polyphonic than Euromodernism” (“Modernist Bricolage” 449). By contrast, Urmila Seshagiri dates postcolonial literature from the death of modernist aesthetics: in her eloquent “Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix,” she analyzes Jean Rhys’s 1934 *Voyage in the Dark* as a telling “fulcrum between experimental modernism and postcolonial literature” (489). Likewise, Simon Gikandi sees postcolonial literature as one of modernism’s heirs. He argues “that it was primarily—I am tempted to say solely—in the language and structure of modernism that a postcolonial experience came to be articulated and imagined in literary form” (420). Gikandi’s contention may not sit comfortably with those who define postcolonial literature by its independence from European political and cultural projects, as he himself acknowledges (421), but it complements arguments such as Friedman’s and Eric Hayot’s, which have emphasized the complex interrelation between so-called European and non-European literary production.

In a special issue of the journal *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Hayot presents a two-pronged attack on the notion

that modernism began in the West, arguing first that “at the so-called origin of European modernism, the foreign has already inserted itself” and second that “it ought to be possible to reconceive a definition of modernism itself that . . . would consider the entire global output that has occurred under the name ‘modernism.’” This consideration, Hayot argues, “would permit an understanding of ‘modernism’ from a much larger historical and cultural perspective” (“Bertrand Russell’s Chinese Eyes” 131). Making room both for the expansion of modernism’s locations and for the recalculation of European modernism’s Europeanness, Hayot’s work is part of a rich seam of scholarship that has focused on what he has called “modernisms’ Chinas”—on how Anglo-American modernists “took China as the national or cultural ground for their aesthetic labor” and how artists in China created modernist traditions of their own (“Modernisms’ Chinas” 3; see also Chang; Hayot, *Chinese Dreams*; Laurence).

Other challenges to reifications of the divide between European modernism and literary production originating beyond Europe appear in Nicholas Brown’s *Utopian Generations*, Charles Pollard’s *New World Modernisms*, and Jessica Berman’s work on “comparative colonialisms.” Brown argues vigorously that “every discussion that isolates a ‘modernist tradition’ or an ‘African tradition’ . . . carries with it an inherent falseness” (3), while Pollard sees a dynamic exchange between fields: “as Caribbean writers have transformed the methods of modernism, modernism itself has become a more discrepant cosmopolitan literary movement” (9). Berman, for her part, offers an innovative twist on the comparative model, bringing modernism and postcolonial literature together by analyzing the intellectual encounter between two colonial subjects, James Joyce and Mulk Raj Anand. Instead of choosing writers from different generations, Berman treats the Irish Joyce and the Indian Anand, both of whom

published important works in the 1920s and 1930s, as central players in a modernist anti-colonial tradition.

Scholars are understandably concerned that the globalization of modernism will involve the erasure of countertraditions or the folding of those countertraditions into a normative Anglo-American model. Doyle and Winkiel articulate this concern at some length in the introduction to their volume, but they also offer helpful replies in later essays. In “Transnational History at Our Backs,” Doyle points out that transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, that it has not simply or recently replaced national models of literary culture. Rather, she argues, transnational cultures, including the Atlantic transnationalism that began in the sixteenth century, have helped generate the imaginary construction of the nation (532–33). For her part, Winkiel aims for a “manner of reading transnationally” that brings local histories together while emphasizing and exposing their “gaps and contradictions” (508). Winkiel considers as an example the complex placements of Nancy Cunard’s 1935 anthology *Negro*, which was produced transnationally (in Paris, London, and New York), which assembled contributors from the African and African American diaspora, and which used the anthology form to create a discontinuous transnational collage (526).

Winkiel’s analysis of Cunard’s anthology is not the only work to offer a model for thinking about twentieth-century literary texts that operated on both a local and a transnational scale. Her analysis builds on Brent Hayes Edwards’s *Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, which presents the Harlem Renaissance as a transnational movement, “molded through attempts to appropriate and transform the discourses of internationalism” (3). *The Practice of Diaspora* does not have an entry for *modernism* in its index, but it makes a major contribution to the field by presenting an elegant solution to the tension

between recognizing local movements and drawing connections across borders. Edwards proposes that internationalism “necessarily involves a process of linking or connecting across gaps,” because transnational solidarities need national discrepancies (11). Gaps and differences, he asserts, provide the friction that animates art (15).

