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The And of Modernism: On New Periodizations

1. Introduction

In this article, we are interested in a recent trend we observe in modernism literary criticism concerning the futurization of the object (literary modernism) and, *a fortiori*, of critical work thereupon. This kind of criticism, one that specifically addresses developments in contemporary Western Anglophone literature, guided by the loose term 'neomodernism', seeks in various ways to extend the project of modernism (sometimes called its 'promise') into the present, understanding it as the principal agency in literary distinction and merit.[1] We discern three interconnecting strands in this criticism – three ways of futurizing modernism, and of self-futurizing modernism criticism. Each is addressed in detail in the three sections which follow.

First, we look at how modernism studies futurizes itself through the Hegelian trope of modernism's 'promise'. This section explores the teleological historicism of Laura Marcus's and David James's work as they seek to propagate the continuation of modernism in the present through its putative sublation of postmodernism. Important to this argument is the critical gesture whereby certain thematic *aspects* of modernist texts become *properties* of modernism – a transformation unremarked by either critic, but crucial to their approaches.

Second, we consider how modernism is 'mourned' by some new modernism criticism. Through this 'mourning', modernism is construed as an enduringly privative presence. We contrast the approaches of Jacqueline Rose and Madelyn Detloff to think about how mourning both resists teleology, and ultimately becomes teleological. Central to our argument is a focus on the slippage from a modernism instructive *about* mourning to

modernism as something *to be* mourned; and again, we are interested in how the aspect of the modernist text must become its property for this approach to cohere. Although the tone of the 'mourning' model differs markedly from the triumphalism of the 'promise' model, the recurrence of this slippage suggests an important formal homology between them.

Third, through readings of Susan Stanford Friedman and Peter Osborne, we discuss the question of modernism's relationship with 'modernity', a relation which the modernism studies analysed here construe with a degree of creative licence. We discuss modernism as both an experiential relation to the present and present-ness (its 'qualitative' dimension, in our terms), and as a development with an historically-specific extension (its 'quantitative' dimension). The central idea of this section is that it is incoherent to excise the qualitative experience from the quantitative extension, and that doing so is what makes possible the new modernism criticism. We conclude by arguing that it is postmodernism (frequently maligned in this criticism) which might qualify the modernist expansion at work in these critical models – proffering a way of seeing how modernism *can* influence the concerns of the literary present, but does not necessarily have to define this present.[2] Or, in terms consonant with our critique at large: the legacy of modernism might be a theme of contemporary literature, without having to be its dominant trait.

In *Dying for Time*, Martin Hägglund observes an orthodoxy in some key readings of Proust, Woolf and Nabokov, whereby critics have seen in those authors a desire for, respectively, 'timeless being', exemption from temporality, and the transcendence of time. This contrasts with Hägglund's own readings of these authors, which emphasize the pathos of an attachment to finite life – what he calls a 'chronolibidinal aesthetics'.[3] Hägglund explains this difference bluntly: 'modernist literature continues to be read in accordance with a desire for

immortality'.[4] Although Hägglund does not specifically explore what this tendency says about the criticism which produces and normalizes it, this question will be our focus here. What interests us in this article is whether reading a 'desire for immortality' *in* modernism may engender a desire to make this immortality integral *to* modernism. This passage from *aspect of the text/s* to *property of modernism* is in different ways our focus in the three sections of this article. We begin with the 'promise of modernism' argument exemplified by Marcus and James, because this construal of modernism – especially James's theoretical justification of it at the outset of his influential 2012 monograph, *Modernist Futures* – establishes most explicitly the valuation of modernism which is also integral to the critical orthodoxies addressed in our second and third sections.

2. A Modernist Future

Modernist Futures ends its methodological introduction on a metaphor. James depicts modernism and contemporary Anglophone writing as twins, hailing one another from either side of the century. It transpires that the re-unification of these twins both describes James's intention for *Modernist Futures* (a text that traces modernism's necromancy in contemporary fiction), and is a gesture programmatic for modernist and contemporary studies alike. James tells us that

> Those twins have been together all the time, as it turns out, even though postmodernism intervened for a considerable time in their kinship – a kinship that has often been mistaken for more anxious versions of influence.[5]

The metaphor condenses much of what makes James's argument symptomatic of modernist studies' self-futurization. Stripping away alternate aesthetic cultures and histories, such as

postmodernism, we realize that these twins have actually been together all along. And when we recognize this relationship (the trope of 'natural' kinship is unfortunate), literary history is made temporally continuous again: the literary past is re-instated and made coincidental with itself in the literary present. Contemporary authors such as Toni Morrison, Ian McEwan and J. M. Coetzee display a future-facing return to modernism through their novelistic engagements with 'craft' and 'formal integrity', which disengage them from 'the vanities of postmodern self-reflexivity'.[6] But this is a very specific kind of future. It is a modernist future.

Although he nowhere acknowledges it, James's argument owes a great deal to an orthodox Hegelianism. From the very beginning of *Modernist Futures*, he is arguing for modernism as world historical:

> What does it really mean to consider that a given movement [i.e. modernism] may also have a replenished moment, a phase of re-emergence – in another time, for another culture – through which its promise obtains renewed pertinence?[7]

If the reader infers from 'a given movement' that modernism is hypothetically interchangeable with other literary epochs, whose trans-historical and trans-cultural import one could 'consider' analogously, she should think again. The refusal of this claim is integral to James's bipartite thesis, which is that modernism is qualitatively distinct from everything that came before it, and ineradicably invested in everything (of literary merit) which follows it. This is because of what James calls 'modernism's own dialectical relation to tradition'; the possessive 'own' here carries much weight. This relation is James's thesis in its broadest formulation:

> fiction today partakes of an interaction between innovation and inheritance that is entirely consonant with what modernists themselves were doing more than a century ago, an interaction that enables writers to work *with* their lineage in the process of attempting new experiments with form.[8]

This thesis is effective because of its false modesty. Initially, it does not seem as though any extravagant claim is being made here. And yet, is it not the case that James is granting to modernism, and modernism alone, the process of 'innovation and inheritance' – the 'dialectical' relation to its own history? (If he is also granting it to 'fiction today', this is because he perceives in it the endurance of a putative 'promise' of modernism, which we discuss below.) If this exclusive attribution is not the case (and could, say, be applied to Romantic writers, which it can), then the logic of James's book falters, because there is then no special relation between modernism and the contemporary. For this book to cohere, James has to be claiming that modernism is irruptive in that it marks the inception of a dialectical relationship to a 'lineage'.

