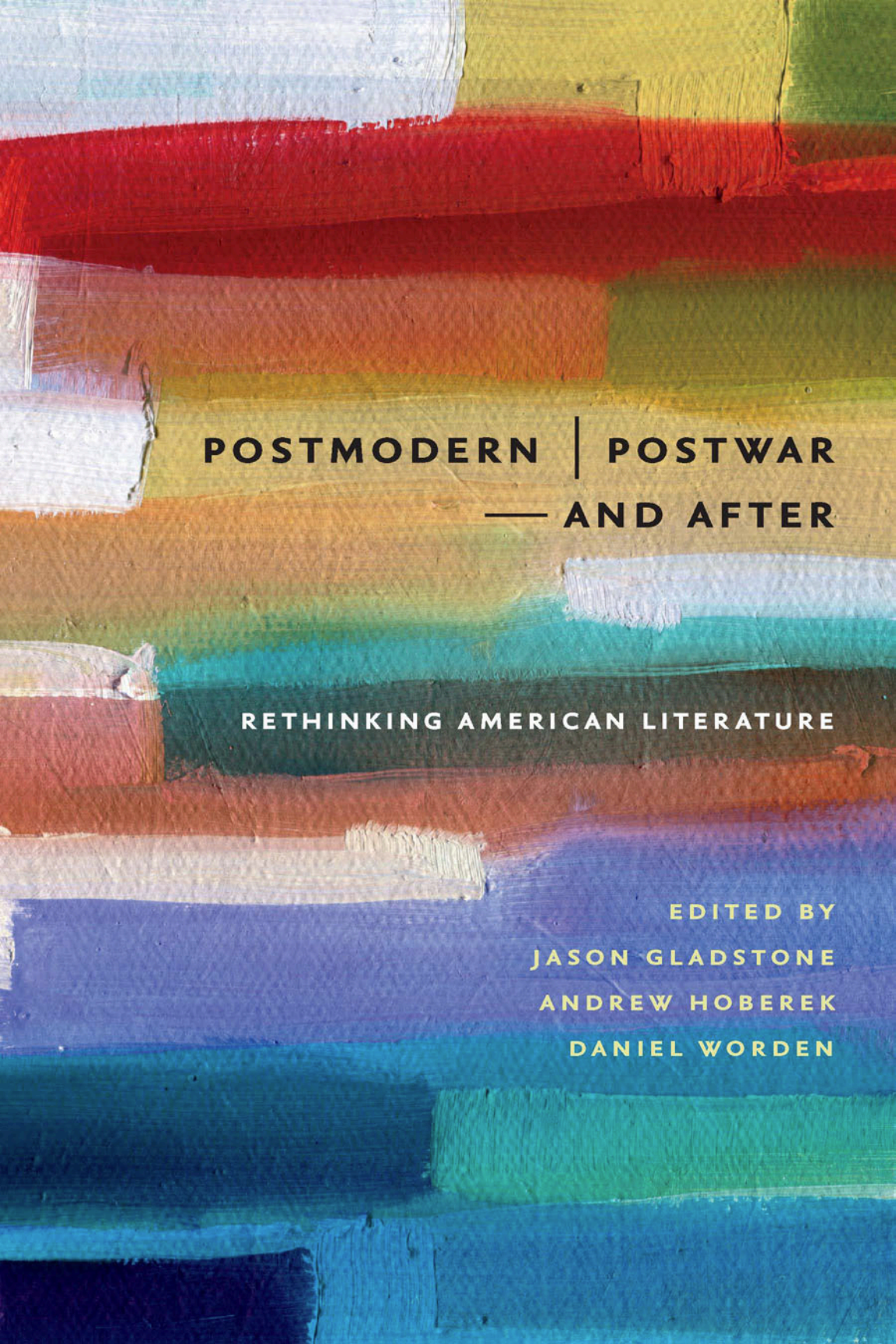

POSTMODERN | POSTWAR
— AND AFTER
RETHINKING AMERICAN LITERATURE
EDITED BY
JASON GLADSTONE
ANDREW HOBEREK
DANIEL WORDEN

POSTMODERN | POSTWAR — AND AFTER

THE NEW AMERICAN CANON

The Iowa Series in Contemporary Literature and Culture

Samuel Cohen, Series Editor

POSTMODERN | POSTWAR — AND AFTER

Rethinking American Literature

edited by

JASON GLADSTONE
ANDREW HOBEREK
DANIEL WORDEN

University of Iowa Press | Iowa City

University of Iowa Press, Iowa City 52242
Copyright © 2016 by the University of Iowa Press
www.uiowapress.org
Printed in the United States of America

Design by April Leidig

No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher. All reasonable steps have been taken to contact copyright holders of material used in this book. The publisher would be pleased to make suitable arrangements with any whom it has not been possible to reach.

The University of Iowa Press is a member of Green Press Initiative and is committed to preserving natural resources.

Printed on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress.
ISBN: 978-1-60938-427-2 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-60938-428-9 (ebk)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the contributors to this volume, and to the contributors to the "Postmodernism, Then" special issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature* (57.3–4 [Fall/Winter 2011]), the volume that preceded and paved the way for this book. Thanks also to Lee Zimmerman and Keith Dallas at the journal *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Sam Cohen of the New American Canon series, and Elisabeth Chretien at the University of Iowa Press. An earlier version of Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden's introduction to this book originally appeared in the "Postmodernism, Then" special issue mentioned above.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction
Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden

PART I. DIALOGUE

27 Postmodern, Postwar, Contemporary:
A Dialogue on the Field
Andrew Hoberek, with Samuel Cohen, Amy J. Elias, Mary Esteve, Matthew Hart, and David James

PART II. THE POSTMODERN REVISITED

59 Break, Period, Interregnum
Brian McHale

73 Cold War Postmodernism
Harilaos Stecopoulos

81 How Postmodernism Became Earnest
David James

93 Reperiodizing the Postmodern:
Textualizing the World System Before and After 9/11
Leerom Medovoi

111 Mapping Postmodernism and After
Emilio Sauri

PART III. THE POSTWAR RECONFIGURED

127 The Idea of Happiness:
Back to the Postwar Future
Mary Esteve

141 Cold War, Post–Cold War:
What Was (Is) the Cold War?
Daniel Grausam

153 The Forms of Formal Realism:
Literary Study and the Life Cycle of the Novel
Deak Nabers

165 Perpetual Interwar
Paul K. Saint-Amour

PART IV. WHAT COMES AFTER

181 Six Propositions on Compromise Aesthetics
Rachel Greenwald Smith

197 The New Sincerity
Adam Kelly

209 Influences of the Digital
N. Katherine Hayles

217 The Resurgence of the Political Novel
Caren Irr

227 The Currency of the Contemporary
Theodore Martin

241 Make It Vanish
Michael W. Clune

251 Slow-Forward to the Future
Ursula K. Heise

261 Contributors' Biographies

267 Index

POSTMODERN | POSTWAR — AND AFTER

JASON GLADSTONE
DANIEL WORDEN

INTRODUCTION

From our contemporary vantage point, a case can certainly be made for the predictive or, perhaps, programmatic power of David Foster Wallace's 1993 essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." In the essay, Wallace posits a shift away from the postmodern irony of authors such as Don DeLillo, Mark Leyner, and Thomas Pynchon and toward a literature of sincerity that would be pioneered by a younger generation of writers raised with television.[1] And, indeed, in contemporary literary culture, one can locate a shift away from "ironic watching" and toward the embrace of "single-entendre principles" almost everywhere: *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*'s emo-sincerity, the ethnic bildungsroman's emphasis on multicultural identity as upward mobility, Jonathan Franzen's social realism, *n+1*'s enthusiastic recuperation of "high" cultural critique, novelists such as Michael Chabon's heartfelt embrace of genre fiction, and the memoir's ascension of best-seller lists, to name a few (Wallace 81). At the same time, alongside this concerted, professional abandonment of postmodernism's signature affective stance in recent North American literary enterprises, postmodernism has begun to drop out of academic discourse as well. While at least since 9/11 critics have been routinely declaring that postmodernism is, now, over, in the last five years an increasing number of critics have also begun to question whether

postmodernism was ever a significant aspect of postwar American literary culture.

The field of contemporary literary studies has changed significantly over the past ten years. Following the turn of the century and mounting doubts about the continued explanatory power of the category of "postmodernism," new organizations have emerged, book series have been launched, journals have been created, and new methodologies, periodizations, and thematics have redefined the field. *Postmodern/Postwar—and After* seeks to lay out the parameters of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary studies, to serve as a source book for the new field. Accordingly, this book consists of two parts: the first part is a dialogue between some of the scholars who have pioneered new organizations—the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present (ASAP) and Post•45—as well as the book series Literature Now at Columbia University Press and the New American Canon at the University of Iowa Press that have helped to define and consolidate the reconfigured field of postwar and contemporary literary studies;[2] the second part of the book is a series of brief position papers that highlight new avenues of research and new modes of periodizing or reconceptualizing twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. Because the field of postmodern, postwar, and/or contemporary literary studies has been changing so thoroughly and so recently, we designed this book as more of a conversation than a conclusive account. This introduction lays the groundwork for the shifts that have occasioned the recent overhaul of the field(s) of post-1945 literary studies; the dialogue presents a conversation about these changes and some of the institutions recently created to facilitate them; and, in each position paper, a scholar presents some of the key concepts, texts, and historical/theoretical parameters for the reconfigured field—a field formerly known as postmodern literary studies, and now known by a growing number of periodizing terms. It was, in fact, precisely this proliferation of periodizing terms (contemporary, cosmodernist, exomodern, neoliberal, post-9/11, to name just some) that occasioned the dialogue and position-paper format of this volume. Since what comes after the postmodern and the postwar in post-1945 literary studies is undergoing perpetual revision, a conversation and set of overlapping but not uniform approaches best represents the state of the field, a field with something of a canon (Benjamin Kunkel, Rachel Kushner, Thomas Pynchon, Richard Powers, and David Foster Wallace, for example, figure importantly in many position papers) but a field defined by

the continual emergence of provisional canons, idiosyncratic periodizations, and new approaches.

The title of the book—*Postmodern/Postwar—and After*—references its tripartite focus. First, the section titled "The Postmodern Revisited" features essays that return to the category of the "postmodern" and argue for the usefulness of key concepts and themes from postmodernism to the study of contemporary literature, or they reevaluate postmodernism in light of recent developments in the field and/or historical and economic changes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The essays in the next section, "The Postwar Reconfigured," take the contemporary abandonments of postmodernism as an occasion to assess the current states of postwar, or post-1945, literature: the postwar seems to signify not only the present but also the past, not only a synonym for our contemporary condition but also an alternative conception of literary history, not only what comes after the close of high modernism but also a continuation of modernism, not only a unifying category that contains all late twentieth-century literature but also a way to point out a cluster of aesthetics and frameworks. The final section, "What Comes After," contains a number of essays that assess what comes after the postmodern/postwar. Accordingly, these essays provide a number of frameworks for approaching postwar and contemporary literature as influenced by, yet distinct from, postmodernism. All of the essays in this volume are from leading and emerging scholars in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary studies, and all of them posit moments of continuity and rupture with postmodern and postwar periodizations in order to chart new areas of research and inquiry.