Our own field of expertise is anglophone modernism, and for that reason much of the work we have discussed here reflects changes in scholarship on English-language literature. But it must be said that one of the key recent developments in anglophone modernist studies has been a greater acknowledgment of the role of translation and multilingual circulation in the development of national and micronational literary histories. For example, Irene Ramalho Santos has called for the inclusion of the Portuguese modernist Fernando Pessoa (who was educated in South African English-language schools, felt himself deeply influenced by literature in English, and sometimes wrote in English) in the canon of Anglo-American literature, arguing that we need to reorganize the intellectual divisions in modernist studies from nation- and language-based traditions to categories such as Atlantic modernism. In *Atlantic Poets*, she cautions that comparative work needs to be careful not to intensify the separations between distinct traditions: “The very disciplines that recently emerged for building bridges and establishing comparisons among literatures continue, in general, to assume that such bridges and comparisons occur between integral, preconstituted entities” (4). On the contrary, Santos insists, “the heteroreferentiality of national literatures and cultures constitutes their original proper mode” (4–5).

Martin Puchner makes a similar point about original multilingualism, arguing in *Poetry of the Revolution* that the *Communist Manifesto*, composed in German but first published in England and translated quickly into many other languages, was designed to be a

work of world literature. He then undertakes a global analysis of modernist art that pivots on the production, translation, and circulation of the *Communist Manifesto* and its influence on art manifestos throughout the world. Other recent scholarship also follows the migration of modernist art across national borders and argues for the significance of translation to modernist production. In “Le Pragmatisme,” Lisi Schoenbach looks at the social and state institutions that enabled transactions between American and French versions of pragmatism; Pericles Lewis, reading Woolf reading Marcel Proust, argues that the influence of nonanglophone precursors on British modernism has been underestimated (“Proust”).¹

Scholarship such as Edwards’s, Santos’s, Puchner’s, Schoenbach’s, and Lewis’s should change the way we talk about Anglo-American modernism. It asks us to consider how early-twentieth-century texts circulated in the world and how this dissemination affected modernist production; it suggests that even those of us who think of ourselves as scholars of British or United States modernism can no longer exclude nonanglophone works from our teaching and research. This point has been made not only by specialists in modernism but also by other kinds of theorists of world literature, who over the past few years have been nudging that field from the study of masterpieces to the study of circulation and consumption in the global marketplace.² Meanwhile, scholars such as Edwards, Puchner, Ramazani, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have been analyzing how modernist works developed new paradigms of transnational solidarity that were then appropriated by later artists. Tracking various examples of “cultural globalization,” Cuddy-Keane argues that “global connectivity entered into literary, and hence public, discourse” during the early twentieth century (545). Ramazani, focused on poetry, and Walkowitz, focused on the novel, have examined the ways that late-twentieth-century

migrant writers refashioned modernist strategies to suit new transnational designs.

Leah Price has remarked that nothing proves the existence of a field so much as the publication of a reader (36–37). If this is true, the field will be here soon: *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, edited by Mark Wollaeger, is scheduled for production in 2009.

Media in an Age of Mass Persuasion

One element of early-twentieth-century transnationalism that bore heavily on literary modernism was the development of novel technologies for transmitting information: telegraph, radio, cinema, and new forms of journalism not only reconfigured culture’s audiences but also helped speed manifestos, works of art, and often artists across national and continental borders. As Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon note, “[T]he invention of new communication technologies and the increasing globalization of capital following World War I” meant that “the avant-garde movements appeared simultaneously in the margins and the center. No longer can one speak of culture ‘arriving late’ to the far-flung removes of the empire” (xxx). Clearly, attention to such technologies contributes to both spatial and vertical expansion of the field, as in Fernando Rosenberg’s *Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America*, which shows how questions of transnational simultaneity and connection inform the work of writers like the Argentinean Roberto Arlt. In 1937, Rosenberg observes, Arlt altered the name of one of his newspaper columns to “Al margen del cable” (“On the Margins of the News-wire”); in 1929 and 1931, Arlt published a pair of novels, *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, that in Rosenberg’s view represent a “critique of media consumption” yet also suggest how social change might be supported by a “permanent, open-ended strategic action from within streams of information that become

sites of contestation,” a “decentering of stagnant notions of producers and consumers along a geographic divide” (131, 63, 66, 72).