The second part of this thesis, 'modernism's persistence and recrudescence in contemporary fiction',[9] requires this dialectic to become an identifiable and imitable aesthetic and politics in its own right. *Pace* 'familiar' models of rupture which account for 'early-twentieth-century literary experimentalism', James argues for a 'connection in fiction between inventiveness and literary heritage', an 'interaction of inheritance and innovation', and a combination of 'acts of homage *with* fresh "developments in modernist literary style"',[10] as characterizing and unifying what he calls 'the compositional and the politico-ethical' facets of modernism. James advertises this dialectic as a 'complication' of the rupture hypothesis – and yet one of its pertinent effects is to make the task of *Modernist Futures* simpler. Whereas an hypothesis

of rupture would quickly run around on the idea that modernism's intimacy with rupture presupposes its own finitude and its own supersession through further rupture, James's iterative dialectic of inheritance and innovation instead simultaneously permits modernism's persistence in the present moment and preserves its categorical singularity.

Therefore, modernism is shown both to persist and to recrudesce in relation to 'postmodernism'. A précis of postmodernism's function in *Modernist Futures* would be that, as an antithesis to be sublated, it is destined merely to confirm modernism's continuity *and* its innovation, because the gesture by which postmodernism is overcome requires a little of both and hence confirms modernism's 'belief in formal integrity'[11]:

> It is thanks to the postmodern, then, that modernism has any future at all. Part of the purpose of this Introduction is to explain in literary-historical terms why that might be so, showing how those writers selected for the following five chapters [J. M. Coetzee, Milan Kundera, Ian McEwan, Toni Morrison, Michael Ondaatje, Philip Roth] reinvigorate modernist aesthetics in response to politically abortive metafiction.[12]

Understood this way, the postmodern provides the means of modernism's dialectical development: the succession and supersession of postmodernism by contemporary modernism casts the latter as a dialectical synthesis which harbours its sublated antithesis as a mnemonic of the superiority of the original thesis. Contemporary modernism differs from modernism only in that the former is in part a testimony and tribute to the resources it finds in the latter for overcoming postmodernism; this is its synthetic fabric.

The intention behind *Modernist Futures*'s thesis is significant for contemporary literary criticism.[13] How do we treat writers like Tom McCarthy or Eimear McBride, whose archive

and influences are clearly modernist?[14] According to James, this question necessitates a methodological distinction of 'modernism as a "selective" institutional construction, from modernism as the scene of an unfinished argument about the novel's critical and formal potentiality'.[15] No sooner has this distinction been made, however, than modernism is shorn of its historical contingency and revealed as supra-historical, a formal attitude that persists in a handful of key aesthetic signatures, including formal integrity and ethical accountability,[16] an engaged interest in the interplay between 'tradition and innovation',[17] and a demand to 'produce art that reaches for alternative horizons'.[18] James undeniably offers a number of intricate and attentive close readings with this toolset, but it is nevertheless difficult not to see these genetic codes as abstracted enough to warrant almost any textual analysis that conceives of its object as modernist.[19]

It would be inaccurate to limit this critical perspective to James alone, however. To take another example, Laura Marcus argues for modernism's future in the following manner. First, Marcus encourages a revision of standard historical narratives of cosmopolitan 'high' modernism's displacement by post-war realism and parochialism, arguing instead that 'The "realisms" of many mid-twentieth-century writers and beyond are beginning to look not only more interesting and more complex, but closer to the "modernisms" that they are conventionally held to have displaced'.[20] This jump from something being worthy of our attention – more interesting and complex – and its being 'modernism' is common in the criticism under study.

Second, Marcus develops the claim into an ethical one:

> A number of critics and writers have argued that we are seeing the emergence of an 'ethical turn' in contemporary literature, and there have been some very interesting

> turns by contemporary novelists to modernist texts – in particular those of James, Forster, Lawrence and Woolf – as spaces in and through which questions of art, life and value can be reposed and reconfigured.[21]

Notice that this 'ethical turn' is *itself* immediately reposed and reconfigured here, into a turn to, and inflection by, modernism. Notice also that this 'turn' necessarily presupposes something non-ethical, or unethical, from which one will have turned. This something is 'postmodernism', whose 'vapidity' James notes in *Modernist Futures*,[22] and which is perceived as so vapid as no longer to exist deictically, instead becoming the debris of a sublated antithesis fated to reinscribe, with value added, the 'formal integrity' of modernism; 'paradigm' or 'hegemony' without content, and thus the most negative of figures. 'Vapidity' is the term we might give to how postmodernism, in Marcus's argument, signifies the characteristic of *not having characteristics*.

Developing this point, Marcus states that the intertextuality linking Zadie Smith and E. M. Forster – apparently emblematic of this ethical/modernist turn in contemporary literature – is 'neither that of "parody" nor that of "pastiche", but one in which the author sets up a dialogue with a literary predecessor'.[23] Insisting on a mutual exclusion between parody and pastiche on the one hand, and authentic 'dialogue' on the other, is a problematic methodological recourse contradicted by literature from any historical period; but again, what haunts this overdetermination is the perceived formal vacuity of postmodernism.