As Andrew Hoberek notes in his introduction to the "After Postmodernism" special issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, declarations of the decline of postmodernism have become enough of a critical commonplace that it has now become something of a critical commonplace to even cite this fact (233–34). And as Brian McHale elucidates in "1966 Nervous Breakdown; or, When did Postmodernism Begin?," declarations and interrogations of the actual start-date of postmodernism have become equally commonplace (391–93). At the same time, the expression of uncertainty about the beginning or end of postmodernity has been a standard feature of periodizing accounts of postmodernism at least since David Harvey prefaced his foundational *The Condition of Postmodernity* by asserting that "it does not matter whether postmodernism is or is not on the way out" (ix). Indeed,

as Bill Brown suggests in "The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory)," this recursive process of relocating the periodizing breaks that define postmodernity can, itself, be understood as part of the logic of postmodernism (734–35).[3] And, accordingly, the infinite revisability of postmodernism as a periodizing concept can then be understood as an iteration of the malleability of a postmodernist aesthetic—an aesthetic that underwrites those studies that Ursula K. Heise describes as ones in which "certain sets of postmodern theories and philosophical perspectives (usually, but not always, influenced by one of several strains of French poststructuralism) . . . [are] brought to bear on texts and artworks not necessarily associated with [the post-1960] period" (2011 966). From this perspective, the contemporary eclipse of postmodernism might, then, register as its ultimate triumph, as methods of reading or aesthetics once thought to be specifically tied to the postmodern era are now disseminated as reading practices in many, even all, historical periods, and as standard reference points for contemporary art and literature.[4]

More recently, the declarations and redeclarations of the ends of postmodernism have begun to be eclipsed by accounts of modernism, American literary history, and, most notably, postwar US literature and culture that not only abjure the employment of postmodern critical modes, but also either mount critiques of postmodernism or abandon it altogether as a periodizing concept or theoretical coordinate. This set of developments is made most apparent by the absence of an entry for either "postmodernism" or "postmodernity" in two recent reference volumes of American cultural and literary studies: Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler's *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* and Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors's *A New Literary History of America*. In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, terms such as "globalization" and "postcolonialism" seem to demarcate the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, yet in this volume these terms also refer back to earlier national and transnational moments, thus sidestepping the issue of postmodernism. In *A New Literary History of America*, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century culture is atomized, and larger periodizing categories are rarely invoked. Instead, the volume focuses on individual writers, artists, and works. To be sure, these volumes' approaches differ. Burgett and Hendler's *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* dislocates the contemporary through the use of terms such as "globalization," while in her entry on that key word, Lisa Lowe critiques globalization's common usage, to

describe the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, because "it obscures a much longer history of global contacts and connections" (120). Marcus and Sollors, by contrast, break the contemporary into individual figures and discrete movements, seemingly disconnected from larger periodizing categories. For example, Hal Foster's entry on artist Robert Smithson's 1968 essay "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" discusses the "textual turn in art of the 1960s that parallels the more celebrated version of this turn in theory and philosophy" (Foster 947). But whereas in his 1979 essay "Earthwords" Craig Owens famously identifies Smithson's essays as a marker of the "transform[ation of] the visual field into a textual one" that "is coincident with, if not the definitive index of, the emergence of postmodernism," in *The New Literary History of America*, the "textual turn" described by Foster registers as less of an aesthetic shift than a stylistic choice made by Smithson and some other individual artists and writers (45–47).

The abandonment of postmodernism that is exemplified by reference volumes such as *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* and *A New Literary History of America* is in no way limited to such general approaches to US literary history. Rather, more direct versions of this abandonment characterize an increasing number of studies of twentieth-century and post-1945 literature. Driven by the "New Modernist Studies," the category of modernism has become quite elastic in recent scholarship. Modernist critics have convincingly dismantled the high/low divide, pushed modernism back into the nineteenth century and forward into the late twentieth century, and turned to periodicals rather than discrete texts to map modernism as a more complex, varied aesthetic and historical period.[5] Often in support of this expansion of modernism, studies of contemporary literature have also increasingly set aside "postmodernism" as an organizing category. Concretized in the "After Postmodernism" special issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, and present in a number of other works that preceded and followed it, critics have begun to think of the contemporary moment as no longer postmodern.[6] In fact, recent studies have positioned the decade of the 1990s as the end or exhaustion of postmodern aesthetics, as well as the site for the emergence of contemporary literary styles that seem to critique and produce alternatives to postmodern aesthetics.[7] Along with this revaluation of the contemporary against the postmodern, another set of recent studies of postwar literature and culture have emphasized the ways in which postmodernism was never, in fact, the dominant cultural logic or literary rubric of the

late twentieth century. For example, works by Sarah Brouillette, Michael W. Clune, François Cusset, James English, Loren Glass, Mark Greif, Amy Hungerford, Caren Irr, Michael LeMahieu, Alan Liu, Sean McCann, Mark McGurl, Lisa Siraganian, Ted Striphas, Michael Szalay, and Michael Trask have focused on institutions and concepts such as the creative economy, creative writing programs, human nature, literary prizes, aesthetic autonomy, religion, logical positivism, the presidency, copyright law, the free market, the publishing industry, the information economy, and the English department's ties to a specific form of reading and style as determining forces in post-1945 literature and literary studies.

One of the effects of these approaches to post-1945 literature has been to displace postmodernism as an explanatory category in the name of more pragmatic institutional histories, circulation studies, sociological inquires, and reception models. For Sean McCann and Michael Szalay, this shift marks a rejection of New Left politics and, by extension, postmodernism, for it entails a recognition that many of the concepts and theories central to postmodernism—the poststructuralist theory of language, Foucauldian understandings of discipline and the subject, Althusserian accounts of compromised agency, and gender/queer theory's emphasis on the power of the "unspeakable"—are, in fact, not radical ideas but rather "cherished and ultimately comforting folklore of the late capitalist economy" (460). At the same time critics like Sianne Ngai and Ursula K. Heise have produced accounts of the postwar period that dispense with postmodernism as an explanatory category while retaining it as an aspect of their analyses of the contemporary condition. Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories* extends David Harvey's claim that modernism and postmodernism are "diverging responses to a single process of modernization" by describing our ongoing modernity as one characterized by "aesthetic categories" that "cut across modernism and postmodernism" and which cannot, therefore, be usefully or accurately described as either modern or postmodern (15). And whereas the "ecocritical insurgency" that was consolidated by the 1995 publication of Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* was largely organized against postmodernism's instituted eradications of nature, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* Ursula K. Heise identifies a set of characteristically postmodernist features of post-1960 novels as literary modes of engaging with the scenarios of ecological risk and global connectedness that, on her account, characterize the postwar period (17–67).[8]

In terms of periodization, these new approaches to post-1945 literature often find continuity where advocates of postmodernism find rupture. For both Ngai and Heise, for example, the characteristic categories, concerns, and modes of postwar and contemporary culture are identified as aspects of a long-running modernity. More programmatically, in "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary" Amy Hungerford—citing Wendy Steiner's "Postmodern Fictions, 1970–1990" as a foundational text—argues that the last decade of postwar literary criticism is characterized by works that identify the postwar period not as the supercession of modernism but as the "triumph" of "modernism's aesthetics" (418). Indeed, the two most important periodizing studies of the last decade, Walter Benn Michaels's *The Shape of the Signifier* and Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*, also both identify the post-1945 period as a continuation or extension of modernism. In *The Shape of the Signifier*, Michaels argues that the theoretical framework of postmodernism—the dual commitment to the materiality of the text and the primacy of the subject position—is, in fact, a postwar iteration of a modernist problematic: the imbrication of concerns about the ontology of the artwork with a distinctly modern notion of identity. Both here and in subsequent essays, such as "Going Boom" and "The Un-usable Past," Michaels then also identifies postmodernism as the still active cultural style of a neoliberalism that works to project the world postwar America wants neoliberalism to have produced (a world organized by subject positions and divided into identities) rather than the world it has actually produced (a world structured by economic inequality). In *The Program Era* McGurl redistributes a number of more and less agreed-upon descriptions of the characteristic formal and thematic features of postwar American fiction—including those that are regularly identified as being definitive of postmodernist fiction—in order to document how the postwar literary field is structured not by the emergence of postmodernism but by the fact that modernist principles of writing were "institutionalized as another form of original research sponsored by the booming science-oriented universities of the Cold War era" (4). McGurl then identifies the aesthetics usually identified as postmodernism as one of the three "relatively discrete but in practice overlapping aesthetic formations" that compose "the totality of postwar American fiction," and he suggests that this particular formation is best described as "technomodernist" (rather than postmodernist) in order to both register its engagement with information technology and to reassert its "obvious continuity" with

interwar literary modernism (32, 42). In his subsequent essay "Ordinary Doom: Literary Studies in the Waste Land of the Present," McGurl further argues that "the return of the rhetoric of 'modernity' and the partial eclipse of 'postmodernism' " in recent criticism is an aspect of the emergent recognition that "the contemporary" is best described as the current stage of an ongoing modernity (337, 342–43).

As Hungerford also notes, whereas the field of postwar American literature is, for the most part, still structured by the "reigning bifurcation of contemporary fiction into the 'postmodern' avant-garde" and "realist" writing of "women and people of color," studies such as Michaels's and McGurl's follow on Steiner's to the extent that they demonstrate how "a reading of experimentalist novels . . . must be . . . integrated with a discussion of realist writing" (Hungerford, 2008 411).[9] To the extent that this is the case, a parallel development can be traced in the field of African American literary studies. Following on Phillip Brian Harper's 1994 study *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture*, in which he argues that "the fractured subject" that many critics identify as a hallmark of postmodern culture "has long formed a staple element of minority literatures," Madhu Dubey's 2003 study *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* demonstrates how antirealist postwar African American fiction performs a version of the cultural and historical labor that critics continue to arrogate to realist modes of minority literature. Moreover, in making her argument for the utility of postmodernism as a periodizing concept in regard to African American literary and cultural studies, Dubey develops Harper's argument that the social marginalization that underwrites the modes of postwar minority literature is, itself, a "condition of possibility for postmodern culture" (Dubey 21). These locations of the postmodern as an amplification of, rather than a departure from, earlier moments in literary history are, then, continuous with Kenneth W. Warren's *What Was African American Literature?*, which argues that "African American literature"—a field concretized under the sign of postmodern and poststructuralist theory in works such as Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* and Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey*—is itself a construct of an aesthetically and politically modernist notion of literature's relationship to the social world (Warren 1–43).

The addition or adoption of both comics and digital literature into the field of postwar literary studies has also been marked by revised understand-

ings of the relationship between the postwar and the postmodern. In the case of comics this adoption has proceeded as more of an extension, rather than a contestation, of modernism. Indeed, the comics that have become an indispensable part of postwar literary studies, such as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, and Chris Ware's *Building Stories* are all dense, multilayered works, often exhibiting the self-reflexivity common in modernist texts. Foundational work in comics studies by Hillary Chute, Jared Gardner, and Charles Hatfield also emphasizes how comics emerge from modernity, share formal characteristics with other modernist forms such as film, and are determined by a persistent high/low divide, a divide that often separates "mainstream" comics like the often collaboratively authored superhero comic book, from single-author works that are more likely to be read as aesthetic and literary objects. By contrast, the foundational 1990s works on electronic literature by writers such Jay David Bolter, Robert Coover, and George P. Landow identified "hypertext" as unequivocally both postmodernist and poststructuralist. As N. Katherine Hayles details in *Electronic Literature*, the field has since developed a more characteristic focus on the medial specificities of particular works in relation to the material affordances of their computational bases (software, hardware, platforms, and so on). In certain respects this has produced an unconsolidated field: a field that—given the multimodality of digital-literary objects—consists of studies that necessarily employ disparate methodologies to elaborate an object's distinctive medial, literary, and material appurtenances and genealogies.[10] At the same time, in recent studies with literary-historical or media-archeological ambitions, the focus on the medial and material aspects of electronic literature have yielded organizations that circumvent the postmodern. For instance, both Jessica Pressman's *Digital Modernisms* and Lori Emerson's *Reading Writing Interfaces* focus on the deliberate difficulty of a particular set of twenty-first century works of electronic literature. For Pressman this difficulty makes these works noninteractive and thus aligns them with the literary modernist avant-garde of the early twentieth century. For Emerson, by contrast, this feature makes these works anti-immersive and implicates them in a nonlinear history that includes both Emily Dickinson's fascicles and typewriter concrete poetry of the 1960s and '70s.

