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Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New

The essays in this volume take up a range of artifacts from poetry and manifestos to philosophy and movie musicals; in so doing, they both exemplify and interrogate the so-called new modernist studies or new modernisms. To be sure, this critical project, whose emergence has coincided with a powerful revival of modernist sensibilities in architecture, design, poetry, and other arts, has not been formulated in any strict or polemical sense by its practitioners. Rather, the new modernisms seem to have arisen from diverse quarters; to have found a stimulus in a new journal (*Modernism/Modernity*); to have come into focus as the title of a conference (the inaugural meeting of the Modernist Studies Association); and thereafter to have been certified as a coherent trend by a prominent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. It is clear, nonetheless, that the rubric encompasses at least two significant enterprises: one that reconsiders the definitions, locations, and producers of "modernism" and another that applies new approaches and methodologies to "modernist" works.

In its definitional aspect, the new modernist studies has extended the designation "modernist" beyond such familiar figures as Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf (to take the subfield of literature in English, central to this volume) and embraced less widely known women writers, authors of mass cultural fiction, makers of the Harlem Renaissance, artists from outside Great Britain and the United States, and other cultural producers hitherto seen as neglecting or resisting modernist innovation. Some contemporary scholars have even chosen to apply "modernist" yet more globally—to, say, all writing published in the first half of the twentieth century—thereby transforming the term from an evaluative and stylistic designation to a neu-

tral and temporal one, and thus economically countering the implication that a few experimental works were somehow the only ones authentically representative of their age (as in the familiar sequence Romantic-Victorian-Modernist-Postmodernist). The essays in this volume do not replace the qualitative sense of the term with the chronological, however, so much as they ask what happens when the two collide. What effects of synergy or friction result when the many, sometimes contradictory, criteria of high modernism are tested against less evidently experimental texts by principal figures; against principal works by less well known or non-European artists; against texts that seem neither to be art nor to be about art, such as erotic novels, popular films, spy thrillers, melodrama, and ethnography?

On the side of approaches, the new modernist studies has moved toward a pluralism or fusion of theoretical commitments, as well as a heightened attention to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media, to collaborations and influences across national and linguistic borders, and (especially) to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged. This direction resonates with developments occurring throughout the humanities in recent years, of course, but it seems to accrue particular influence in the orbit of modernism, because early-twentieth-century writers were themselves so preoccupied with border crossings such as cosmopolitanism, synesthesia, racial masquerade, collage, and translation. In *Bad Modernisms*, this new variousness of approach is represented by, for example, a comparative reading of European and African American dandyisms, an approach to Filipino American modernism in the context of anti-colonialism, treatments of popular and political works alongside aesthetic treatises and canonical novels, and the commingling of values and techniques from fields such as queer theory, cultural history, cinema studies, anthropology, and literary criticism.

Thus the new modernisms; but why *bad* modernisms?

Since "modernism" first became a leading topic of critical disquisition, in the cold war writing of figures like Clement Greenberg, Harry Levin, and Irving Howe, a persistent assumption has been that badness is at once the essence and the Achilles heel of modernist art. The idea that there might be something good about bad artistic behavior did not originate with modernism, but no kind of art, so the early retrospectives suggested, has been

more dependent upon a refractory relation between itself and dominant aesthetic values, between itself and its audience, between itself and the bourgeoisie, between itself and capitalism, between itself and mass culture, between itself and society in general. In 1967, for example, Howe led off his list of modernism's signal features by observing that its writers and artists form "a kind of permanent . . . opposition, . . . an *avant-garde* marked by aggressive defensiveness, extreme self-consciousness, prophetic inclination and the stigmata of alienation."[1] According to Lionel Trilling in 1965, any "historian of the literature of the modern age" would "take virtually for granted the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention, that characterizes modern writing" and "perceive its clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes."[2] In their 1976 survey *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane named as key elements of modernist style "shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis," and ventured that if "Modernism is our art," this could be because "it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos."[3]