Concluding, Marcus discusses how, in certain contemporary novels, characters are often portrayed relative to windows. She states:

> As in Woolf's fiction, and in particular *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, the window, or the windowpane, also suggests transparency and opacity, connection and separation, clarity and distortion, and the relationship between past and present, or the ways in which the present becomes the past.[24]

There is evidence for glass windows dating back to Ancient Rome, and Virginia Woolf was certainly not the first to explore their dramatic or thematic potential. Nevertheless, Marcus's reading of the window is a strategic manoeuvre. The formula is: Author's name + everyday object + literal characteristics of object and their opposites + metaphorical characteristics which are tendentious but not presented as such. Hence: Virginia Woolf + window + characteristics of the window (transparency, connection, clarity) and their opposites (opacity, separation, distortion) + a reading of windows as being metaphors for temporal connection and separation.

This allows Marcus to make the general statement that Colm Tóibín, Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro, because some of their novels *also* have windows in them, participate in a return to issues of subjectivity peculiar to, or at least intensified in, modernism. This extrapolation from a mundane object in a given text or author to a larger claim about a particular field has been termed the 'bathetic possessive' or 'biological synecdoche'; Mark Currie identifies in such extrapolations a methodology 'in which an atomic detail carries within it the pattern of a much larger reality'.[25] The genetic vocabulary here is significant: Woolf's windows are understood by Marcus as part of modernism's DNA: liable to dormancy, certainly, but ineradicable because part of the seminal historico-aesthetic irruption of modernism.

We are less interested in the textual analyses offered by this specific type of modernist studies than we are in its theoretical justifications, to which these readings helpfully point. To return to *Modernist Futures*, James's assertions of continuity depend on the notion of the 'promise', which incorporates a troubling temporal structure into the study's periodizing method. The *promise* of modernism lives on in its authors, who take on responsibility for it: 'novelists' strategies today must be particularised if we are to see how the promise of modernism survives within and because of them'.[26] What is problematic in this argumentation is how the promise – a vague and indefinite notion attached to a vague and handful of aesthetic features – legislates a temporal logic that *a priori* grounds these authors' works in the framework of modernism, a ground that has been established prior to them and yet survives within. It is almost as if the modernist promise is a nightmare from which these authors are trying to wake.

When conceptualized in these terms, James's and Marcus's arguments are vulnerable to the critique of dialecticism made most acutely by Jacques Derrida: that the dialectic form is a superficial and retroactive explanation for a synthesis which has already been made. In the case of Hegel, the critique amounts to showing that the processes of symbolization and representation necessary to posit and mutually determine thesis and antithesis entail a disarticulated, even unconscious process which predetermines and predestines the supposedly reason-bent dialectic. That is**,** the dialectic produces what it purports to discover.[27] In the case of *Modernist Futures*, an analogous process is at work, whereby the cart of the modernism/postmodernism distinction is put before the horse of its dialectical discovery. This becomes a logical problem because of a certain bias already inherent in the different manners by which modernism and postmodernism are conceptualized; this bias, when analysed, elucidates this question of production preceding discovery. This precise logic

allows James's study to stipulate, in a moment of strange chronological dissonance, that these contemporary authors are really 'late modernists', the implication here of course being that postmodernism, as that which what comes between 'modernism' and 'late modernism', is reduced either to a stage in modernism's own *telos*, retroactively revealed as modernist all along, or a failed and forgettable remainder of its dialectical sublation. This establishment of a modernist promise systematizes a logic that is inherently futural, except rather than allowing for any kind of unforeseeable future, futurity is dressed in the content of modernism. When modernism's promise transforms itself from metaphor to method, modernism futurizes itself.

3. Mourning for Modernism

If we invert modernism's promise to suggest that modernism does not function in the way of a preceding telos that drives historical formation, but is rather something retroactively projected onto that formation, isn't modernism's promise revealed as a kind of mourning narrative *for* modernism? Jacqueline Rose's essay, 'Virginia Woolf and the Death of Modernism', argues that modernism itself can teach us how mourning layers the psyche:

> No longer something to be dispatched [in a Freudian sense], mourning becomes more amorphous and fluid, more interminable as one might say. Taking on the incalculable nature of mourning could then be seen as one of the defining features of modernism.[28]

Refusing to demarcate borders between presence and absence, modernism, and especially Virginia Woolf's fiction, represents a literary form dedicated to living on with the dead. Rose's refreshing account of modernism's axiomatic hauntology, instead of reverting to any kind of musculature formalism or obsession with the 'new', warily strikes a balance between

mourning's (and modernism's) incompletion and the dangers of getting too caught up in mourning's (and modernism's) haunting presence.[29] Rose therefore warns of mourning as an act that can implicate itself in a form of teleology, of believing that 'matters can be brought to a satisfactory or appropriate end (that the best end of the world was foretold in how the world began)'. There is a point when mourning can become confused, where it sees its lost object not as a haunting if absent moment, but rather a lingering and incomplete presence, there to be 'worked through' and brought to conclusion in the future. As Rose suggests of this teleological mourning, 'identity hanging on to its ancestry because it is frightened at the prospect of its own demise is capable of no end of historic injustice'.[30]

Modernism undoubtedly exerts its presence in contemporary culture, and we agree that it might never be 'done with.' But the idea of modernism's promise seems to confuse Rose's incalculable mourning with mourning's teleological form. In one way, this kind of modernist scholarship is mourning that confuses its subject's historical exigency with its subject's promise of unfinished *completion*. In turn**,** modernism becomes an object of critical mourning itself. But to think that mourning can be *completed*, either in its successful 'working through', or, more troublingly, in the object's necromantic re-emergence via a kind of promise, is a teleological operation *par excellence*.