These recent shifts in how critics understand postmodernism also register in the work of one of the major theorists of postmodernism, Fredric

Jameson.[11] Charting his work from *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* to the present, one notices a movement away from thinking of postmodernism as an unreadable and vertiginous system to the positing of a "singular modernity" and, most recently, a renewed interest in the dialectic—something that Jameson's earlier work suggested had stalled out in postmodernism but, it seems, is now moving again. In *Postmodernism* Jameson critiques the historical amnesia and cognitive vertigo dominant in late capitalism, famously positing that postmodernism signals an impasse, a cultural logic that annihilates both history and utopia with its celebratory consumerist and technological ideologies. Unable to map the present, we must await a "new political art" that can "[achieve] a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [the world space of multinational capitalism], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (54). In *A Singular Modernity*, Jameson adjusts this construction of postmodernism by setting it into relation with modernism. In that book, Jameson supplements his account of postmodernism by characterizing "interwar modernism" as a largely "American invention" of the "years *following* World War II" (164–65; emphasis added). He then characterizes both this "late modernism" and the recent critical investments in it—the same investments that Hungerford, McGurl, and others identify with the eclipse of postmodernism—as expressions of a regressive "ideology of modernism" that is, itself, an aspect of a continuing postmodernity (210). Following that invocation of singularity (itself a concept seemingly inaccessible from within the postmodern landscape Jameson outlines in the 1990s), Jameson turns to utopia in *Archaeologies of the Future*, arguing that a "post-globalization Left" can now engage in utopian thought as a negation of the world market's "invincible universality," under the "slogan of anti-anti-Utopianism" (xii, xvi). These movements away from a totalizing, rigid construction of late capitalism and toward a sense of the political possibilities that allow for the construction of alternatives to late capitalism have, in recent years, been followed by *Valences of the Dialectic* and *The Hegel Variations*, both of which aim to recuperate the dialectic for the contemporary moment. Indeed, Jameson includes, in an essay on Marx's *Capital*, nothing less than a slogan of his own—"Cynicism of the Intellect, Utopianism of the Will!"—that makes clear his increasing emphasis on action as a necessary compliment to thought in our contemporary moment

(2010a 13). This practicality is further in evidence in Jameson's recent *The Antinomies of Realism*, which, when framed alongside his book on science fiction, *Archaeologies of the Future*, makes it clear that as the mid-2000s move into the mid-2010s, the imperatives of his dialectical thinking shift from the utopian to the realist, from the idealism and play emblematic of postmodernism, to the pragmatic materialism of the contemporary moment.

While Jameson's method differs greatly from that practiced by most of the critics mentioned thus far, the shifts in his thinking over the past two decades also reflect the same story of postmodernism's role in literary studies that we have been tracing elsewhere. In the 1990s postmodernism is unquestionably dominant, only to be offset by a stronger notion of modernism in the 2000s. In recent years Jameson's work signals a further shift into the contemporary, as he returns to some of Marxist critique's first principles—the dialectic and utopia—and foundational texts—Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Marx's *Capital*. Here and elsewhere the contemporary now signals renewed possibility.

At the same time, both Jameson's 1984 essay and 1991 book on postmodernism are now generally regarded as loci classici of American accounts of the postwar period. As critics like Phillip Wegner continue to extend the specific account of the postwar period that these works initiated, the "postmodernism" that these works consolidated also continues to serve as the basis for a range of critical studies of postwar American literature and culture. In their introduction to the special issue "The Way We Read Now" of *Representations*, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus identify the publication of Jameson's 1981 book *The Political Unconscious* as the key episode in the institutionalization of the mode of interpretation—"symptomatic reading"—that, on their account, continues to characterize postwar American literary and cultural criticism. Of course, many other contemporary movements in literary criticism and theory similarly draw from the theoretical tradition established under the category of the postmodern. These include the influential posthumanist accounts of the postwar period advanced by critics such as Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, who assume the basic features of Jameson's account of postmodernism while inverting his critique of late capitalist technology by prioritizing the development of technology over that of capital. There are then also studies like Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, which continues to prioritize the development of capital but offers an account of contemporary temporality that departs from Jameson's arguments

about postmodernism's spatialization of time. More broadly, there is Cary Wolfe's advocacy and Mark Hansen's exemplification of a particularly Derridean construction of posthumanism, the "new materialisms" advanced by theorists such as Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton, and scholars such as Brian Massumi, who draw on the works of Gilles Deleuze and other theorists to posit virtuality and affect as central terms in contemporary culture. All of these strains of contemporary criticism retain much of the theoretical and aesthetic discourse first introduced under the name of the postmodern.

Moreover, the influence of French philosophers Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, along with other European thinkers like Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, Franco Berardi, Antonio Negri, and Paolo Virno in the past decade point to the continuing relevance of postmodern theory to contemporary literary studies. In his introduction to the *PMLA* special section, "Literary Criticism for the Twenty-First Century," Jonathan Culler makes the argument that the future of literary criticism will be, if not necessarily Derridean, then one that was at least made available by "the theory revolution" (914). In the same special section of *PMLA*, Richard Klein argues for a specifically Derridean future for literary criticism—a future that seems to be taking shape in works such as Rei Terada's *Looking Away* and Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets*—and in their "Theory Now" special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Grant Farred and Michael Hardt present a collection of essays on the states of theory in contemporary literary studies that, at the very least, demonstrates the resilience of the link between theory and emancipatory politics for many critics. There are then also recent studies such as Rey Chow's *The Age of the World Target* and Lydia H. Liu's *The Freudian Robot* that employ renovated versions of poststructuralism in order to recalibrate the relationship between poststructuralism and modernity: Chow through an account of the interdependent institutionalizations of comparative literature, area studies, and poststructuralism in the postwar US academy, Liu through an account of interwar literary modernism, deconstruction, and cybernetics. In these theory-inflected strains of contemporary literary and cultural criticism, postmodernism, then, is alive and well, even if it is not always invoked by name.

At the same time, there are a number of critics who have proposed new programs for doing literary critical work that are explicitly pitched as alternatives to the now instituted modes of criticism associated with postmodernism and backed (most often) by poststructuralism. In the introduction

to "The Way We Read Now," Best and Marcus propose that the modes of "surface reading" they delineate in their essay "broaden[] the scope of critique to include the kinds of interpretive activity that seek to understand the complexity of literary surfaces—surfaces that have been rendered invisible by symptomatic reading" (1). In *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Franco Moretti heralds the "disappearance of the text" and proposes a mode of "distant reading" backed by "*a materialist conception of form*" that attends to units both far smaller and far larger than the individual work (92; emphasis in original). Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents* abandons both poststructuralist and historical-materialist modes of reading while renovating the protocols of close reading in order to read American literature across deep time and, hence, outside of the temporal and spatial constraints imposed by the nation state (1–6).[12] And in *Our Aesthetic Categories* Ngai argues that the "aesthetic category" as an object of analysis—an object that requires a critic to track it as it develops at different scales and rates across time periods, nation-states, genres, cultures, industries, and media—poses a fundamental challenge to both the tenets of postmodern aesthetic theory and the period-based mode of "historicism that has dominated literary and cultural studies over the past three decades" (16). While these programs differ significantly from one another, what they have in common—and what they also have in common with the periodizing or period-specific projects of critics such as Greif, Hungerford, McCann and Szalay, McGurl, and Michaels—is that they are backed by diverse invocations of "form," invocations that are conceived of as rejections or departures from postmodernism. In recent essays such as "The Politics of a Good Picture" and "Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the Form of the Photograph," Michaels has made an explicit, programmatic, version of this argument for form and against postmodernism. In these essays Michaels has positioned form against multiculturalist, identity-focused approaches to literature dominant in the past two decades: here, the return to form promises actual engagements with both history and the contemporary moment that bypasses what are, by now, quite familiar and, for Michaels, quite obviously ineffective claims about literature's role in troubling social hierarchies.[13]

From the perspective of this volume, what needs to be noted here is that a shift away from tired liberal politics and toward a reinvigorated notion of form also motivated early critics and theorists of postmodernism in the 1960s and '70s. For example, in an account of what she called the "new sensibility"

in a 1965 essay in *Mademoiselle*, Susan Sontag claims that contemporary art, ranging from Samuel Beckett, William S. Burroughs, and Robert Rauschenberg to the Supremes, Budd Boetticher, and Jean-Luc Godard, "demands less 'content' in art, and is more open to the pleasures of 'form' and style . . . is also less snobbish, less moralistic—in that it does not demand that pleasure in art necessarily be associated with edification" (303). This argument against content is also key to John Barth's well-known 1967 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion." Central to any account of metafiction, Barth's advocacy of "virtuosity" and exuberance at the possibilities offered by exhaustion rests on the novel's obsolescence and the ways in which this frees the writer to focus on form rather than content. In Barth's essay, metafiction signals a revitalization of the novel, as the novelist is able to examine the text's own status as an object in the world: "A novel is as much a piece of the real world as a letter" (145). Accordingly, for Barth and Sontag, postmodernism inaugurates a renewed attention to form, one that is, perhaps, instructive for our contemporary moment, when critics are similarly troubled by literature's, and the English department's, changing, even receding, role in the twenty-first century.[14] Indeed, the argument could be made that returning to form is, in a way, returning to postmodernism, but a postmodernism that looks quite different than the version ultimately dominant in English departments in the 1990s. At the same time, in the optic introduced by the recent work we have been discussing in this essay, it could also be claimed that this return to form recasts the turn to form that characterized the advent of postmodernism as something other than the advent of postmodernism: as an extension of modernism, as an aspect of the postwar system of American fiction, as a component of emergent neoliberalism, or as an aspect of a contemporary aesthetic that has yet to be adequately described.

By briefly sketching the question of form at postmodernism's emergence in the United States, we hope to gesture to some continuities between what we see as two camps in recent scholarship on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature and culture. On the one hand, postmodernism still retains the explanatory force that it once did for scholars who draw heavily on theory and who look to literature for moments of disruption, resistance, and utopian imagining. On the other hand, postmodernism is reduced or abandoned by critics who turn to institutional histories of post-1945 literature and who see in that literature continuity with, and the institutionalization of, modernism. Both of these approaches hinge upon competing

accounts of literary form and its connection to the social world. Accordingly, we believe that a reevaluation of postmodernism might be useful for thinking of form today, especially since early critics of postmodernism found themselves to be equally uncertain and divided about what forms and functions literature might take in the late twentieth century. We can look back now to that speculation and uncertainty with a degree of familiarity, as postmodernism itself becomes a question, again, rather than a dominant category.