Rosenberg’s book is only one of several recent studies to locate literary modernism in a rhetorical arena transformed by media’s capacity to disseminate words and images in less time, across bigger distances, and to greater numbers of people than ever before. In *Recovering the New*, Edward S. Cutler argues, in a rather different transnational vein, that the “scene of modern writing is . . . the recursive print exchange between urban nodes throughout the United States and Western Europe” beginning in the nineteenth century (11–12); in *Front-Page Girls*, Jean Marie Lutes attends to the influence of turn-of-the-century American newspaperwomen on American fiction. In *Modernism on Fleet Street*, Patrick Collier treats the difficult relation to the press felt by early-twentieth-century British literati, who found newspapers and magazines a handy source of income (from the writing of reviews, for example) but also saw in them a stimulus to an accelerated and superficial reading likely to have baleful social consequences. The ethical and political imperatives driving BBC radio, and the authors who contributed to its programming in the 1920s and 1930s, are the subject of Todd Avery’s *Radio Modernism*, while in *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* Timothy Campbell argues that fascism exploited not only the capacity of radio to reach mass audiences but also the kind of machine-body relay emblemized in the *marconista*, or wireless operator. In this quintet of books alone one can find sustained discussions of media transformation in relation to Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Willa Cather, Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Rebecca West, T. S. Eliot, H. G. Wells, F. T. Marinetti, Vicente Huidobro, Gabriele D’Annunzio, Ezra Pound, and other now canonical writers.

Some recent studies, such as Michael North’s *Camera Works* and Keith Williams’s

British Writers and the Media, 1930–45, have illuminated the social hope engendered among writers by what were, in the early twentieth century, new or relatively new media, but many have stressed more heavily the anxieties spawned by such channels’ evident handiness for implanting particular beliefs in a docile populace. Collier, for example, notes how period commentators worried about newspapers’ tendency to offer only fragments of political debates, “selected not for their rational soundness but for their likelihood of selling papers,” and about their ability to “exercise a mysterious, extra-rational, *mass* influence, transforming readers into a dehumanized conglomerate, liable in the direst projections to becoming agents of anarchy or an easily manipulated mob” (19, 15). In *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda*, Wollaeger argues that the “propagation of too much information by the media created a need for propagandistic simplifications” disseminated by those same media, yet at the same time created “a receptive audience for modernism’s deep structures of significance. . . . [B]oth modernism and propaganda provided mechanisms for coping with information flows” (xiii). In *Sex Drives*, Laura Frost tracks erotic fantasy’s now familiar incorporation of fascist iconography back to the propaganda, especially the anti-German propaganda, produced during the heyday of high modernism. And a number of scholars (Buitenhuis; Cohen; Sherry; Tate; as well as Wollaeger) have explored how the propaganda machine was partly served by literati or, on the other side, inspired new modes of political dissent.

It is hardly a secret that the materializing of a new world of information was one of the crucial historical developments of the early twentieth century, nor has modernist criticism over the decades completely neglected the phenomenon. But it does seem that this transformation is currently attracting unusually focused scholarly attention, and we may want to ask why. What does this upsurge tell

us about the recent past and immediate future of modernist literary study?