In offering these generalizations, these critics were drawing upon a century of instigations by artists and reactions from audiences in which bad manners were bound up with bad times, bad feelings, and a radical destabilizing of the criteria by which a work of art's goodness or badness could be judged. The history of the modernist affront—whose influential purveyors included Baudelaire, Marinetti, and Schoenberg, and whose celebrated events included the New York Armory Show of 1913, the debut of *Le sacre du printemps* the same year, and the obscenity trials of *Ulysses* in 1921 and 1933—was shaped by an antagonism to certain all-too-positive elements judged characteristic of works achieving more immediate public acceptance. These elements included uncritical endorsement of traditional forms, uplifting sentiments and happy endings, complacency about the course of world events, approbation of the social order, and the view that instrumentality and moral legibility were distinguishing features of worthwhile art.

Whether they used the term "modernism" or not, early-twentieth-century analysts of the new art noted not only its rejection of such positives but also how this mode of social criticism could look more like voluble disdain than visible address. In their 1927 *Survey of Modernist Poetry*, for ex-

ample, Laura Riding and Robert Graves tried to show that modern poetry's apparent withdrawal from the "plain reader" owed much more to that reader's timid conventionality (and appetite for "Spiritual Elevation") than to any willful obscurantism practiced by poets; in 1931's *Axel's Castle*, to take another instance, Edmund Wilson saw both richness and danger in innovative British and French writers' increasing scorn for popular language and sentiments.[4] In the middle third of the century, Greenberg and Theodor W. Adorno authored especially influential versions of the idea that the new art most engaged society when it seemed most to turn away. Greenberg, who did more to consolidate a theory of modernism in the visual arts than any other critic, credited the avant-garde with the crucial insight that art could only find "new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of [bourgeois] society" by fixing on problems intrinsic to each artistic medium (the flatness of the canvas in painting, for example) and thus rejecting both society's "ideological division and its refusal to permit the arts to be their own justification."[5] Adorno, meanwhile, drew on the dissonances of modern music and the bleak austerities of modern writing to argue that art's meaningful protest against the way things are lay in resistance not merely to pleasing representations but to virtually all obvious social content.

To this day, no other name for a field of cultural production evokes quite the constellation of negativity, risk of aesthetic failure, and bad behavior that "modernism" does. But a profound peril lurked in this involvement with badness: it left modernism's program vulnerable to incoherence once its work achieved wide acceptance as good. And indeed the early retrospectives of modernism confirmed themselves *as* retrospective by marking how modernism's impulses had withered under the sun of esteem. In his 1960 "What Was Modernism?," for example, Levin began by reading the name of a new apartment building in New York (The Picasso) as symptomatic of was-ness, then went on to remark the relative weakness of contemporary literary production in comparison to that of the modernism whose features he was cataloguing. Seven years later, Howe noted that the avant-garde was "no longer allowed the integrity of opposition or the coziness of sectarianism; it must either watch helplessly its gradual absorption into the surrounding culture or try to preserve its distinctiveness by continually raising the ante of sensation and shock—itself a course leading perversely to its growing popularity with the bourgeois audience."[6] By 1981, Robert

Hughes could declare in *The Shock of the New*, a survey of modern visual art, that the "age of the New, like that of Pericles, ha[d] entered history." Though the "bourgeoisie, butt and nominal enemy of the *avant-garde*, was also its main audience," he observed, it had through much of the century remained roughly "a generation behind the art." Around 1970, however, "the middle-class audience finally enfolded every aspect of 'advanced' art in its embrace, so that the newness of a work of art was one of the conditions of its acceptability."[7]