At the very least, what these divergent approaches to post-1945 literature make apparent is that, at present, the questions of the postmodern and, accordingly, the postwar and after are peculiarly pressing. Did postmodernity ever begin? Is it now over? Has it been replaced by the contemporary or superceded by the global? Does the postmodern provide a rubric for conceiving of new aesthetic and political practices? Is it a term that remains necessary for the current discourse in postwar US literary studies? Was postmodernism an instituted critical fiction? Was it a major or minor aspect of postwar American literature and culture? Is the postmodern just modernism, after all? Does the postmodern now mark out the basic condition of life in the early twenty-first century, rather than an aesthetic vanguard? However the question of the postmodern is posed, it is clear that it remains central to any adequate conception of both the present moment and its immediate past. Moreover, the postwar promises to broaden, and also to challenge, the field of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary studies. Yet it poses its own set of questions. Does the postwar mark a significant literary or aesthetic shift, or does it, instead, chart a shift in global power structures that only later resonate in aesthetic forms? Is the postwar a convenient tool for separating scholars in contemporary literature from modernist studies, or is it a way of bridging the division formerly created by the "break" between modernism and postmodernism? And since the postwar broadens the historical scope of the field formerly periodized by the term "postmodernism"—by moving the period's origin point back from the 1960s/1970s to 1945—it also raises the question of "after." When does the "postwar" end—in 1989, 2001, 2008? What fissures, ruptures, breaks, repetitions, and continuities can we chart on the new timeline? These questions recalibrate one of the classic problematics of postmodernism—our inability to view ourselves within a larger historical totality, our inability to view ourselves as living in anything but an amnesiac present tense, with no possible

future and no past. The dialogue and brief position papers that follow offer a number of overlapping, yet also divergent, answers to these questions. This book should be read as a conversation among scholars in the field, as the shifts, changes, and stabilities in the field are very much ongoing. The promise of the new developments in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary studies is that we can now come up with new ways of placing ourselves, in history, in the present, and in the future, and the dialogue and position papers in *Postmodern/Postwar—and After* articulate a number of those new orientations.

NOTES

1. David Foster Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" was originally published in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (13.2 [Summer 1993]: 151–94).

2. These important disciplinary developments are representative of a broad-based and ongoing set of efforts to constitute "the contemporary" as an area of inquiry. For instance, the above developments are preceded by book series such as Duke University Press's Post/Contemporary Interventions and print and electronic journals such as *Contemporary Literature* and *Postmodern Culture*; they are concurrent with the formation of print and electronic venues such as Punctum Books, *n+1*, *Nonsite.org*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

3. Other influential periodizing accounts of postmodernism include Anderson's genealogy of the term from the early twentieth century to the 1990s, DeKoven's case for the 1960s as the site for postmodernism's emergence, and Huyssen's account of postmodernism's critiques of and departures from modernism.

4. For instance, Jean-François Lyotard's foundational postmodern critique of "metanarratives" has been absorbed into literary studies under the heading of the New Historicism, and postmodern art's frequent critique of the museum—as theorized by Douglas Crimp—has itself become a mainstay of the contemporary art museum, with its emphasis on interactivity, site specific installations, and critique of the high/low divide.

5. For a gloss on the "New Modernist Studies," see Mao and Walkowitz's definitional essay. Notable anthologies of scholarship in the New Modernist Studies that exhibit the above-mentioned critical impulses include those edited by Ardis and Collier, Caughie, Doyle and Winkiel, and Mao and Walkowitz.

6. While Hoberek's *After Postmodernism* special issue solidified postmodernism's waning influence in literary criticism, this shift can also be seen earlier, in many of the short essays in Hoberek's 2001 "Twentieth-Century Literature in the New Century: A Symposium." Hoberek prefaces the symposium essays with an account of the new choice that scholars of twentieth-century literature have in the twenty-first

century: "We can now construe ourselves as either historicists *or* contemporarists, depending on our taste. That is, we can either continue to study new literature, or else we can devote ourselves to the twentieth century as a completed historical period (ceding new work by Rushdie or Morrison, Ai or Stoppard, to our colleagues in twenty-first century lit, or else treating it as an embarrassing coda, somewhat like Faulkner's post-World War II novels)" (9; emphasis in original). Hoberek's reference to Faulkner points to the periodizing function of the category "modernism" and, by implication, the question of postmodernism's usefulness as a period marker for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At this moment, one cannot imagine the successful formation, or even the desirability, of a "Postmodernist Studies Association" that would mirror the Modernist Studies Association. Instead, groups implicitly organized against the periodizing claims of postmodernism, Post•45 and ASAP (The Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present), have begun to serve that function.

7. Recent scholarship that locates the 1990s as a hinge point between postmodernism and the contemporary moment includes Adams, Cohen, Green, Heise, Steiner, and Wegner.

8. Other recent influential ecocritical engagements with postmodernism include Nixon's postcolonial ecocriticism, LeMenager's commodity regionalism, and the material ecocriticism of scholars such as Bennett, Iovino and Oppermann, and Morton. For an earlier influential account of the relationship between ecocriticism and poststructuralism, see Phillips.

9. Of note in this regard is the way in which a number of recent accounts of postwar, contemporary, and even postmodern literature seek to replace characteristically postmodernist features with features that are routinely associated with ethnic literature. Rachel Adams does this sequentially in her essay "The Ends of America, The Ends of Postmodernism," insofar as the "American literary globalism" she describes as following postmodernism is, essentially, an expanded version of ethnic-American literature. Ursula Heise does so synchronically in her essay "Postmodern Novels," insofar as her argument that postmodernism needs to be understood as a response to mass media that consists of an effort to capture or preserve "oral culture"—which is, itself, a long-standing description of the central project of ethnic-American literatures. We are indebted to Maria A. Windell for this insight.

10. We are indebted to Benjamin J. Robertson for this point.

11. The institution of Jameson's account of postmodernism as the standard account for the field of post-1945 literary studies is, itself, a periodizing feature of the 1990s—a period during which Jameson's account of postmodernism as "late-capitalism" outstripped other influential accounts such as Brian McHale's association of postmodernism with "ontology" and Linda Hutcheon's association of it with "historiographic metafiction."

12. Other recent influential versions of transnational and transamerican literary scholarship include Adams, Fox and Sadowski-Smith, Giles, and Saldívar.

13. For example, in "The Politics of a Good Picture," an essay on Jeff Wall's 1982 photograph *Mimic*, Michaels reads the photograph as "[asserting] the irreducibility of form to affect," which, in the photograph, is split between class inequality, a formal relation, and racial discrimination, an affective relation (183). That is, for Michaels this irreducibility is something that is often present in aesthetic objects, but it is often neglected, ignored, or conflated with affective content by critics who read texts through a multiculturalist methodology.

14. While this brief gloss deals with literary—and novelistic—form, the same tracing could be accomplished for the question of modernism's relation to postmodernism, a connection that is central to Ihab Hassan's 1971 "paracritical bibliography" of postmodernism. Hassan claims that postmodernism is "the change in Modernism," but also that postmodernism operates through "Anarchy," a radical departure from modernist "Authority" (190, 205). In Hassan's early accounts of postmodernism, we see the history to contemporary debates about the efficacy of postmodern politics as well as postmodernism's connection to or rupture with modernism. Removed from the critical imperative to advocate for (or against) postmodernism that motivated Hassan and other critics, our contemporary moment offers a unique vantage point by which to reevaluate the stakes of postmodernism.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Rachel. *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009.

———. "The Ends of America, The Ends of Postmodernism." Hoberek, *After Postmodernism*, 248–72.

Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodernity*. New York: Verso, 1998.

Ardis, Ann L., and Patrick Collier, eds. *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2008.

Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.

Barth, John. "The Literature of Exhaustion." *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*. Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002. 138–47.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011.

Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *The Way We Read Now*. Eds. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. Spec. iss. of *Representations* 108.1 (Fall 2009): 1–21.

Bolter, Jay David. *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991.

Brouillette, Sarah. *Literature and the Creative Economy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2014.

Brown, Bill. "The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory)." *PMLA* 120.3 (May 2005): 734–50.

Buell, Lawrence. "The Ecocritical Insurgency." *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 699–712.

———. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.

Burgett, Bruce, and Glenn Hendler, eds. *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York: New York UP, 2007.

Caughie, Pamela L., ed. *Disciplining Modernism*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.

Chow, Rey. *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics as Literature?: Reading Graphic Narrative." *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008): 452–65.

Clune, Michael W. *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945–2000*. Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 2010.

Cohen, Samuel. *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2009.

Coover, Robert. "The End of Books." *New York Times Book Review*. June 21, 1992: 23.

Crimp, Douglas. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1993.

Culler, Jonathan. "Critical Paradigms." *PMLA* 125.4 (Oct. 2010): 905–15.

Cusset, François. *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Trans. Jeff Fort, Josephine Berganza, and Marlon Jones. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

DeKoven, Marianne. *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.

Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006.

Doyle, Laura, and Laura Winkiel, eds. *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005.

Dubey, Madhu. *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.

———. "Speculative Fictions of Slavery." *American Literature* 82.4 (2010): 779–805.

Emerson, Lori. *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014.

English, James F. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005.

Farred, Grant, and Michael Hardt, eds. *Theory Now*. Spec. iss. of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110.1 (Winter 2011): 1–230.

Foster, Hal. "The Illusory Babels of Art." Marcus and Sollors 943–48.

Fox, Claire, and Claudia Sadowski-Smith. "Theorizing the Hemisphere: Inter-Americas Work at the Intersection of American, Canadian, and Latin American Studies." *Comparative American Studies* 2.1 (Spring 2004): 41–74.

François, Anne-Lise. *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2008.

Gardner, Jared. *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Giles, Paul. *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2011.

Glass, Loren. *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant Garde*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2013.

Green, Jeremy. *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.

Greif, Mark. *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015.

Hansen, Mark B.N. *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015.

Haraway, Donna. *Modest Witness@Second Millenium. FemaleMan Meets OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

———. *Simiams, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Harper, Phillip Brian. *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990.

Hassan, Ihab. "POSTmodernISM: A Paracritical Bibliography." *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*. Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002. 186–206.

Hatfield, Charles. *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2008.

———. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.
———. *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.
Heise, Ursula K. "Postmodern Novels." *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. Ed. Leonard Cassuto. Cambridge: U of Cambridge P, 2011. 964–86.
———. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.
Hoberek, Andrew, ed. *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction*. Spec. iss. of *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 233–393.
———. "Introduction: After Postmodernism." Hoberek, *After Postmodernism*, 233–47.
———, ed. "Twentieth-Century Literature in the New Century: A Symposium." *College English* 64.1 (Sept. 2001): 9–33.
Hungerford, Amy. "On the Period Formerly Known as the Contemporary." *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 410–19.
———. *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2010.
Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann, eds. *Material Ecocriticism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014.
Irr, Caren. *Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2010.
Jameson, Fredric. "A New Reading of *Capital*." *Mediations* 25.1 (Fall 2010a): 5–14.
———. "A New Reading of Capital." <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/a-new-reading-of-capital>.
———. *The Antinomies of Realism*. New York: Verso, 2015.
———. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.
———. *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*. New York: Verso, 2010b.
———. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.
———. *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*. New York: Verso, 2002.

———. *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 2009.
Klein, Richard. "The Future of Literary Criticism." *PMLA* 125.4 (October 2010): 920–23.
Landow, George P. *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
LeMahieu, Michael. *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism from American Literature, 1945–1975*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013.
LeMenager, Stephanie. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 2014.
Liu, Alan. *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.
Liu, Lydia H. *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.
Lowe, Lisa. "Globalization." Burgett 120–23.
Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
Mao, Douglas, and Rebecca Walkowitz. "The New Modernist Studies." *PMLA* 123.3 (May 2008): 737–48.
Mao, Douglas, and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds. *Bad Modernisms*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006.
Marcus, Greil, and Werner Sollors, eds. *A New Literary History of America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002.
McCann, Sean. *A Pinnacle of Feeling: American Literature and Presidential Government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2008.
McCann, Sean, and Michael Szalay. "Do You Believe in Magic? Literary Thinking after the New Left." *Countercultural Capital: Essays on the Sixties from Some Who Weren't There*. Ed. Sean McCann and Michael Szalay. Spec. iss. of *Yale Journal of Criticism* 18.2 (Fall 2005): 435–68.
McGurl, Mark. "Ordinary Doom: Literary Studies in the Wasteland of the Present." *New Literary History* 41.2 (Spring 2010): 329–49.
———. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
McHale, Brian. "1966 Nervous Breakdown; or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?" *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.3 (September 2008): 391–413.
———. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1987.
Michaels, Walter Benn. "Going Boom." *Bookforum* 15.5 (February-March 2009). <http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/015_05/3274)>.
———. "Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the Form of the Photo-

graph." *nonsite.org* (25 January 2011). <http://nonsite.org/issue-1/neoliberal-aesthetics-fried-ranciere-and-the-form-of-the-photograph>.