One critic who on occasion joins modernism's capacity to represent mourning to mourning for modernism itself is Madelyn Detloff, whose book, *The Persistence of Modernism*, begins:

> Because modernism has been with us for over a century and does not promise to become obsolete in the near future, understanding its persistence is instructive for twenty-first-century readers facing the ethical and political complications of widespread suffering and loss.[31]

Detloff argues that modernism provides a lens through which we can understand both contemporary culture and the widespread trauma afflicting 'experience' today. Instead of focusing on modernism's assertive *promise* of its own futurity, Detloff's book works on the strange, negative, and inverted statement that modernism *does not promise* to go away. Its persistence is due to its archetypal articulation of loss, a loss which similarly compels contemporary writers such as Pat Barker and Hanif Kureshi. Chiming with Rose, Detloff persuasively articulates modernism's formative relationship with loss and mourning, and states the important case for its relevance for thinking about the present: 'Tracing modernist articulations of loss, violence, and their attendants – trauma, consolation, and retribution – illuminates the contours of our own encounters with imperial "blowback" in this already bloody first decade of the twenty-first century'.[32]

But modernism's formative relationship with loss and mourning also seems, in Detloff, to outgrow a simple description of its aesthetic and thematic investments. This formative relationship also describes the temporal structure of modernism's furtive, epochal persistence itself. Detloff moves from an articulation of modernism's formal usefulness for thinking about the object of mourning to a statement that makes modernism *itself* the object of mourning in the present. This is readily apparent in Detloff's double negative, where modernism *does not promise to become obsolete*, which is a phrase that could just as easily describe the temporal structure of an object of mourning. Said object cannot *promise* to persist because it is impossible for the object to ever *be* present enough to make that promise; its incalculable nature is only ever present as *privation*, that is, as absence.

While Detloff's inversion of James's promise might suggest a different tack, a neutral observer would find it difficult to remark on whether Detloff's alternate method results in anything different from James's belief that we are somehow still comprehended by modernism's epoch. What she calls the modernist 'patch', then, is not just a lens through which to understand the contemporary, but explicitly argues for 'modernism's continuation into the twenty-first century' as well.[33] A leap has been made here from modernism's epistemological usefulness to modernism's *continuation*, and it is replicated in the leap from modernism's thematic concern with mourning to modernism *itself* as the very object of mourning in the present.[34] These parallel jumps in logic pose the specific paradigm shift in new modernist studies that we have been underlining all along. Modernism's thematic investments in certain issues – now recurrent in contemporary fiction[35] – have themselves *become* modernism, and subsequently absorb contemporary fiction into the modernist paradigm.

If anything, Detloff's inversion of James through mourning and loss tells us something about this shift in modernist studies which James's and Marcus's work is, understandably, rarely forthcoming about. That is, behind the many theoretical justifications, modernism's continuation in the present rests on a criticism that mourns its lost object. This practice recasts its own mourning for modernism – a mourning that manifests as teleological because of this very recasting – as a desire to point out a kind of verifiable actuality in the present. It seems apposite here to reiterate Rose's injunction to avoid Freud's mistake. That is, to remember mourning's constitutive incalculability, and to stress that while the lost object may return, it should not be treated as something that persists to be reinstated or completed in the present. Any kind of challenge to the critical paradigm Marcus, James and Detloff seem to be

involved in would first have to recognize, we suggest, that modernist studies is mourning in the wrong way.

We wouldn't push this point if it were not for the risks that neomodernism studies takes in inadvertently expelling other literary and cultural histories from the paradigm of Anglophone contemporary literature, which its teleological mourning appears to necessitate.[36] After all, whatever happened to postmodernism?

4. Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?, Or, Modernism/modernity

> The –ism of modernism turns the noun modern into an advocacy, a promotion, a movement presumably centred around a systematic philosophy, politics, ideology, or aesthetics.[37]
>
> Susan Stanford Friedman

Detloff's monograph opens with a striking image of the twentieth century as a 'parabola curve', with its lowest dip just after the Second World War.[38] The curve's unspoken meaning clearly concerns postmodernism. Indeed, this meaning remains unspoken in a most literal sense: we were unable in our reading of Detloff's monograph to find significant discussion of 'postmodernism', even though the book discusses novelists who arguably are as connected to that putative canon as they are to modernism. It goes without saying that the disarticulation of postmodernism is an especially fraught matter in the critical logic we have been tracing. For instance, it gets notional mention in James's *Modernist Futures*, but only as a dialectical negative, there to be overcome and forgotten. James's procedure, as Bertholt Schoene puts it, is 'a root-and-branch dismissal [that] takes places entirely in the margins of James's

argument, almost as if postmodernism's aesthetic inferiority were a given grounded in a […] consensus.'[39] Modernism's privileged metaphysical status provides history with an unimpeachable *telos,* anticipating and producing legitimate and illegitimate aesthetic forms. Postmodernism becomes the neglected and ethically corrupt remainder of history's dialectical sublation, the gravitational pull dragging on the parabola curve's abyssal dip.

It is not our concern in this paper to offer alternative readings of the contemporary authors above in the light of postmodernism. Nor do we intend to respond to the critical work of modernist studies by providing a 'contemporary' aesthetic taxonomy of our own.[40] Rather, we are interested in the argumentative structures that allow these critics to describe contemporary cultural forms as modernist. We want to ask: what is at stake in modernist studies' vision of literary history, beyond its own self-perpetuation?