Some critics have descried some good in this domestication of the once-bad. Trilling saw meaningful benefits in adversarial culture's reconciliation with the middle class through universities and museums; Levin found a compensation for the lassitude of art after modernism in the thought that he and his contemporaries could "so effortlessly enjoy those gains secured by the pangs of our forerunners";[8] and some later critics (such as Ricardo Quinones in *Mapping Literary Modernism*, 1985) have stressed still more heavily the sheer good of the existence of modernism's masterpieces. But many, above all those writing from a broadly Marxist orientation in the 1980s and beyond, have argued that the sapping of subversive energies deprived modernism of its meaning, either as a force in new artmaking or as a body of past works to which one might turn. Denouncing the avant-garde's loss of connection to political radicalism, Andreas Huyssen wrote caustically in *After the Great Divide* (1986), "Like a parasitic growth, conformism has all but obliterated the iconoclastic and subversive thrust of the historical avantgarde of the first three or four decades of this century."[9] In "When Was Modernism?" (1987), Raymond Williams charged that modernism gets confined to a "highly selective field . . . in an act of pure ideology" when formerly "marginal or rejected artists become classics of organized teaching and of travelling exhibitions in the great galleries of the metropolitan cities."[10] Dating the death of modernism closer to the fall of the Berlin Wall, T. J. Clark has wondered more recently whether there can be any "modernism without the practical possibility of an end to capitalism existing, in whatever monstrous or pitiful form."[11] And Fredric Jameson has insisted on a radical difference between the Greenberg generation, which nullified critique by providing institutional sanction, and the early-twentieth-century artists who, in Jameson's view, knew "no identifiable public" and "came into a world without models . . . without any pre-existing social role to fill."[12]

A number of critics have even defined "modernism" in opposition to "the avant-garde," aligning the former with a "passive stance" of cozy relationship to the status quo, the latter with a mission of "actively attacking the institution of art."[13] By the end of the century, certainly, "modernism" could be used in a way that "avant-garde" could not: to suggest a persistent orthodoxy rather than a deliberate challenge. In the visual arts, this turn was impelled partly by the rise of commercial and museum apparatuses that promoted modernism's absolute value. In architecture, it was abetted by the sheer proliferation of built examples of the "International style" and associated modernist modes. In literature, it was assisted by demonstrations—from T. S. Eliot, the New Critics, and their heirs—of how modernism was not at war against but rather continuous with tradition. And in all of these arts, as well as music, dance, theater, and film, it was thoroughly supported by a university culture that first transmitted modernist values as twentieth-century standards and later promoted the view that "postmodernism" was the energizing refutation of the complacencies for which modernism had come to stand. An eloquent encapsulation of the reversal from bad outsider to far-too-good insider is offered by Susan Stanford Friedman, who begins her 2001 reflection on the ambiguities of the term "modernism" with a pair of sketches. The first is that of the graduate student she was in 1965, for whom modernism "was rebellion. Modernism was 'make it new.' Modernism was resistance, rupture. . . . Modernism was the antidote to the poison of tradition." The second is that of her own students thirty years later, who found their own antidote to tradition in postmodernism and for whom "Modernism was elitism. Modernism was the Establishment. 'High Culture' lifting it skirts against the taint of the 'low,' the masses, the popular."[14]

Yet modernism, as we noted at the outset, seems suddenly to be enjoying a new life. In the sphere of the arts themselves, this may be in part because postmodernism has revealed itself to be at least as subject to co-optation; in postmodern architecture, especially, the line between irony or pastiche and mere recycling of comfortingly familiar forms has proven perilously thin. But across fields, "modernism" seems again to be naming something that can surprise and challenge, if not indeed profoundly unsettle. This is the hope that Marjorie Perloff voices for poetry, at least: in her critical manifesto *Twenty-First-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*, she proposes that since "the aesthetic of early modernism" represented by

early Eliot, Stein, Duchamp, and Khlebnikov "has provided the seeds of the materialist poetic which is increasingly our own," the present might be the moment at which the "radical and utopian aspirations" of "first-stage modernism" could forcefully revive.[15] New directions in the study of modernism, meanwhile, have included efforts to recover oppositional stances occluded by institutional enshrinement and to scrutinize more closely how, in Marianne Thormählen's words, the "periodizing, characterizing, and valorizing" functions of the term "modernism" have shaped discussions of early-twentieth-century art.[16]