———. "The Politics of a Good Picture: Race, Class, and Form in Jeff Wall's *Mimic*." *PMLA* 125.1 (Jan. 2010): 177–84.

———. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004.

———. "The Un-usable Past." *The Baffler: Civilization With a Krag* (16 December 2009).

Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. New York: Verso, 2005.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Ngai, Sianne. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.

Owens, Craig. *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. Ed. Scott Bryson. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.

Phillips, Dana. *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Pressman, Jessica. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. New York: Oxford UP, 2014.

Saldívar, José David. *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011.

Siraganian, Lisa. *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Sontag, Susan. "One Culture and the New Sensibility." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966. 293–304.

Steiner, Wendy. "Postmodern Fictions, 1970–1990." *The Cambridge History of American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Vol. 7. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 425–538.

Striphas, Ted. *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009.

Szalay, Michael. *Hip Figures: A Literary History of the Democratic Party*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012.

Terada, Rei. *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

Trask, Michael. *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2013.

Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *A Sup-*

posedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments. Boston: Back Bay, 1997. 21–82.

Warren, Kenneth W. *What Was African American Literature?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.

Wegner, Phillip E. *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989–2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009.

Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.

PART I | DIALOGUE

ANDREW HOBEREK
with
SAMUEL COHEN
AMY J. ELIAS
MARY ESTEVE
MATTHEW HART
DAVID JAMES

POSTMODERN, POSTWAR, CONTEMPORARY

A Dialogue on the Field

What follows is a partial and inconclusive conversation about the state of post-1945 literary studies at the present moment. It is partial and inconclusive in the way that all conversations are, since it brings together a particular group of people to discuss matters on which they do not—as becomes clear almost immediately—always agree.

The aim of the conversation was to obtain a snapshot of the study of post–World War II literature that would touch upon the institutional frameworks shaping the field. To that end, in early 2013 I asked a group of people if they would agree to answer a series of questions collaboratively over e-mail. Because of their schedules, the conversation went on until summer 2014. The participants were Mary Esteve, a founding member of the group Post•45 and an editor of its online journal; Amy J. Elias, one of the founders of the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present (ASAP); Matthew Hart, then president of ASAP and one of the editors of the Columbia University Press book series Literature Now; David James, coeditor with Hart and Rebecca Walkowitz of Literature Now; and Sam Cohen, editor of the University of Iowa Press series The New American Canon. Each of these people, as the

interview makes clear, necessarily approaches the study of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature with an awareness of the organizational structures in which research is produced and circulates.

This generates, of course, a version of the field very different from one that would have drawn, say, on proponents of different methodologies (nonsymptomatic reading, digital humanities) or critical schools (affective criticism, transnational studies, the critique of neoliberalism). While all of these differences of approach matter deeply to the study of post-1945 literature, Daniel, Jason, and I thought—in keeping with the overall aims of this volume—that what makes the field distinctive is its relatively recent solidification and the consequent emergence of new groups and new publishing venues for those working within it.

Of course, even as an institutional snapshot this conversation leaves things out—perhaps most important the rise of semiacademic publishing venues like the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and *Public Books*—fora that stress contemporary writing and that encourage the academics who contribute to them to write in a more public way. That's another conversation, and it would be a great one. For now, though, we hope what follows offers insight and—perhaps even more important—encourages rebuttal. We offer it not as an ex cathedra summing up but rather as a frozen moment in a much larger conversation that all of us in the field are, in fact, having every day, and that will hopefully go on for a long time.

Andrew Hoberek
August 2014

AH: It's not that long since modernism was the leading edge of historically informed, period-specific literary study in English departments, with studies of post–World War II writing carried forward only in various fragmented ways: under the rubric of postmodernism, which focused primarily on a limited canon of experimentalist writers; via discrete subfields like ethnic studies and postcolonial studies; or through attention to individual authors like DeLillo, Morrison, or Rushdie. In the past decade or so, post-1945 literature has become a recognizable field (or set of nationally defined fields) in its own right, with journals, book series, and job searches all proceeding under this rubric. As scholars who experienced and in many ways participated in this transition, what is your sense of how and why it took place?

What are the gains and, perhaps less obviously, the losses entailed by this development?

MH: Whatever we call it, it's true that there's currently a boom in contemporary literary studies. As for what caused that boom, three possibilities come to mind right away: time; or what Amy Hungerford, in her essay "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary," called "focal distance" (418): the fact that the literary history of, say, the 1960s really is history for most of us working today, not something remembered. Anyway, I think she's right that focal distance enables new sorts of scholarship, whether historicist or not, that aren't just different or differently interesting. It enables the sort of work that gets recognized and rewarded by our colleagues, most of whom assume such focal distance as a matter of course.

Market pressures: In that same essay, Hungerford quotes Gordon Hutner's story about the underprivileged status of contemporary literary studies circa 1970. Kenyon College offered a class on recent American writing, but students couldn't get credit for it (417–18). Could this happen now, in an era when market forces—student bums on classroom seats—shape the curriculum as well as standards of canonicity? Every place I've taught, classes in contemporary literature have been very popular. It might be that, given the corporatization of the university, our broad professional practices are now more sensitive to, or at least in tune with, the logic of curricular supply and demand. There's no simple equation that explains the link between undergraduate enrollments and such things as graduate teaching, conferences, book series, and the contents of scholarly journals. No one's going to deny that a link exists, though, are they?

Modernist studies: In the last twenty years, modernist studies has become institutionalized in new ways. This has been accomplished via a massive expansion of that field, not least in temporal terms. Modernism bleeds forward into the present, just as it pushes back into areas traditionally covered by specialists in the nineteenth century. Still, I think the expansion of modernist studies has had a clarifying effect for our field. It's given us institutional structures to imitate and react against. It's helped us see modernism as a diversity of historical objects, not as the common sense of what it means to read and write in a sophisticated manner. It's helped kill off postmodernism by demonstrating how much of what passed for postmodern

theorizing depended on an impoverished account of the modern. Finally, because the new modernist studies has so aggressively colonized new areas of literary history, it's forced us to do a better job of describing the literature we study—and of exploring whether we need new theories and methods to understand it. Postmodernism tried to do that from a position at once within and after the penumbra of the modern, with the result that, unless you made a strong claim—à la Jameson—for an epochal break, your argument always risked being dragged back into modernity's shadow. I don't claim that we've finally escaped modernity. I don't even know if that would be desirable. But two things have happened for sure. Modernist studies now sometimes overreaches, especially in its globalist or transnational versions. This creates opportunities for pushback and clarification; it certainly made me, for instance, newly conscious of the limitations of that literary-historical term. More positively, because the growth of modernist studies as a field has been accomplished by the demystification and diversification of its objects of study, it's become possible to talk about the relation between then and now in less anxious and more open-ended terms.

DJ: For me these questions draw attention to two overlapping aspects of the way we think about what we do: pedagogy and periodicity.

Matt's reflections on the institutionalization of modernism as a field remind me of Hungerford's witty plea that we should aspire to be the kind of critics and teachers who are not confined to those "hefty postmodern slabs that formerly sat on syllabi as proof of the difficulty, and thus the worth, of contemporary writing in the academy" (418). While we no longer need postmodernism—and its accompanying theoretical apparatus—as an aesthetic premise or historical paradigm to justify the value of what we research as something that's also worth teaching, we're now entering (if not already well within) a more challenging moment where it's becoming increasingly tricky to engage with post-'45-to-the-present as a coherent field in its own right. The period is no longer entirely tenable as a period. John Duvall recently admitted as much in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*, claiming that his volume would be the last of its kind, given that "after 1945" is now so temporally distended as to become literary-historically amorphous. By the same stroke, however expansive "modernism" becomes conceptually, it's always going to be a

historically localizable set of movements as well as a more flexible and historically transportable set of formal ambitions, imperatives, or possibilities. The same can't be said for those bedfellows "postwar" and "contemporary," since the latter is always running away—critically, institutionally, culturally—from the former. And so it should.

That said, I'm hardly alone in implicitly defending post-'45 literature as a pedagogically useful frame, despite all the challenges it presents to our efforts to sustain some kind of particularity in addressing specific writers within discrete decades in the face of broader-brush gestures of retrospective periodization. Courses in this field are more popular than ever among undergraduate students, and students in further education who are taking A-level English (sixteen- or seventeen-year-olds) continue to be offered a strong provision in contemporary writing, and that's been the case for over twenty years. In scholarly terms, likewise, the range of options for reconstructing the field seems more wide ranging than ever, and the rise of "decade studies" (of which Sam Cohen's book on the 1990s in an American context, and James Brooker's book on the 1980s in a British context, are key examples) offers one avenue. These new formats offer welcome alternatives to the paradigm-instituting and symptomatizing vocabularies of the postmodern, which left us with limited resources to account for more contextually confined, temporally or regionally specific conditions of literary innovation.

But it would be reductive, of course, to dismiss the currency of postmodernism outright, given how temporally complex its development was and how generically and ideologically multifarious its influence on recent writers continues to be. I remember a conversation with Brian McHale, at the first ASAP conference in Knoxville, following a complex paper on Pynchon's *Against the Day*. After the Q&A, Brian said to me: "I wonder whether we defined 'postmodernism' too soon?" I'm still pondering what he meant; or rather, I think his intriguing question has a pertinent set of implications. Yes, that label was perhaps too easily arrived at, too quickly assumed (indeed, institutionalized) as the interpretive status quo, and then too easily dismissed as metacritical conversations about contemporary writing moved on—all before we had a chance to see whether actually "postmodernism" legitimately applied to writers we can draw under its umbrella. But on another scale, I also think Brian meant something like this: that deciding how

to define the character of a period is the easy part; testing how and why those definitions work for us, and asking ourselves honestly whether they square our scholarly and pedagogical priorities, is a tougher exercise.

AE: First, while I understand the desire to see the field of contemporary literature studies as still smoking from the forge, if one looks at actual research and teaching, it's clear that the post-WWII period has been a recognizable field for over half a century. I'm not the only one who firmly believes that there is a difference between modernism and what happens in art after the 1960s. The first issue of *Contemporary Literature* was published in 1960 as Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, "a critical journal primarily devoted to a consideration of the new literature which has emerged since World War II on both sides of the Atlantic" (and primarily containing essays not on experimental postmodernists but on Mailer, Faulkner, and Bellow). *boundary 2* was publishing with the subtitle "a journal of postmodern literature" in the early 1980s, when many of the influential monographs for and against postmodernism were published. (The scores of major studies ranging through literary criticism, sociology, architecture, visual arts, philosophy of history, and philosophy of science make clear that even people who hated the idea of postmodernism were often willing to consider the postwar period a break of some kind.) *Postmodern Culture* started publishing in 1990 (grappling with the language not of modernism or literary postmodernism but of poststructuralism). While what scholars do and what the corporate university considers legitimate work are often not the same things, a quick look through back issues of the MLA Joblist (English edition) reveals that by the early 1990s—twenty-odd years ago—a number of schools were advertising for positions in "modern/contemporary." I had such a position, titled "Postmodern American Literature" when "postmodern" meant "contemporary" because no one knew (or knows) what to call the post-WWII period.