In a way, it all goes back to Kant. Or more precisely, to Foucault's reading of Kant. In his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' Foucault famously loosens 'modernity' from a historically specific, delineable epoch, and instead describes it as an attitude, or 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality [un mode de relation à l'égard de l'actualité]'.[41] Foucault makes modernity an effect of the Enlightenment, which is synonymous with a kind of self-questioning, reflexive, philosophically interrogative mode ('un type d'interrogation philosophique'[42]): 'one that simultaneously problematises man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject'.[43] To see how Foucault's essay reverberates in modernist studies, an example is useful. Rebecca Walkowitz's monograph, *Cosmopolitan Style*, defines modernism as involving 'strategies that respond to and engage with the experience of modernity, a condition of industrialisation and "spirit of critique"'. Her argument is Foucauldian: 'Michel Foucault provides a definition

of modernism that I will use to describe the projects of all of the novelists I consider in this study: [she quotes the above definition]'.[44]

Foucault's definition of modernism as an attitude of comportment is intimately historical, then, but it is not chained to a narrowly specific time or epoch. This is not to say that it does not arise from the confluence of a series of historical conjunctions – far from it. But the point in describing modernism in this way is that it can be seen as a reverberating *style* or *method* of critical suspicion; its historicity comes not from the narrow margins of a handful of dates, but from the heterogeneous umbrage of modernity itself. Modernism, then, is an attitude toward the present that is simultaneously *of* the present; where there is modernity, there is modernism.

However, Foucault doesn't once use the word 'modernism'. His attitude of philosophical critique describes modern*ity* (la modernité). Although he discusses Baudelaire, the essay does not conflate modernism and modernity at all. In an ideal world, Walkowitz's use of Foucault's 'definition of modernism' would warrant a '[sic]' and no more, but her elision of modernism and modernity is an endemic one. It allows Gabriel Josipovici, for instance, to argue against modernism's chronological containment, instead seeing it as 'the coming into awareness by art of its precarious status and responsibilities, and therefore as something that will, from now on, always be with us'.[45] Josipovici uses this loosely Foucauldian reading of modern*ity* to canonize modern*ism* in its world-historical place, and indeed, he will suggest that Modernism (with capital 'M') begins with Cervantes and Sterne, if not before. Art's 'coming into awareness' is modernism as history's *telos* of enlightenment, and a *telos* that is ultimately rooted in the beginnings of modern*ity*.

One of the few new modernist critics who has sought to consider the translation of modernity into modernism in a more rigorous fashion is Susan Stanford Friedman, whose work on the '"relational" mode of definition' 'opens up the possibility for polycentric modernities and modernisms at different points of time and in different locations'.[46] Friedman rightly critiques the Eurocentrism of Western modernism, and does so by 'jettisoning the ahistorical designation of modernism as a collection of identifiable aesthetic styles,' abandoning its 'singular temporal beginning and endpoints'. Instead, modernism for Friedman is the '*expressive dimension of modernity*'. That is, it manifests as an aesthetic and experiential engagement with modernity, expressing everything from modernity's epochal self-reflexivity to its 'phenomenology of the new and the now'.[47] Nevertheless, when faced with the homogenizing possibility that *everything* becomes modernism as a result, Friedman's reading practice, which seeks the important goal of breaking the notion of a dominant, European modernity, still contradictorily draws on the specific aesthetic markers of high canonical modernism to make her point. Her commentary on Tayeb Salih's 1967 novel *Season of Migration to the North* is that it is modernist precisely because of its modernist aesthetic form:

> Even more than Conrad's novel [*Heart of Darkness*], *SOMTTN* is a narrative of indeterminacy; of mysteries, lies and truths; of mediating events through the perspectives of multiple embedded narrators; of complex tapestries of interlocking motifs and symbols; and of pervasive irony. Stylistically speaking, Salih's novel is 'high modernist'.[48]

Friedman supplements her expansive definition of modernism as expressive of modernity with a handful of aesthetic forms that are recognisably modernist in a local sense.[49] It seems to us that if modernism is to be read as simply expressive of modernity, it also necessitates

some kind of historical and geographical specificity to define its aesthetic form more quantifiably, which leads Friedman to read in Salih the aesthetic epoch she wishes to disenfranchise, and thus, her account risks succumbing to notions of centre and periphery challenged by postcolonial critiques of European modernism.[50] This is not to deny, of course, how canonical Anglo-American modernism occupies a point in the map of influence for various localities, nor is it to recuperate different geographical modernities into a single, ethnocentric master-narrative.[51] Indeed, to understand *modernisms* as geographically and temporally plural is rightly to decentre this canonical understanding, and to situate modernism – both its canonical form, and its global transformations – in historically specific global coordinates, around situated sites of 'affiliation, indifference, or antagonism'.[52]

Our concern has less to do with Friedman's geographical de-centring of modernism; clearly, modernity's diverse formations can produce multiple *modernisms*, if we understand these various modernisms as historically and locally distinct from the Western canon. However, when it comes to Anglo-American contemporary writing and its criticism, Friedman's move to make modernism the sole expression of modernity temporally legitimizes a periodizing process which, ironically, suffocates contemporary writing's historical difference from modernism, first of all by stating its affinity with the expressive dimension of modernism, before stating its debt to the formal practices of canonical high modernism. To put it otherwise, when the two poles of modernism combine (modernism as an ethos or attitude and modernism as a specific historical aesthetic moment), the contemporary and postmodernism are recast as modernist; likewise, models of temporal and phenomenological experience are reinstated as modern*ist* all along, specifically indebted to its canonical forms, thus providing an expanding, ever-reflexive, potentially colonizing horizon for literature in modernity.

The translation from modernity into modernism, then, invokes a dual understanding of modernism. Modernism is both an experiential expression of modernity, and thus captures its 'sensibility of radical disruption and accelerating change';[53] but modernism *qua* modernity also denotes a set of recognisable markers derivable from a specific epoch. In other words, modernism is both qualitative and quantitative: it is the expression of an unending structure of experience *and* it is a distinctive aesthetic response to particular historical circumstances. It is as if Friedman's reading cannot tear one apart from the other, either for fear of homogenizing literary history entirely, or minimising modernism to a simple aesthetic style.[54]

A less partisan reading of modernism's translation into modernity might recognize that this dual understanding of modernism is internal to the temporal logic of modernity itself. As Peter Osborne argues, modernity 'designates the contemporaneity of an epoch to the time of its classification; yet it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality'.[55] In other words, modernity quantitatively designates a time *of* modernity (be it 'now', but also 'then'), but also qualitatively designates a structure of *temporality* that is quintessentially modern (a reflexive temporal attitude that privileges the 'new', the precedence of the 'now', and an openness to futurity). The latter designation traces a history of discourse about modernity, from Benjamin through to Koselleck, which is clearly operationalized in many of the definitions of modernism above: an unending phenomenological temporality.