Even as recent scholarship has sought to bring forgotten badness to light, however, it has also questioned whether modernism's earliest incarnations were really as bad as all that. Crucial in this regard has been the thought that modernism's original professions of daring or disdain can themselves be seen as marketing strategies—how, far from opposing commerce in some absolute fashion, the modernist "work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempted from the exigencies of immediate consumption prevalent within the larger cultural economy, and instead is integrated into a different economic circuit of patronage, collecting, speculation, and investment."[17] Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), from which this quote is drawn, is only one of a number of recent studies of the economics and promotion of modernism; others include Michael FitzGerald's *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art* (1995), Joyce Wexler's *Who Paid for Modernism?* (1997), Thomas Crow's *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (1998), and the collections *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* and *Marketing Modernisms* (both 1996). These investigations have been complemented by a vast inquiry into exchanges between high modernism and popular culture, from Jennifer Wicke's *Advertising Fictions* (1988) to Thomas Strychacz's *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism* (1993) and beyond.

The old story in which heroic modernist outsiders assault a complacent bourgeoisie has also been complicated by the observation that there were numerous ways of being outside in the early twentieth century—many of which invited a marginalization far more enduring that that briefly experi-

enced by Picasso or Eliot. In their 1986 collection *The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggested that "in their problematic relationship to the tradition of authority, as well as to the authority of tradition, women writers" could be seen as "the major precursors of all 20th-century modernists, the *avant garde* of the *avant garde*," and feminist criticism has since shown how modernism was shaped by a host of exclusions and embattlements pertaining to gender.[18] The effort here has been not only to recover the central role in modernism of female artists, publishers, patrons, and critics (as in Shari Benstock's groundbreaking *Women of the Left Bank* from 1986, or Bonnie Kime Scott's *Gender of Modernism* anthology from 1990, or Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace's collaboration, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* from 1994) but also to show how integral to modernism's development were phenomena such as women's growing economic independence and the predominantly female audience for genres legible as "bad" by middlebrow and modernist alike (as in Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land*, 1988, or Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism*, 1991, or Ellie M. Hisama's *Gendering Musical Modernism*, 2001). Nor has inquiry focused on gender been the only source of complications to the heroic-outsider narrative; also crucial have been studies of exclusions and exchanges across boundaries of politics (as in Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery*, 1989), race (as in Houston A. Baker Jr.'s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 1987), and sexuality (as in Colleen Lamos's *Deviant Modernism*, 1998).

For some, modernism's claims to a virtuous badness are most seriously compromised by its appearance as a dominant cultural mode in imperial centers at the very height of imperialism. In a 1990 essay, for example, Stephen Slemon declares that modernism must be seen not simply as a "radically vanguardist and anti-bourgeois movement" but rather in terms of a "wholesale appropriation and refiguration of non-Western artistic and cultural practices by a society utterly committed to the preservation of its traditional prerogatives for gender, race and class privilege," indeed as a movement whose militant version is "colonialism itself."[19] Other critics, however, have stressed the ways in which the "periphery" appropriated modernism. In their 2000 collection *Modernism and Empire*, for example, Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby point out that for "key figures in . . . what came to be called post-colonial studies—one thinks, for example, of

Chinua Achebe and Edward Said—modernist literature was at once the near-contemporary established great literature of their early maturity and the father to be slain and overcome."[20] In *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992), Simon Gikandi explores how modernism's vocabularies could be creolized in anti-colonialist directions. In *The Experimental Arabic Novel* (2001), Stefan G. Meyer shows how texts taking inspiration from the innovations of Euro-American literary modernism emerged in Lebanon and Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s. In the collection *Alternative Modernities* (2001), Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, drawing on Charles Taylor, discusses a "creative adaptation," where peoples " 'make' themselves modern, as opposed to being 'made' modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny."[21]