With that said, however, certainly one can see in the twenty-first century a distinct influx of vital energy into the study of contemporary literature and a desire to historicize this writing in some concrete way. The near-death of poststructuralism and the expansion of historicism beyond older Marxist paradigms—concomitant with interest in gender studies, postcolonialism, and ethnic studies—helped a lot here: an ebbing of Marxist hegemony opened the door to new work in ethics, new economic criticism, and (most

important to our conversation) aesthetics in the 1990s and aughts that could reexamine the nature of the self, communication, other, and text without positing difference or total system as primary operators and values in those relations. (Postmodernism was entwined with poststructuralism; they waxed and waned together, perhaps.) Other factors contributing to a rise of interest certainly include historical distance, though I wouldn't shortchange the end of the Cold War as an incentive to reevaluate periodization and aesthetic movements (as does Badiou, for example) or the urgency felt by many in the face of rapid and wrenching globalization to determine how art can speak to what is unique and different about our contemporary moment. We see it in the range of key words being floated to name our time and then tested in literary criticism: digimodernism, cosmodernism, the New Sincerity, Remodernism, planetarity, performatism, geoculture, transculturalism, neocosmopolitanism, network society.

On the ground today, scholarly interest in the post-WWII period has certainly been ignited. The development of digital technology during the past twenty years has been important to this: while the modern certainly is influenced by technological development (as Stephen Kern and others have shown), the post-WWII period saw a paradigm shift in how technology defined lived time and space. Matt and David also are correct to say that the growth of the new modernist studies has encouraged a reconsideration of twentieth-century periodization, though I believe that it has been more important for those who wish to break old shibboleths about modernism, or who started their academic work primarily in modernist studies, than for those who have always worked squarely in post-1960s art. Alan Wilde was using the phrase "Late Modernism" in 1987 to distinguish aesthetic transitions in the twentieth century, yes? Statements such as that by Craig Owens that postmodernism was characterized (and distinguished from modernism) by its "appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hybridization" (321), or Ihab Hassan's obsessive parallel lists of different period characteristics, or Andreas Huyssen's distinctions between modernism and pomo based on art's relationship to popular culture, or Brian McHale's claims about ontological vs. epistemological dominants—these and scads of other statements on post-1945 arts in the C20 set off firestorms of modernism/postmodernism debate but eventually made it clear that we needed to think break as well as continuity between

modernism and what followed. Brian McHale was right, I think, that we theorized the postmodern too early, but only in the sense that we theorized it as a break from modernism—as late modernism, it worked just fine.

Thus I can honestly say that the debates in new modernist studies have had less effect on what I do or the theory of the contemporary that has been most influential to my work than did postcolonial theory and feminist theory, both of which exposed silences and repressions in much of what passed for postmodernism in the mid- and late twentieth century. With that said, I do think that work such as Mary's with Post•45 and, I hope, my own through ASAP, as well as Matt's, David's, and Sam's creation of new publication venues, has been central to this upsurge of interest in the contemporary period. Scholars are not merely reacting to new interest in the contemporary: we are helping to create and sustain it. I am convinced that the creation of scholarly community is fundamental to new analysis: if we create rigorous and open platforms for research and scholarly dialogue, research and dialogue do in fact happen. It's really exhilarating to see this validated today.

The gains of transitioning to a recognizable field of "post-1945 literature" include critical energy, a release from the endless and often pointless debates about "postmodernism," openness to new perspectives and paradigms, and institutional tidiness (what David calls "pedagogical" gains). The potential losses are another question, for me connected to the very American (US) connotations surrounding the post-1945 breakpoint (implying that literary history is American history); the erasure of tension between the birthdate of the postwar military-industrial complex and revolutions in cultural thought and production, which in the twentieth century may have a key date not of 1945 but of 1955 or 1968 (think of Marianne DeKoven's work on the 1960s as break, for example); and the significance of the Cold War to periodization (its beginning is centralized as a period marker but its ending is repressed as a period marker). Discussing all these can be very interesting and productive.

SC: I'll answer this question wearing the hat I happen to have on right now, the series-editing hat (I like to imagine it as a reporter's fedora, like in *The Front Page* or something). Perhaps the most obvious thing to note from under its brim is the number of new series publishing in this period; it's certainly evidence of Andy's point that study of the period—post-'45—is enjoying a

growth spurt. One slightly less obvious thing I've noticed in the short time that I've been beating the bushes, fielding proposals, and speed-reading manuscripts are the effects of this growth, some possibly too easy metaphors for which would be growing pains, a gangly awkwardness, and intense self-consciousness.

I agree with Amy that the field has existed as a field for longer than Andy's question has it; since at least as long as when I started graduate school in the mid-1990s, a canon of post-'45 literature (and, just as important, criticism) has been establishing itself, journals have been published for those working in the field, and one could identify as a post-'45 specialist. That this was a recent development then was evident in the composition of my and many other post-'45–specializing students' committees, which were stocked with and chaired by professors who'd started their own careers as modernists or Victorianists; committees are less likely to be so composed these days. But it is still true that the field is growing in all the ways we have been noting—enrollments, publications, dedicated organizations, conferences (though the larger conferences have not always kept pace with this in their program planning).

With this accelerated expansion has come not only the excitement and productivity that working with an active, growing cohort affords but also a self-referentiality of the sort we are taking part in here. This is a good thing and a bad thing, I think; I have enjoyed much of my participation in the virtual and actual gatherings of people working in the field because we are able to keep a conversation going, plus the people are nice, but I do wonder if a side effect of this is that we're talking to ourselves too much. I notice this (back to the hat) in the book projects I'm seeing, many of which exhibit a tendency toward certain kinds of scholarship, and in the inclination so many of us share to obsess about periodization, movements, and moments. All of the "afters" we in the field have been throwing around (and I've thrown a few myself) are evidence of a desire to understand how the arts and the world that produces them have changed and continue to change. However, another set of desires—to have a new name for everything, to build schema in which the difference of now from then can be charted—can also breed a predictability and, perhaps more important, can restrict the ways we think and talk about aesthetic and social history. While of course insisting that the new "ism" is new still depends on an understanding of the old "ism," it is a

particular kind of understanding that can veer toward the strawmanesque, and it can run the risk of unfairly downplaying the continuities between new and old.

As I say this I am trying to write a book that runs the risk of doing many of the things that I'm wondering about. I am trying to be conscious of these things, though, and conversations like the one we're having here and the larger one we're having in the field, while I'm wary of them, are the best way to remain informed and stay conscious. So maybe this is a necessary paradox?

ME: Apropos periodization, it's worth noting that literary studies' disciplinary neighbor, history, has also witnessed recent growth in post-1945 scholarship, evident for instance in book series like Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History and Macmillan's Studies in Contemporary History. Titles in the latter series (*Germany Since 1945*, *Decolonization Since 1945*, *The United Nations and International Politics*) further suggest the pertinence of the date to areas other than the United States and the United Kingdom. My sense is that 1945, as a periodizing marker, is as conventional as it is "convenient" (as David James will later describe 1945's periodizing significance); or, more precisely, that the value of 1945's convenience is bound up with its conventionality. The date draws no more nor less attention to itself than others that stick in broader collective imaginations, i.e., imaginations formed beyond the groves of academe.

When the research collective Post•45 formed in 2006, it was less interested, I think, in challenging the historiography of periodization than in asserting the validity of historicizing (or contextualizing) the literature and culture of a recognizable period dominated by too few methodological paradigms (primarily the ones Andy and Amy cite: postmodernism, poststructuralism, author studies, ethnic studies, etc.). Some of Post•45's founders have roots in areas of scholarship where historicist methodologies have become the norm—pre-1945 modernism and late nineteenth-century American studies—and no doubt an element of frontierism factored into their commitment to developing alternative approaches to post-1945 literature and culture.

But like Matt and others, I think that a good deal of the impetus to carve out a post-1945 area of concentration has to do with the success of the new modernist studies. I like to think that in its temporal, geographic, and

thematic expansions (ably described by Doug Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz in their 2008 PMLA piece, "The New Modernist Studies") this new formation presents itself as a big tent or, perhaps less democratically, a big word-cloud (with favored methodological practices and foci of varying weight and measure). In this context, the 1945 break functions to create a complementary silo (albeit one whose open-endedness implies possibly unwieldy expansion, as David suggests). It signals a contraction of sorts, which might appear retrograde and insular; but at its best it reflects an ambition to create a discursive space in which more or less common literary and historical knowledge circulates so that fresh approaches to an underhistoricized era and an undercontextualized body of cultural artifacts might emerge and build on one another.

Apropos of undergraduate pedagogy, I'll hazard the assertion that post-'45 studies should have been the first, not the last, to historicize and contextualize. It's often a challenge to make, say, John Winthrop or even Benjamin Franklin seem relevant to students, while the works of post-1945 and contemporary writers are susceptible to the presumption of unmediated accessibility. I don't wish, of course, to snuff out students' enthusiasm for their "favorite" writers; but I do think it's crucial for students to grapple with the political and institutional situatedness of their era's cultural artifacts. As wedges of defamiliarization, recent historicist accounts—for example, Mark McGurl's program-era thesis and Sean McCann's presidential-government thesis—have proven immensely useful.

AH: Amy raises the idea that post-'45 is a distinctly American period marker. In the United States, and perhaps in the United Kingdom as well, placing the break here does two things: it establishes the literature we study as distinct (perhaps too distinct, as Matt notes) from modernism; and it locates our historical interests in the end of World War II and the largely (if not exclusively) Anglo-European events (the expansion of the welfare state, the advent of the Cold War, the rise and fall of the Fordist economic settlement) that followed it. To what extent does this periodization distort our understanding of national literatures and the interactions between them? Does it give us a false sense of either American or British literature, in ways that go beyond the question of when (or if) modernism ends? Does it make it difficult to place American and British writing in conversation with each other, let alone with global literatures that might depend on a completely

different periodization grounded in, for instance, anticolonial and postcolonial frameworks that depend relatively little on World War II? Are there, perhaps, other models with which we might replace it, without sacrificing the focus on history that, as a number of you note, has been central to the development of the field?

DJ: To speak of "post-'45 fiction" is itself to partake in something of a convenient fiction: "convenient" because it allows us primarily to organize the field in ways that are pedagogically tried and tested and that enable us to use links between the legacy of WWII and the dynamics of decolonization as "backdrops" to literary production. Post-'45 works reasonably well in a British context too, and it even gives one the opportunity to trace transatlantic dialogues between what was happening to the novel in Bellow's scene and the way it was evolving for Ballard. Postwar postmodernism soon complicates these affinities, though, because the postmodern came to mean, by the 1980s, so many different things (with a distinctly shorter afterlife in the United Kingdom) to writers on either side of the Atlantic. Once we dig a little deeper, that is, the Anglo-American correspondences one can draw between historical events and the aesthetic particulars of what fiction is doing at any specific moment become more tenuous.