But the former, 'quantitative' designation of modernity paradoxically treats it as a marker of chronological time, one subject to historical difference. Modernity as *modern* is synonymous with the 'present', the 'contemporary', and the 'now'. Understanding modernity as both a particular kind of attitude toward the present *and* an historical marker that can change

explains the somewhat counterintuitive notion that certain epochs can seem more 'modern' than others. Because it depicts modernity as doubly ahistorical (aesthetic and expressive) and historical (tied to historical time), this dual understanding helps to explain the paradoxical emergence of postmodernism within modernity, namely, how some versions of modernity appear to '*grow old*' or are replaced by different formulations of what it means to be modern, even if those old forms are to be understood as modern at one point in time.[56]

These counterintuitive statements harbour the root of one of the major philosophical problems for modernity as a whole. Because of its temporal anchoring in a kind of expressive phenomenological experience that privileges the rupture of the 'new' and 'present-ness', modernity is to some extent as infinite as the horizon of time. But on the other hand, it is also bound to and changes in response to mutable, ever-shifting historical coordinates. Modernity's continual designation of the contemporary and the present as the 'most' chronologically modern means that past periods, previously seen as modern, in some senses lose their modern designation over time. This means that modernity's rootedness in chronological classification suggests that traces of epochality linger in even the most expansive definition of modernity's temporal phenomenology, so that one is never able to escape thinking about modernity without also thinking about a period, a style, or historical coordinates as well. The dual temporality of modernity, therefore, is one in which modernity is constitutively split between a general structure of experience and a specific point in historical time. The point in this dual understanding is that we cannot separate these two models of time without doing damage to the concept of modernity itself.

Hence, it is ironic that there is no better teacher of this temporal aporia than the discourse of postmodernity: as Osborne acknowledges, 'to become post-modern, in this sense at least, is

simply to remain modern, to keep in step, a companion of the times, to be con-temporary'.[57] Postmodernity at once signals its ultra-modern-ness, but simultaneously grounds its identity in the paradoxical past-ness of a prior expression of modernity. In other words, postmodernity understands that modernity is both the inescapable horizon of a particular kind of temporality, and also something that produces different expressions that are historically anchored in different ways to numerous epochs.

While this legitimizes a reading of contemporary Anglophone fiction as influenced by modernist sensibility, it should not result in marginalizing the contemporary *as* modernist. In other words, modernism is not and cannot be a one-to-one expression of modernity, because it is not the sole expression of modernity. Many of the above neomodernist critics agitate around the direct translation of modernity into modernism. But this translation neglects the fact that discourses on postmodernity are not as simple as the flat-out denials of modernity that these critics want them to be; rather, many are subtle, even paradoxical, accounts of the fundamental *modernity of postmodernity*.

The most well-known of these is probably that of Lyotard, for whom postmodernity, far from being a different epoch supposedly coming 'after' modernity, is really just a different expression of modernity. It is a kind of comment made in the present about the present, one that draws attention to how modernity can allow for differential expressions of itself, with different quantitative and qualitative features; modernity, as Lyotard puts it, implies the very existence of postmodernity because modernity provides a temporal logic that seeks to exceed itself with the constantly new, thereby always spurring itself on with the anticipation of something to follow:

> Rather [than consider modernity and postmodernity according to linear succession] we have to say that the postmodern is always already implied in the modern [le postmoderne est déjà impliqué dans le moderne] because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. […] Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity.[58]

A more recalcitrant but equally important point we wish to stress is that the kind of historicism proposed by Friedman, in which the present is constituted by a multitude of different epochs, is actually a form of historicism that postmodern theory best describes. Lyotard defines the 'post-' as something that breaks with modernity's triumphant discourse of linear historical time, suggesting instead that the present is filled with multiple histories and expressions of modernity.[59] Ironically, it is this postmodern logic that enables James's and Friedman's discussions of a non-linear historical present.

Rita Felski echoes this in her book *Doing Time*, emphasizing that postmodernity cannot be reduced to a single definition, and that triumphalist 'End of History' discourses, often announced in postmodern theory, exhibit the very periodizing logic they claim to interrupt. For Felski, the irreducibility of postmodernity to a single definition has the effect of revitalising both the present and the past: it asks us to think of historical periodization *tout court* as problematic, and to recognize in turn that the difficulty of speaking of any one time in the 'present' complicates postmodernity's and modernity's historical chronology:

> Yet this big, sweeping story of epochal change cannot capture the unevenness of history and time. [A wholesale theory of postmodernity] exaggerates the fragmented, chaotic nature of present time (clock time, timetables, and other forms of regulated, 'objective' time have not yet disappeared from our lives), while denying the temporal

> complexity of the past. Preoccupied with establishing differences *between* epochs, such a story cannot begin to explore historical differences that exist *within* epochs.[60]