Still others have challenged the assumption that modernism was ever essentially a creature of the Western European metropole. In the introduction to their 1999 collection *Modernism and Its Margins* (1999), for example, Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon observe that "modernism's reversal of the artistic priorities at the turn of the century provided the periphery with a certain authority. . . . Thus . . . within the Hispanic world—and the margins of the margin—it is with Rubén Darío's modernism that the ex-Spanish colonies manage for the first time to 'conquer' and influence Spain's cultural landscape." Nor does the example of Darío and company's *modernismo*, whose relationship to "modernism" remains a subject of vigorous debate, stand alone. As Geist and Monléon point out, "the 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."[22] In an essay in the same collection, George Yúdice recalls that the "international character" of modernism encompassed not just "French, Germans, English, Russians, Swiss, and so forth" but also "Africans, African Americans, Brazilians, Chileans, Peruvians, Jamaicans, Martinicans, Senegalese, Turks, Greeks, and others who . . . participated either in Paris or at home."[23]

One way to describe the trajectory of writing about "modernism" over the last half century, then, would be to say that it has disclosed in more and more striking ways how badness is relative and contextual. What reads

in one frame as the purest oppositionality may appear in another as an intragroup squabble reinforcing all manner of tacit unanimities; what seems from one perspective the most spirited defiance of rules may be shown to require the retention or amplification of other strictures performing their own kind of gate keeping. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that recent efforts to broaden the embrace of "modernism" are no more than prescriptive and historically foundationless reaching after inclusivity. On the contrary, the achievement of recent scholarship has been a richer, more accurate history, one that sees how problems and qualities said to distinguish modernist art informed other spheres of life, and how exchanges among many modernisms—as the new locution goes—helped to shape culture in the early twentieth century. *Bad Modernisms* contributes to this project by working outward from a general base in English-language literature (and back again, and outward again) to styles of dress, philosophical treatises, Hollywood backbiting, popular fiction, anthropological field work, advertising campaigns, and other realms of life and art the extent of whose interconnection is perhaps just beginning to be appreciated.

The subject of the volume's first essay, Walter Pater, has long been emblematic of one problem in defining modernism—that of setting its temporal boundaries. For some, putting this late-nineteenth-century writer under the modernist rubric is an inadmissible stretch; for many others (including W. B. Yeats, who in 1936 placed a sentence from Pater's prose commentary on the Mona Lisa, now broken up into lines of poetry, at the front of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*), Pater was the veritable fountainhead of the modern in English-language writing. In "Forced Exile: Walter Pater's Queer Modernism," Heather Love takes a new approach to Pater's possibly inadequate modernness, historicizing "badness" to investigate the vocabulary of refusal and recoil with which Pater addresses changes in the taxonomy of sexuality. For Love, one of the lessons to be drawn from Pater is that effective forms of action, perhaps especially in the orbit of queer politics, may need to incorporate rather than disavow the hitherto inassimilable bads of abjection and failure. The next essay, Martin Puchner's "The Aftershocks of *Blast*," takes up the productivity of regression in a different way, placing the strident, anti-revolutionary broadsides authored by Wyndham Lewis in 1914–15 within a tradition of "manifesto modernism." Reading the self-consciously English *Blast* against Continental exempla such as Marx

and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* and Marinetti's *First Futurist Manifesto*, Puchner argues that *Blast* positions itself as a sort of homeopathic remedy, taking on the form of the manifesto in order to oppose the will to immediate and radical change that manifestos embody. Adopting the avant-garde's form in order to undermine its program, Lewis produces a "rear-guard modernism"—a defending, distancing, and redirecting that seeks to transcend both the dutiful moralizing of political revolutionaries and the bad or "naughty" morality of soi-disant decadents.