So is the period marker at all useful? Clearly it is for undergraduate courses, where it tends to function as an organizing category in the same way that "modernism" and "romanticism" do, even though they too are retrospectively constructed periodizing frames that also carry an evaluative function. But the argument could be made that unlike in the case of modernism or Romanticism (and despite ongoing debates about the forever expanding spatial and temporal coordinates of modernism), the literary-historical integrity of "post-45 literature," given its open-endedness, is especially difficult to justify and sustain. It could even be an example of what Eric Hayot has recently denounced as the "dominance of periodization in literary studies, a dominance that amounts to a collective failure of imagination and will on the part of the literary profession" (149). This might sound a bit harsh for those of us who are keenly aware of the extent to which the very process of periodizing postwar and contemporary literature has been vital to ensuring its legitimacy as a research domain, one that deserves a place on core undergraduate programs, that draws the investment of research funding councils, and that attracts serious attention from leading scholars who

may have begun their careers in modernist studies but who are now working on later decades (hence the rationale for a book series like Literature Now). But Hayot's charge might nonetheless apply if we look at the period from a "writerly" rather than cultural-historical perspective, in which case the 1945 break becomes less helpful to understanding how Sillitoe, Selvon, Spark, or Storey (to take only the leading Ss of the 1950s) were reshaping the novel form. Our "historical interests," as Andy calls them, should coexist in some respect with writers' interests: that Morrison was working on Woolf and Faulkner in the fifties and Coetzee on Ford and Beckett in the sixties suggests, at least anecdotally, that they were engaged in the kind of artistic continuum (though let's not call it "the long twentieth century") which makes 1945 seem like an artificial interruption. All of which suggests that there's no need to abandon the postwar as a set of parameters, but simply a need to acknowledge that the post-'45 era is a discursive category that has a certain pedagogical legitimacy and utility, even though in critical practice it has inevitable limitations as a frame for literary-aesthetic developments that might otherwise stubbornly refuse to synthesize.

AE: I don't think that post-1945 is distinctly American; I think the way it has been institutionalized loads the dice toward US history. The end of WWII certainly is a historical marker beyond US borders; after all, this moment gave us the atomic bomb and carved up Europe, Africa, and the Middle East in ways that influence world politics today. To start the "contemporary" period here is convenient and perhaps institutionally necessary. But like those "south-up" maps of the world that put Australia at the top left corner of the map in order to defamiliarize our common notions of global spatial geography, we need to defamiliarize our temporal geography and think how our notions of the contemporary might change if we mapped it onto 1947 and the partition of India, or 1968 (key to European shifts into a contemporary moment), or 1969 (Stonewall, the birth of the Republic of China), or 1970 (the date of the first Women's Liberation conference at Ruskin College), or 1989 or 1991 (central to post–Cold War Europe's notion of "the present"), or 1994 (when apartheid was destroyed in South Africa)—etc. Depending on how things turn out for the human race, it may be that the most important date for periodization of the new, contemporary era will be 1990, the year that Tim Berners-Lee posted the first website and the World Wide Web was created. Singularity, here we come.

I don't care much about using periodization to ensure the legitimacy of a field; that seems a full capitulation of our self-definition to bureaucratic processes. A field should have other means of legitimation—e.g., acute analysis of aesthetic alliances and tectonic shifts, pedagogically useful summaries of political and ethical foundations, insightful documentation of historical associations, provocative and conceptually freeing analysis of form. Fredric Jameson in fact noted in *A Singular Modernity* how a historical period and a historical break morph into one another: as soon as one identifies a historical "break" of some kind, that break grows historical periodization around it. As Brian McHale noted in an ASAP roundtable at MLA some years ago, breaks become periods, periods become breaks. (A book like Christian Caryl's *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* makes this relation clear.) This is in fact why ASAP avoided defining itself with period markers, preferring to associate itself with "the present" and even "the contemporary," terms much more open to new definitions, fluidity, and rhizomatic movement than is the historical marker of post-[nameyourdate]. I love Giorgio Agamben's definition of the contemporary in *What Is an Apparatus* (2009), particularly when he writes that "to be contemporary is, first and foremost, a question of courage, because it means being able not only to firmly fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us. In other words, it is like being on time for an appointment that one cannot but miss" (46).

So there is always a tension between the desire to set limits to time and make it humanly comprehensible as history (i.e., periodization) and the reality of time, which is not itself marked by the social. Keeping this tension alive can be productive, as David notes when he says that the post-'45 era is a discursive category. My recent work with Christian Moraru examines the spatial geography of "the planetary"—theories of the present based on new border crossings and global spatial configurations. Lauren Berlant's term "the affectsphere" is a different kind of model for the kind of sideways glance we need to take on the contemporary: identifying a feeling that something has shifted, then using that as a vehicle for cognitive mapping of the present that both articulates its newness and speculates on its provenance.

In other words, I don't think it matters how we carve up aesthetic periods beyond a certain point, though I would defend certain breaks as logical in human time. What counts is why we do so (and if we know and control why

we do so), as well as what insights can result from seeing periods and breaks from new starting and ending points, from the sites of new art forms as they emerge on the historical scene. As long as periodization is understood as artificial, fluid, and open to constant revision and resituation and avoids ossification or territorialization through institutionalization, we'll be okay.

AH: One of the advantages that those of us working in the field of (more or less) contemporary literature have over those in other fields is, of course, the opportunity to engage in dialogue with our writers. To what extent is such dialogue crucial to what we do? To what extent does it undermine (perhaps productively) the historicist impetus of the post-'45 rubric?

DJ: At a moment when the protocols of hermeneutic suspicion are somewhat under suspicion, and when we don't need to feel compelled to eliminate questions of authorial agency, aspiration, or personality to fulfill the interests of ideology critique, there's a real opportunity to integrate into criticism details of what writers think they're doing. To what extent the methods and priorities of critical discourse are ever tangibly shaped by its transactions with creative practice is difficult to gauge. But if there's no longer a need to feel embarrassed to talk about artistic intentions, then there's a chance to develop new kinds of interpretive intimacy between scholarly and writerly engagements with what contemporary literature does, how it gets made, and how it's institutionally constructed. That intimacy need not be inimical to the aims of historicism; dialogues with writers enrich rather than hinder the way we construct literary history. Some writers, though, are more obviously "helpful" at doing this: consider, for instance, the theoretically savvy and philosophically absorbed Tom McCarthy in interview, and contrast him with the somewhat more reticent and circuitous conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro, and you have two very different kinds of dialogues on show—where the reciprocity with the aims of scholarly interpretation is conspicuous in one instance and oblique in the other. Where McCarthy energetically invites and participates in the anatomization of the work, Ishiguro perpetuates the mystery, offering an impressionistic rather than analytical account of the compositional process. But either way you have the advantage of getting in closer touch with form. To some skeptics, that might result in descriptive or merely appreciative accounts of the work that lack the necessary (political) edge that the symptomatic impulse of some

historicist approaches can enable. But I think we're at a juncture, methodologically speaking, where it's becoming harder to dismiss the validity of writers' views not only on their own medium but on the way their work is received and profiled, even when we're reading them against the grain.

SC: I agree with David that listening to what writers have to say about their work can encourage closer critical attention to form, that is, to what's on the page as the shaped product of writers' choices, but it can also encourage emphasis on thematics, on the experiences and ideas motivating writers and their manifestation in the work. I am happier about the former, as it brings us closer to the literary. I don't want criticism to be further from the social, but I do want it to remember what it is that it's reading, and one danger of the thematic, of what a work is "about," is that it can lead to the forgetting of the literary, which is always more than that.

There's also the danger implied by what the Lester Bangs character in Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous* tells the young music critic: "Don't make friends with the rock stars." This is important less because we might shy away from being negative, though there's always that to consider, and more because we want to be skeptical of authors' accounts of what they are doing in their work. Two stories come to mind, both involving Jonathan Lethem and one involving Matt Hart, and both set in London. The first: I was invited to a symposium in London, a one-day affair on Lethem's work involving a group of talks and then a reading by Lethem himself. The presence of the writer while one talks about him provides—in addition to evidence against the Death of the Author and in addition to nerves (though happily Lethem was late because he'd left his passport in the apartment where he was staying in Paris and had to return to get it before taking the Chunnel, and so missed my presentation)—a healthy warning against idle speculation and overly sure statements about exactly what writers are doing in their work. Watching a writer's face as someone explains a novel by referring to a painful moment in the writer's childhood makes you remember humility while making claims.

The second story: Walking past Royal Albert Hall with a group during the ASAP symposium in London, I believe right after a talk I gave, coincidentally on Lethem, Matt Hart remarked on my use of authorial statements on particular works, current events, and so on, and said something to the effect of "You know, you don't always have to agree with everything they

say." What he meant, I think (though I suppose we can ask him now), is that skepticism toward authorial statements outside of the work itself is a good thing to retain. It's one thing encouraged by the historicist approach of so much work on the contemporary, and while I resist wholly symptomatic readings, in which the author's intent is not part of the equation, reading work in the context of its times can keep us from serving less as critics and more as publicists.

MH: "Never trust the teller, trust the tale." Google tells me that D. H. Lawrence was fond of that adage, which encapsulates the common sense that the meaning and effects of a literary work exceed an author's account of it. I think that's true even if, like Walter Benn Michaels, one believes that intentionality is a minimal condition for artistic meaningfulness in general. I think that's what I was getting at in London. It's hardly a brilliant insight. Assuming it's true, it's as relevant to an analysis of Gotthold Lessing as of Doris Lessing or Jonathan Lethem—which is to say, there are limits to the methodological peculiarity of contemporary literary studies.

Still, it does matter that I can e-mail or talk to Tom McCarthy, just as it made a difference to Hugh Kenner that he knew Ezra Pound. I've always thought of literary criticism as a three-legged stool, with the legs being historical, aesthetic, and theoretical analysis. Engaging in dialogue with living writers can provide information of relevance to every part of that triple enterprise. We would be foolish to discount it or to forget that there's a difference between helping to describe or explain a writer's art (sometimes in terms amenable to the writer herself) and lapsing into a species of PR.

I've recently stumbled across a version of this problem in my own work. A chapter of my new book focuses on J. G. Ballard's autobiographical stories about his upbringing in Shanghai. Ballard wrote and spoke often about how his SF and dystopian fictions drew on the traumatic experiences of his youth. In his memoir, *Miracles of Life* (2008), he describes his life in Shanghai as having built a kind of imaginative firmware: "a set of images and rhythms, dreams and expectations that are probably the basic operating formulas that govern my life to this day" (384). Now, when I first read statements such as those, I was deeply skeptical—in part, I'll admit, because so many coterie critics (Martin Amis, for instance) take them so seriously. But as I read more widely, and especially as I started to research the history of the Shanghai International Settlement and relate it to the narrative poetics

of Ballard's fiction, I began to change my mind. This left me with a bit of a problem. How, as a critic trained to distrust biographical criticism and believe in the intentional fallacy, should I deal with autocritical statements that seem basically true? It's not that Ballard's "Shanghai-to-Shepperton" story shouldn't be doubted; it's unreliable in all sorts of ways. The fact remains, however, that you can't write a formally and historically comprehensive account of his fiction without placing it front and center.

You'll have to wait to learn what this means in practice. I'll restrict myself to saying, for now, that I see the challenge like this: how to craft an account of Ballard's work that admits the agency of the writer, the text, and the critic. There are, obviously, special versions of this problem in our field. (And in this context, I think the fact that authors have the nasty habit of writing new works, constantly changing the nature and shape of their oeuvre, is more important than the fact that they give interviews.) In the end, though, I think I have to come back to what I implied before: what I'm describing is a general methodological problem in literary studies. My story is about Ballard and Shanghai, but one could imagine a similar anecdote being told about Dante and Florence or Dickens and Kent.