Lyotard's and Felski's construals of postmodernity are open to the possibility of intra-epochal differences, a possibility that the modernism scholarship under study here appears to limit. But for our modernist critics, postmodernism cannot be an expression of modernity because it is *modernism* alone that expresses modernity. Yet in postmodern discourse, 'modernity' does not automatically result in the aesthetic expression of 'modernism,' and nor does an expression of modernity necessarily result in modern*ism*. Rather, modernism in this case labels a set of aesthetic practices that respond to a specific historical formation (its quantitative dimension) just as it *also* describes a relation to modernity that, as we have remarked, privileges a particular but also spatiotemporally mobile experiential temporality (its qualitative dimension). Postmodernity thus seeks in some way to challenge the ideological mental image of modernity, but simultaneously affirms it, by constituting itself as more appositely 'modern' than previous interpretations of modernity. In postmodern discourses, then, modernism cannot simply *be* the aesthetic affirmation of the experience of modernity, because *postmodernism*, a reflexive attitude as well as a 'cultural and intellectual time'[61] is just as expressive of it. With Osborne again,

> It is the irreducible doubling of a reflexive concept of modernity as something which has happened, yet continues to happen – ever new but always, in its newness, the same – that the identity and the difference of the 'modern' and the 'postmodern' plays itself out at the most abstract level of the formal determinations of time.[62]

We want to stress here that we have no intention of positioning discourses of postmodernism to be in some way meta-historical or gifted with post-historical insight. Nor do we seek to

suggest that all neomodernism is really just a repackaged postmodernism. Rather, our argument is a more mundane and institutionalized one that takes aim at the field-clearing gestures found in some neomodernism criticism. The irony we note is that the discourse marginalized by the re-writing of contemporary Anglophone fiction as modernist – postmodernism – is that which most subtly understands the temporal logic of modernity. Postmodernity recognizes modernism's part-definition as an expression of a particular temporal phenomenology indicative of modernity, but it also understands that modernity is not simply, or only, expressed through modernism.

Like realism in histories of modernism's initial emergence, postmodernism exists solely in much of the work we have been analysing as something already under erasure. Like realism, an epistemological mode supposedly overcome by modernism, postmodernism is simplified to a handful of dismissible characteristics. But also, like realism, which in part grounds the very logic of innovation and annexation that modernism revendicates for itself, postmodernism is given no accordance for its own capacity to complicate the ties that bind modernity to modernism, or to uniquely articulate neomodernism's historiographic method.[63] Schoene's response to James's book is emphatic and much like our own: 'Does one really need to spell it out? Postmodernism deserves to be taken seriously as a literary response to human experience'.[64] Except in this case, we want to draw attention to the illegitimacy of directly translating modernity into modernism, by urging an attention to the messy remainder of modernism's sublation of literary history: postmodernism. Neomodernism criticism's consignment of postmodernism – a body of historical, institutional, and intellectual work – to history offers, for us, one helpful example of how this criticism flattens the present's historical particularity in favour of modernism's futurization. If modernism can't claim hegemony over the expression of modernity's temporality without inadvertently colonising

the past, present, and future, then in some sense it should acknowledge, in the context of Anglophone contemporary literature, its formal and historical anchorage in certain aesthetic and epochal conditions rather than simply providing a shorthand for a reflexive and experiential attitude to the present. Our definition of modernism in light of this, then, is to emphasize and combine modernity's dual constitution.

Modernism is in part a qualitative expression of the phenomenological temporality of the 'new' and the 'now', an attitude, practice, or experiential relation to the present. But modernism also foregrounds a quantitative, aesthetic response to a specific historical formation, however that might be delimited. To treat modernism as a purely phenomenological response or experiential attitude is to loosen it of specificity to the point where any era, epoch, or aesthetic practice might be called modernist; but to treat modernism solely as quantitatively delimited is, as criticisms of European modernism suggest, to suffocate its meaning and to privilege a Eurocentric view of aesthetic practice. We enter this debate in the context of neomodernism to insist on the importance of postmodernism for an understanding of contemporary Anglophone cultural production. Discourses of postmodernism, we argue, insist that the translation from modernity to modernism is not a one-to-one step, and that modernism is not the sole expression of modernity; this translation *has to be* fraudulent if modernism isn't to colonize time and cultural production entirely. Otherwise, the future and the 'new' are forever anticipated by modernism's supposed promise, and the past has always already been modernist.

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Notes

[1] We use the term 'neomodernism' in this article over alternative formulations such as 'metamodernism' in order to gesture to a broad range of articulations of modernism's continuance in the present (cf. David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 'Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution', in *PMLA*, 129 (2014), 87-100, and Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 2 (2010), n.p.).

[2] The term 'expansion' has been an issue under focus in some recent surveys of modernist studies that consider the vexed relationship between the field's expansion and cultural expansionism (cf. Paul K. Saint-Amour, 'Weak Theory, Weak Modernism', in *Modernism/modernity*, 25 (2018), 437-59.

[3] Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 16-19.

[4] Hägglund, p. 2.

[5] David James, *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 25.

[6] James, pp. 16-17.

[7] James, p. 1.

[8] James, p. 2.

[9] James, p. 7.

[10] James, p. 8.

[11] James, p. 12.

[12] James, p. 10.

[13] The book has been praised as an important contribution to modernism scholarship. See Thom Dancer, '"Literary History of the Contemporary". Review of *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel*, by David James', in *Contemporary Literature*, 54 (2013), 634-42, and Kimberly Fain, 'Review of *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel*, by David James', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 60 (2014), 864-66.

[14] Cf. Justus Nieland, 'Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58 (2012), 569-99, and Jacqueline Rose, '"From the Inside Out". Review of *The Lesser Bohemians*, by Eimear McBride', in *London Review of Books*, 38 (2016), 11-12.

[15] James, p. 3.

[16] James, p. 17.

[17] James, pp. 40-41.

[18] James, p. 2.

[19] In this respect we are sympathetic toward Max Brzezinski's argument that there can be a tendency in some New Modernist Studies work to focus on certain thematic or aesthetic features, such as the 'future' or the 'new', in ways that can "be made to mean almost anything" for literary analysis (Max Brzezinski, 'The New Modernist Studies: What's Left of Political Formalism?', in *Minnesota Review*, 76 (2011), 109-25 (p. 111)). Our argument differs to Brzezinski's historicization of the modernist 'brand', however, to instead consider the effect of modernism's institutional futurization on the study of Anglophone contemporary fiction.