From abjection and defensiveness, the volume shifts to other fertile negatives: nonsense and cliché. Michael LeMahieu argues that Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* dramatizes the tension between a positivist understanding of modernity and an anti-positivist aesthetic modernism, via a rhetoric of "feelings" that disorients the language of both logic and art. What Puchner argues of Lewis, LeMahieu argues of Wittgenstein: that he uses the tools of modernism in order to criticize modernism, and, in so doing, suggests why a constitutive aspect of modernism lay in a strong self-negation under which critique teeters always on the edge of nonsense. In "The Romance of Cliché," which follows, Laura Frost confronts the rhetoric of modernist originality with modes of erotic representation shared by high modernist and popular fiction from the interwar years. Noting that D. H. Lawrence appropriates elements of sexual fantasy from E. M. Hull's best-seller *The Sheik*—in spite of the latter's denigration both by Lawrence himself and by pro-Lawrence critics like F. R. and Q. D. Leavis—Frost points out that formulas designed to produce pleasure in Hull's female readers are deployed to anti-erotic, moral ends in Lawrence. The derivativeness and earnestness often imputed to popular fiction thus prove to emerge more strongly in a modernist appropriation of popular clichés.

As Rebecca L. Walkowitz notes in the volume's fifth essay, Virginia Woolf too was charged with lack of seriousness by the Leavises (as well as other critics), though where Hull was faulted for clichés, Woolf was damned for evasion and quietism. Reading Woolf's fiction in the context of cosmopolitanism and social theories of dissent, however, Walkowitz argues that Woolf's indirectness constituted a strategic response to the rigidities of national culture and wartime patriotism. By refusing to conform to political or aesthetic expectations of goodness—that is, by indulging in what some took as a highly indecorous decorousness—Woolf resisted versions of

generalization and literalism that supported what she believed to be worst about her society: imperial triumphalism, heroic masculinity, and sexism. In this effort, Walkowitz proposes, Woolf suggests that the modernist critique of evasion must involve the willingness to cultivate it. Walkowitz's concern with modernist and anti-modernist ways of reading is then echoed in Sianne Ngai's essay, which reveals what viewers might gain by interpreting Josef von Sternberg's film *Blonde Venus* in an "amodernist" or "bad-modernist" fashion, a fashion that would privilege plot over style or story over medium. Proposing that *Blonde Venus*, starring the German actress Marlene Dietrich, is both a tribute to and parody of the life of the African American cabaret star Josephine Baker (known as "the Black Venus"), Ngai remarks the difficulty of deciding whether the "inverted" imitation of Baker is theft or flattery. She speculates that the film's ambiguities in this regard result from a problem inherent in homage and dramatically exacerbated here by matters of race, nationality, emigration, and celebrity: that any praise effectively arrogates to itself the *right* to praise, and in this exerts a control over its object as unshakeable as it is abstract.

Monica Miller continues this discussion of race, performance, emulation, and critique in "The Black Dandy." Extending Jessica Feldman's suggestion that the dandy might be a "sign" for modernism, Miller examines how the early-twentieth-century African American dandy stood at the intersection of prior black sartorial and theatrical performances, black optimism about the unprecedented urban community that was Harlem, and white fears and desires concerning the future of black culture. Miller's analysis thus encounters the badness of modernism in two senses, one pertaining to the inevitable inability of the dandy figure to bear the burden of "uplift" with which it was charged, the other (which evokes LeMahieu and others on modernism's self-negation) pertaining to an inevitable heterogeneity or syncretism that makes modernism feel ever different from or not quite itself, always in oscillation between a cultural authenticity that can be exposed as artifice and an artifice legible as authenticity.

The next essays continue two themes taken up in earlier pieces: the relationship between modernism and regression (Love, Puchner, LeMahieu, Frost, and Walkowitz) and the elaboration of identity through contrast with racial or ethnic others (Frost, Ngai, Walkowitz, and Miller). In "A Shaman