One key context for this turn, unquestionably, is modernist scholars' ongoing exploration of the networks of publications in which high modernist artifacts saw print and of the movements and agendas such publications served. Scholars have been examining closely the little magazines and other periodicals that famously sponsored the first appearance of so many modernist masterpieces (Churchill; McKible; Morrison; Rainey, *Institutions* and *Revisiting*), and this effort has been assisted by the growth of the Modernist Journals Project, which provides online access to seminal periodicals such as *Blast*, the *English Review*, and the *New Age*. Among the most significant revelations to emerge so far from work on the larger culture of print has been that of modernism's entanglement, in the pages of early-twentieth-century periodicals, with what may seem at first quite unliterary promotions of feminism, socialism, nationalism, and other programs of social change (Ardis; Lyon; Nelson; Scott). To study the media of modernism, it seems, is to encounter ambitions for literary art that might otherwise be lost to historical memory.

No less significant, as a context for the recent inquiry into propaganda and new media, is the now substantial body of work on what we may call the marketing of modernism—a topic that has engaged some of the finest scholars in the field for over a decade and whose partial genealogy is worth sketching here. For the mid-twentieth-century commentators who helped solidify modernism as an object of analysis—Clement Greenberg, Theodor W. Adorno, the *New Critics*, and others—it was evident that a common denominator in the vast welter of modernist formal innovations was the property of being hard to sell to large numbers of people, at least in the short term. From this observation it was but a step to the view that an essential component of modernism lay in disdain

for the easy consumability of mass cultural forms. And for some, Adorno most notably, this conclusion in turn led to the conviction that at the very heart of modernism lay an intricate resistance to the course of the world as advanced capitalism was fashioning it.

This broad understanding began to suffer revision in the last quarter of the twentieth century, with interventions such as Fredric Jameson's 1979 "Reification and Utopia," which preserved the central opposition but insisted that modernism could have absolutely no conceptual coherence apart from the reviled other of mass culture, and Andreas Huyssen's 1986 *After the Great Divide*, which disclosed a host of convergences between mass cultural elements and modernist art. In the wake of Huyssen's influential work, scholars have complicated the high-low or art-versus-commodity story in countless ways, noting how modernist ambitions were entangled with the language of advertising and the commodification of the bohemian (Bowlby; Cooper; Wicke), how modernist writers absorbed and remade forms of mass culture rather than merely disparaging them (Chinitz; Herr; Naremore and Brantlinger; Strychacz), and how modernists created an audience for their art by associating it with qualities such as seriousness, modernness, or prestige (Dettmar and Watt; Jaffe; Latham; Morrison; Rainey, *Institutions*; Strychacz; Wexler). Predictably, such work has drawn the fire of critics (within and without the academy) who see it as abetting a general devaluation of the specifically literary qualities of literature or as an assault on aesthetic value. But it might be rejoined that this work's truer import lies in showing in new ways how the imaginative exhilaration we draw from literary texts can be rooted in the nonimaginary world.

Recent considerations of modernism in relation to mass media and the manipulation of public opinion can certainly be viewed as part of this larger inquiry into how modernism built its audiences. But it is also possible

to understand the turn toward media and persuasion in another manner—as a veering away from rather than an extension of the kind of scholarship that puts the opposition between art and commodity at its center. After all, even the most surprising elucidations of modernism’s promotional strategies, even those readings that most vigorously unsettle the dichotomy of high and low, can be said to remain under the sway of the anti-commodification paradigm inasmuch as they keep its terms in the foreground instead of asking what other questions it has tended to overshadow. The recent work on publics and persuasion, however, suggests how the long-standing focus on commodification has sometimes led to a sidelining of communication and dissemination, a privileging of the element of entertainment over that of information, and a dwelling on the new products issuing from the culture industry at the expense of attention to new techniques of public rhetoric. Whether the harbinger of a long-running trend or a brief convergence around a particular literary-historical problem, in other words, work on modernism in an age of mass persuasion demonstrates that we may enrich significantly the vertical expansion of modernist studies when we take as the other of modernist art not popular culture *qua* commodity but something else—in this case, the avalanche of reportage, the shaping of fact in propaganda, the phenomenon of news.