[20] Laura Marcus, 'The Legacies of Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. by Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 82-98 (p. 82).

[21] Marcus, p. 94.

[22] James, p. 3.

[23] Marcus, p. 97.

[24] Marcus, p. 95.

[25] Mark Currie, 'The End of Difference', in *English: The Condition of the Subject*, ed. by Philip W. Martin (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 180-90 (p. 183).

[26] James, p. 40.

[27] Tina Chanter, 'Antigone as the White Fetish of Hegel and the Seductress of Derrida', in *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. by Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 378-90 (pp.380-81).

[28] Jacqueline Rose, 'Virginia Woolf and the Death of Modernism', in Rose, *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World* (London: Vintage, 2004), pp. 72-88 (p. 73).

[29] For an excellent criticism of the 'strength' model of modernism, see Saint-Amour, 'Weak Modernism.'

[30] Rose 2004, p. 86.

[31] Madelyn Detloff, *The Persistence of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[32] Detloff, p. 10.

[33] Detloff, p. 119.

[34] This movement from modernism in mourning to modernism as mourning, or as the mourned object, transliterates a universalising tendency in modernist histories that goes as far

back as Ezra Pound's 'make it new', a dictum which, as Fredric Jameson notes is 'not only drawn within the work of art but transformed into the latter's fundamental structure'. See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 125.

[35] One cannot annex mourning to modernist aesthetics entirely. Postmodernism's epistemological crisis in historical knowledge can equally produce a mournful aesthetics that looks a lot like modernism's privileged trope. Cf. Amy Elias, 'Metahistorical Romance, the Historical Sublime, and Dialogic History', in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 9 (2005), 159-72.

[36] Of course, this is not to generalize an entire field. A number of recent surveys of modernism's geographic and temporal expansion in particular display great care over the risk of limitless expansion and the necessity of detailed, historical awareness. C.f. Christopher Bush, 'Review of *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, by Susan Stanford Friedman', in *Modernism/modernity*, 23 (2016), 686-88; Aarthi Vadde, *Chimeras of Form: Modernist Internationalism Beyond Europe, 1914-2016* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Andrew Reynolds and Bonnie Roos, 'Introduction', in *Behind the Masks of Modernism: Global and Transnational Perspectives* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2016), pp. 1-22; Mark DiGiacomo, 'The Assertion of Coevalness: African Literature and Modernist Studies', in *Modernism/modernity*, 24 (2017), 245-62; James Brunton, 'Whose (Meta)modernism?: Metamodernism, Race, and the Politics of Failure', in *Journal of Modern Literature*, 41 (2018), 60-76.

[37] Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism', in *Modernism/modernity*, 8 (2001), 493-513 (p. 498).

[38] Detloff, p. 2.

[39] Bertolt Schoene, '"The Politics and Poetics of Neomodernism." Review of *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* by David James', in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 48 (2015), 131-35 (p. 132).

[40] A literary-historical taxonomy of the present would, after all, undoubtedly include the various declarations of postmodernism's demise in the shaping of other, alternate accounts of contemporaneity. For example, see *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53:3 (2007); *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57:3-4 (2011); *American Literary History* 20:1-2 (2008); *Postmodern Culture* 21:1 (2010); *Contemporary Literature* 53:4 (2012); *Modern Fiction Studies* 58:2 (2012).

[41] Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?', in Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988, IV: 1980-1988*, ed. by Daniel Defert, François Ewald and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), pp. 562-78 (p. 568) and Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. by Robert Hurley and Catherine Porter, in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York, The New Press: 1997), pp. 303-20 (p. 309).

[42] Foucault 1994, p. 571.

[43] Foucault 1997, p. 312.

[44] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 6.

[45] Gabriel Josipovici, *Whatever Happened to Modernism?* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 11.

[46] Friedman, 'Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies', *Modernism/modernity*, 13 (2006), 425-43 (p. 426).

[47] Friedman 2006, pp. 432-33.

[48] Friedman 2006, pp. 435-36.

[49] Note that Friedman herself worries over the problem of homogenizing all literature as modernist, disagreeing with the idea that 'If all periods are *modern*, then all aesthetic expression must be *modernist*' (Friedman 2006, p. 433). Nevertheless, to avoid this homogenization, her argument must ground modernism in the aesthetic styles she seeks to repudiate.

[50] Cf. Laura Doyle, 'Modernist Studies and Inter-Imperiality in the Long Durée', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 669-96.

[51] See Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities', *Alternative Modernities*, ed. by Gaonkar (London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1 – 23.

[52] Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, 'Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism', in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. by Doyle and Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1 – 16 (p. 5). Our critique in this paper primarily concerns neomodernist accounts of Anglophone literary production in the present. In this sense, our discussion is not dissimilar to the careful insistence in studies of global, or geo-, modernism on paying attention to 'the particularities of history' and showing care to avoid assimilation and homogenisation (Reynolds and Roos, p. 14).

[53] Friedman 2001, p .503.

[54] For a detailed criticism of the risks of historical homogenization in Friedman's work, see Bush, 2016.

[55] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and the Avant-Garde*. (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 13-14.

[56] Osborne, p. 20.

[57] Osborne, p. 13.

[58] Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inhumain: Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), p. 34, and Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 25 (translation slightly modified).

[59] See Lyotard, 'Note on the Meaning of "Post"', in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 75-80.

[60] Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (London: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 13-14.

[61] Eyal Amiran, 'Preface: PMC at 20', in *Postmodern Culture* 21 (2010), n.p.

[62] Osborne, p. 13.

[63] On modernism's dialectical invention of a 'naïve' realism, see Jameson, pp. 119-125.

[64] Schoene, p. 134.