in Common," Douglas Mao shows that Wyndham Lewis and W. H. Auden both used anthropological accounts of a homosexual Siberian shaman to refine a vision of liberalism's ideal citizen as a licensed transgressor. Bringing their constructions of this figure of good badness together with their treatments of interwar politics and of relations between intellectuals and masses, Mao argues that Auden and Lewis were united by belief in certain of liberalism's core features, though they disavowed the liberal label and are remembered as belonging to more radical (and opposing) political camps. Joshua Miller, meanwhile, turns to the transpacific modernism of the Filipino American writer Carlos Bulosan to illustrate how a text's modernism can result less from a will to unsettle aesthetic norms than from a rejection of colonialist political strategies. Reading Bulosan's 1944 short story collection *The Laughter of My Father* in conjunction with Ralph Ellison's 1952 *Invisible Man*, Miller notes that audience appreciation of a text's "subversive" elements will vary with cultural—and commercial—context (the edge of Bulosan's anger seems to have been missed, for example, by American audiences). But Miller also shows that some strategies of subversion, such as the laughter in Bulosan's narratives, can bespeak affinities across historical and geographical divides.

Like Joshua Miller's essay, the volume's final two entries ask whether and how modernism persisted past the decades most often said to mark its height or peak (1910s, 1920s, 1930s). Lisa Fluet's essay, "Hit-Man Modernism," first, considers how modernist indicia meet anxieties about social change in a genre not usually associated with high culture. Pivoting her reading on Graham Greene's *A Gun for Sale*, but weaving in numerous other examples of early- and late-twentieth-century pulp fiction, Fluet argues that the figure of the contract killer links two apparently opposite social elements: on the one hand, a highly individual expertise evocative of modernism at its most Olympian; on the other, the vast welfare state whose offers of security can seem predicated on the sacrifice of individual freedom. Fluet shows that the contract killer points both ways because he is frequently a version of the "scholarship boy," a young man who rises to uneasy professionalism from humble origins and becomes an object of feminine middle-class solicitude. In Fluet's analysis, both the killer (who does not quite love society but recognizes a difficult bond to it) and the woman

(who does not quite love the killer but recognizes difficult bonds to him and to the society that made him) suggest how social responsibility can be predicated on the feeling that one is *not* feeling what one should.

In Fluet's telling, this predication offers a partial answer to Raymond Williams's lament that modernist iconography has been appropriated by the critique-neutralizing forces of the administered world. And this leads directly into the volume's concluding essay, wherein Jesse Matz re-evaluates the argument that impressionistic techniques crucial to modernism mutated into a "distraction" effect deployed to bad ends in advertising and other manipulative mass cultural forms. Rather than attempting to exculpate modernism by denying this connection, Matz pursues Jonathan Crary's claim that the same forces attempting to harness distraction also produced the forms of modern attention against which distraction strains. He then goes on to consider how a number of figures from the history of impressionism understood the dialectic of attention and distraction, and how some readers of contemporary culture have pointed to progressive possibilities this dialecticized impression might hold.

The essays of this collection thus form a chain in which each speaks to the one that precedes and the one that follows, even as the overall sequence adheres to a rough chronology of the artifacts discussed. As the foregoing outline may indicate, however, the essays also group in other ways around various senses of "bad modernisms." For one thing, all the contributors take on what we have already seen to be modernism's most notorious way of going bad: its alleged surrender of resistance and transgression (aptly described by Jennifer Wicke as "our critical *bêtes blanches* these days") to sanctification and success.[24] Walkowitz and Love, for example, complicate what we might too easily dismiss as quietism; Matz and Fluet locate positive possibilities in failures of feeling and attention; LeMahieu discusses how a performance of the limits of knowledge might constitute a critique of a dominant worldview. Many of our contributors also examine bad behavior toward mainstream institutions or prevailing aesthetic standards: here one might cite Puchner on the manifesto as a kind of anti-institutional institution, Mao on the role of dissent in the liberal polity, Monica Miller on the balancing act of the black dandy, and key moments in Joshua Miller, Walkowitz, and Love. Another recurrent topic, finally, is how these forms

of badness relate to "bad modernism" in the sense of work deemed inferior or inadequate *as* modernism. Fluet and Monica Miller speak to this question; so does Frost, writing on the disavowed appropriation of a mass-cultural motif; so does Ngai, positing anti-modernist ways of reading a quasi-modernist film; so does Joshua Miller, revisiting a book admired for a non-modernist serenity its author did not intend.