Politics as Itself

If this recent line of inquiry suggests the productivity of getting out from under the commodity form (at least temporarily) when assaying literature’s relation to modern social life, it also suggests the utility of recalling that modern subjects have been not only consumers but also citizens and voters and resident aliens—members of masses capable of being organized and harangued in countless ways yet in varying degrees conscious of themselves

as embedded in political situations that they may in some way affect. This kind of turn is, again, far from unique to modernist studies. In literary scholarship generally, there has for some time been growing interest in the conduct of politics in relatively naked rather than veiled forms. Indeed, if one of the exhilarating trends since the late 1970s has been literary-critical engagement with thick textures of history (the structures and vicissitudes of ordinary life, the experiences of the silenced or obscure as well as the eminent and articulate, the ways questions of power inform discourse apparently removed from the political sphere), such analysis has recently been complemented with intensified awareness of what was once taken to be historiography’s fundamental business: acts of leaders and governments, mobilizations of national and international sentiments, transformations of partisan institutions. With a boost from new or old theorists like Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt, literary scholars seem more and more to be augmenting broadly Foucauldian approaches to the subject’s fashioning by putatively apolitical institutions, experts, and norms with attention to the dissemination of overtly political rhetoric, to perplexities of sovereignty as such, and to writers’ confrontations with immediate apparitions of the state.

Matters of the state and state building have always been central to the literature and metaliterature of colonial and postcolonial struggles, which is to say that this issue of politics as itself marks a point of intersection between the transnational turn in modernist studies and the turn toward the repercussions of mass media—that is, between evidently spatial and implicitly vertical expansions of the field. The new transnational scholarship has not been slow to consider how arms of states and other overtly political bodies have helped bring ideas across national boundaries or at times worked to prevent such crossings, but some critics have argued that the new transnationalism, if it is to be new at all, must

probe much further the effects of the state on modernist production. In an exchange with Jahan Ramazani in a recent number of *American Literary History*, William Maxwell focuses on the case of Claude McKay to point out that border crossing was not always the result of new solidarities or an act of individual assertion; rather, “the modernist state’s disciplinary mechanisms compelled the elaboration of some literary internationalisms.” One can hear the echo of Foucault in Maxwell’s argument, but his riposte notably focuses on specific governmental actions of the early twentieth century (by the FBI and the Foreign Office) and uses these deliberate maneuvers to distinguish an “obligatory Black Atlanticism” from a liberatory experience of “unfettered discursive commerce” (363). Meanwhile, issues of nation and mass politics have increasingly come to the fore in studies of European and North American literary modernism (Chu; Lewis, *Modernism*; Peppis; Tratner), even where imperialism has not been a dominant concern.

Finally, it seems imperative to place recent work on transnational currents and technologies of persuasion in the context of a general feeling that we are today enduring a crisis of information—a feeling as old as modernity itself, perhaps, but especially acute in recent years, thanks not only to the cognitive unsettlement attending the rhetoric of globalization but also to changes in the regulation and organization of mass media. In his conclusion to *Modernism on Fleet Street*, Collier echoes many before him in observing that contemporary problems of access, mediation, and information overload in political participation are well addressed neither by our political structures nor by dominant theories of political communication. Wollaeger draws his recent book to a close by noting how the problem of distinguishing between propaganda and information vividly persists, as in the 2005 Stop Government Propaganda Act, prompted by the second Bush administration’s payments to

news analysts (to promote an education initiative) and a public relations firm (to produce fake television news stories endorsing a new Medicare law [261]). To this eloquent example, we might add phenomena such as the cheeky partisanship of the Fox News Channel, the failure of United States journalists to interrogate adequately the case for the invasion of Iraq, and the immediate entry into the lexicon of the term *truthiness*, coined in the first days of Comedy Central’s *Colbert Report* to denote an air of truthfulness that holds more affective power than fidelity to facts. Clearly, one challenge for twenty-first-century intellectuals is to understand why and how new domestic and transnational debates about media intersect with fierce resurrections of old ones. It would be surprising if modernist studies, centered as it is on times and places marked by especially dramatic changes in the politics of information, ignored this pressing challenge.

NOTES

1. Ramazani, “Transnational Poetics,” is a model of “cross-national literary citizenship.”

2. See, for example, Moretti, “Conjectures” and “More Conjectures”; Damrosch; Dimock; and Buell and Dimock.

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