The last-mentioned essay may turn most vividly on a problem in reception, but in fact all the contributions to *Bad Modernisms* concern moments in which a work or performance has been misjudged or misunderstood. Purporting to set right prior misprisions is, of course, the very bread and butter of scholarly production in our time, but a little reflection will reveal that something more than this routine maneuver is at work here. In each of the cases laid out by our contributors, a failure of apprehension seems fundamental to the very interest of the work; in each, the way in which the artifact was bad according to somebody (or was good in the wrong way) tells us something about its possible meaning or value for us. And if this point strengthens the connection between modernism and badness in a general way, it illuminates more specifically the significance—among modern*isms* in all their diversity—of that invitation to misunderstanding that we call "difficulty." Leonard Diepeveen has recently argued that the difficulty enshrined as the dominant criterion for valid modernist (and postmodern) art is "not a property of the difficult work at hand, but a reading protocol that is radically affect-based";[25] expanding the focus slightly, we might say that difficulty can also come into view retrospectively, as the quality of something that seems not to have yielded all its secrets to prior readers or viewers, whether or not we delude ourselves into thinking it will yield everything to us.

From here, we might be led to one more possible reason for modernism's recent comeback. In 1960, Levin wrote that "[s]tupidity has decidedly not been the forte of the Modernists," that "they were preoccupied with the minds of their characters, and . . . make serious demands upon the minds of their readers."[26] What Levin does not quite say is something that almost always goes not-quite-said in summaries of modernism—perhaps because it seems so obvious, perhaps because it exposes too painfully how "modernism" is entangled with scarcely admissible antipathies belonging to intellectuals as a class. This point is that encounters with "dif-

ficult" artifacts or performances, whatever elation or frustration they may otherwise engender, hold always a capacity to hearten inasmuch as they seem to confirm how intelligence, complexity, and curiosity have been alive in the world (and draw life again from just such confrontations between perplexed audience and elusive object). Could it be, then, that the new-old appeal of modernism lies partly in a consolation of this sort, emerging from its very negatives? If so, we will not be surprised to find modernism holding special allure in times when the future of thinking seems uncertain, when anti-intellectualism seems ascendant, when resistance to all but the simplest positions and solutions has arrogated to itself the mantle of the good.

Notes

1. Irving Howe, "Introduction: The Idea of the Modern," in *Literary Modernism*, ed. Irving Howe (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1967), 23–24.

2. Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking, 1965), iv.

3. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, reprint ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), 24, 27.

4. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: William Heinemann, 1929), 9, 191.

5. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 28.

6. Howe, "Introduction," 24.

7. Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 375, 367–68.

8. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?" *Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 4(August 1960): 613.

9. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 3–4.

10. Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, reprint ed. (London: Verso, 1996), 34.

11. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 9.

12. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 199.

13. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, foreword to *Theory of the Avant-Garde* by Peter Bürger, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxxvi.

14. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*," *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (September 2001): 493–94.
15. Marjorie Perloff, *Twenty-First-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 3.
16. The useful triad of gerundives comes from Marianne Thormählen's introduction to *Rethinking Modernism*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003),3.
17. Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.
18. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, introduction to *The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic*, ed. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1986), 1.
19. Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," in *Past the Last Post*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 1.
20. Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, introduction to *Modernism and Empire*, ed. Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1.
21. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 18.
22. Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon, "Introduction: Modernism and Its Margins: Rescripting Hispanic Modernism," in *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, ed. Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon (New York: Garland, 1999), xxi, xxx.
23. George Yúdice, "Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery," in *Modernism and Its Margins*, 59.
24. Jennifer Wicke, "Appreciation, Depreciation: Modernism's Speculative Bubble," *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (September 2001): 400.
25. Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 244.
26. Levin, "What Was Modernism?," 627.