ME: Having researched and written on a lot of dead nineteenth-century authors, I can't say that I find working on living authors all that different, apart from the fact that access to personal correspondence is limited if not impossible, and that fewer biographies exist. This situation makes me grateful for the people who conduct interviews with authors, along with authors' autobiographical materials, which can help flesh out a context or open up a new one. Which is not to say that I would like myself to conduct these interviews or to speak publicly about these authors in their presence (as other contributors to this roundtable have). Still, I'm intrigued by critics who manage to develop more personal bonds with creative writers. Does this trend—if it is such—suggest a waning commitment to or confidence in academic knowledge? Or is it a way to inject some badly needed unpredictability into the discipline's epistemological pathways and/or to adopt a futurist orientation so as to differentiate post-'45 studies from every other literary field? If the latter, is this futurism a good thing, given (arguably) its consonance with current widespread efforts on the part of university administrations to function more and more like newness-marketing corporations?

I had thought to refer people to Stanley Fish's *New York Times* column

from a couple of years back in which he delves into the problem of encountering his intellectual nemeses, particularly if they're known to be nice persons. Cheeky as usual, he describes what he'd do if a favorite punching bag, such as Habermas, walked into the café: he'd leave. But Sam's and Matt's anecdotes and adages suggest that most of us academic critics have indeed internalized one or another form of Kantian disinterest and/or Michaels and Knapp's heuristic premise of authorial intention (which enables us to attribute speech to a human rather than, say, to waves on a sandy beach). All of which makes Fish's facetious lesson in professional belligerence less vital but still pertinent. To be sure, Fish is describing peer-to-peer relations, where one (such as Fish himself) may be downright proud to be another's nemesis. By contrast, author-critic relations are likely to be more asymmetrical, both interdependent and not, both vexed and not. In general I feel sorrier for belletristic critics than academic ones. Consider, for instance, the cognitive pain James Wood must have to endure, given his commitment to certain aesthetic criteria and his vexed sense of contemporary literature's sad privations. Disinterested historicists have the advantage of being able to be both more indifferent to aesthetic quality per se (which is not to say oblivious to literary form) and more interested in any literary artifact's broader social significance. In this sense academic critics may be more hospitable café companions of contemporary authors than are the James Woods of the world.

AE: What is odd is not that critics today are talking to living writers but that we ever stopped doing so. We need to recognize that at some point instrumentalization intervened and destroyed the organic relation between creation and analysis; today's university delights in cordoning off intellectual territory such as "creative writing" and "literary studies" and thereby spawning more degree markets.

I will refrain from engaging with Matt about three-legged stools, but I think much of what has been said here is right. On the one hand, one of the basic premises of ASAP is that dividing artists from critics is unproductive, particularly since so many artists today are theoretically savvy and have much to contribute to criticism. It may be hubris and desire to mark off intellectual territory that causes us to believe that writers such as Alison Bechdel, Kim Stanley Robinson, Karen Tei Yamashita, Mark Z. Danielewski, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, Percival Everett, Jhumpa

Lahiri, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Gao Xingjian, Wole Soyinka, Joe Sacco, Gerald Vizenor, and others have/had nothing to say about the fundamental formal, ethical, aesthetic, and political basis of art. William Gass couldn't shut up about aesthetics; John Barth helped to invent self-reflexive postmodernism/late modernism; I suspect that Marilynne Robinson has read some theology; China Miéville clearly knows his critical theory, particularly of the Marxist strand; I regularly teach some of Toni Morrison's essays in my race and theory courses; Kim Stanley Robinson has a PhD and wrote his dissertation with Fredric Jameson; and I'd like to talk with Paul Murray about the history of the "adolescent novel." I also would point out how this interview group, all literary critics, naturally gravitates to literature to make its points about critical-creative dialogue. But we live in an age of increasingly intermedial and multimodal art, when the borders between the arts as well as the borders between art and criticism have blurred. In *Patchwork Girl* Shelley Jackson not only goes intermedial, she combines craft and theory; likewise, installation art and conceptual art today very much merges visual and verbal media in artworks often deeply engaged with "high theory."

On the other hand, artists do tend to speak the language of craft, critics the language of analysis, and while we have points of convergence, we also have specialized vocabularies that allow for myriad and distinct approaches. We can talk to one another, but we need not speak a homogenized language. There is a scene in John Barth's 1966 novel *Giles Goat-Boy* in which a computer content analyst tells a fiction writer that he has algorithmically analyzed his style, tells the writer what his quirks are, and essentially kills the writer's spirit for all time. Sometimes separating criticism from creation is not a bad thing. As Mary notes, historicists likewise engage a practice that has different goals and lexicon than does craft, and similarly, if I am going to do a structural analysis of a story by Chimamanda Adichie, I will plug into a disciplinary vocabulary that may be alien to the writer's creative landscape in fundamental ways. That is fine. However, if critics engage in literary thematics, or book reviewing, or analysis of form and structure from a craft perspective, how does our analysis differ from that of the practicing writer? Different critical purposes will bring us closer to or further from creative artists.

Given new mixed artforms and some shared vocabularies, today's critics and artists actually may have new opportunities to redefine the old notions of the creative collective. Particularly since one unique job of the

critic working in the contemporary "period" is to create a new canon out of chaos, to find and advocate for the good and interesting stuff that is out there, it would behoove us to associate closely with artists who are plugged into creative communities and to hang out with emerging creative prodigies. Instead of worrying the creative-critical divide, why not build a new kind of salon for critics and artists whose verbal and written interchange would have the potential to introduce us to new practitioners and to open up discussion of uberous and exciting new art forms, analytical methods, and conceptual frames? I'd like to stress this point, actually: that one raison d'être for working in the contemporary arts is to discover new work and to help canonize—at least for a time—whatever one believes is the best that is known and thought in the world. It is useful to circulate among both artists and critics in order to find this new and exciting work.

AH: Since Amy mentioned work at the borders of literature and other media (especially but not exclusively new ones), I'll ask, what interesting new trends do you see in the field? What sorts of things—not specific subjects, of course, but approaches and conversations—do you want to encourage in your institutional labors?

AE: I do think one trend today is the emergence of intermedial and multimodal arts, both radically enabled by global digital technologies but not necessarily defined by them. (Think of new forms of opera, for example, that utilize video screens onstage.) By "intermedial" I mean artworks that cross the divisions between the arts—mixing the visual arts with the verbal and performance arts—and by "multimodal" I mean art that can be accessed on different kinds of delivery platforms (there are other definitions of these terms circulating right now, but these are mine). In something like Megan Sapnar and Ingrid Ankerson's coedited *Poems that GO*, for example, one sees an online databank of one example of this kind of intermedial production that mixes sound, moving image, poetry, flash art. ELMCIP Electronic Literature Knowledge Base has been archiving all kinds of electronic literature that crosses such boundaries, and the Electronic Literature Organization provides an open archive as well as bibliographies of electronic artworks, some of which are clearly within the parameters of traditional literature and others of which stretch these boundaries into new intermedial territories. There is a lot of visual art now that is meant to be viewed on different

platforms—one artwork that might be seen in a museum but have GPS components that can be used on mobile hand-held devices and might also have print-text elements. And what has been called "relational aesthetics" in the visual arts (or new public art, or the "art of conversation") is intent on blurring boundaries between lived everyday contexts and environments usually associated solely with art, such as museum spaces or the pages of a book.

This kind of experimentation is new and interesting but also forces a reconsideration of older forms. For example, Carolyn Shaw won the 2013 Pulizer in music with Partita for 8 Voices—not a synth remix but an a capella choral arrangement. Similarly, at the moment when social media, digital art, and intermedial artworks are all the rage, we see a resurgence of literary realism that even Fredric Jameson has to account for after decades of "metafiction" and pomo experimentalism. Is this realism a redefinition of mode or a reactionary move? To what degree, if at all, is this return a dialectical counter to the aesthetics of avant-gardism and of the digital?

Certainly there is also a trend in critical circles today to move back to both aesthetics and ethics after decades of the "linguistic turn" of poststructuralism. These are not usually naïve returns nor in all circles reactionary ones: in my experience they are often well-considered moves informed deeply by twentieth-century critical theory, including cultural criticism. The turn to ethics is diverse, from neopragmatism to analysis of the "postsecular" (and its adoption by political critics such as Žižek and Badiou) to communitarian aesthetics in affect, queer, and posthumanist theory. Likewise, if people do their homework and don't just reinvent wheels well worn by Aristotle or head into reactionary "antitheory" modes, then a reappraisal of the aesthetic has the potential to speak importantly to our moment. I am glad to see nuanced formal analyses of the aesthetic emerging in criticism—not just Derek Attridge's stuff but Erin Manning's work, Michael Wood's book on literary knowledge, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's work on mood and literature—and new moves in aesthetics by scholars and artists as politically diverse as Gregg Bordowitz, Walter Benn Michaels, Zanele Muholi, Judith Butler, Claire Bishop, Jacques Rancière, and others.

Finally, I think that concurrent with intermediality in the arts is a transdisciplinarity in criticism. ASAP was founded on the idea that scholar-critics cannot wall themselves up in their disciplinary fortresses and think they know about the global arts. No scholar of modernist literature would allow herself to be ignorant of cubism or other concurrent developments in the

visual and musical arts; in the study of contemporary literature we need to have the same kind of transdisciplinary knowledge, but it is difficult, since we work at the moment when the canons are not yet formed, when we don't quite know where to look, when the market intensely intervenes in art production, distribution, and consumption, and when change happens at breakneck speed. Yet if we live in a global society, then we need to make efforts to understand art in a planetary context—a ridiculously difficult task but one we need to theorize and work on if we truly believe that artists today are in conversation with one another and with critics beyond national lines and disciplinary boundaries. Tough, tough work. But very exciting.

ME: To be dull about this but brief, I haven't done much to hone my trend-spotting skills, perhaps because most of my own research has focused on the first half of the 1945-to-the-present time span. But also, as coeditor of *Post45 Peer Reviewed*, I'd say (and I think the other two editors would agree) that the strongest submissions we've received aren't breaking new methodological ground as much as they are advancing original, compelling, and deeply researched arguments about post-'45 aesthetics and cultural history, some of which is well known, some of which is not. Perhaps the newest and most satisfying dimension of this enterprise has to do with the flexibility and range afforded by the online platform: not only are we able to embed film clips and images with ease, we are also not beholden to a rigid publishing schedule or a set number of pages per issue. (We don't even have "issues," though obviously we still have publication dates.) Thus the turnaround time between acceptance of a submission and its publication can be spectacularly brief compared to traditional print platforms. All of these things matter, we think, to authors and readers alike.

MH: Amy has already written with great eloquence about intermedial relations and transdisciplinary criticism. I'd only repeat much of what she has to say on those subjects, especially about the importance of scholars and artists working together. So as not to be boring, I'll instead focus on where I see things differently.

I've recently been thinking about how fiction and video art respond to certain aspects of contemporary political economy. As I do so, I'm drawn less to the common ground between these media than to that which distinguishes them. This might have everything to do with my current interests,

which are driven by a social and conceptual problem rather than an artistic or formal inquiry: common history, different forms of aesthetic mediation. Old story. If I were working on the born-intermedial artworks that Amy discusses, I'd no doubt have a different experience and come to different conclusions.

So what am I saying? Just that my attempts to write a more promiscuous kind of criticism have led to an unexpected new fidelity to the specificity of particular media, genres, and forms. Practically, this means I've started to write more simply and slowly. I pause to adapt my critical vocabulary to new objects, to learn new ways of doing justice to new forms and sensations. I feel the pressure of speaking to multiple audiences in a critical idiom they'll hopefully share—or, at least, understand.

I feel somewhat similarly about "the global." I work mostly on British culture: the art and literature of the country in which I grew up. It ought to be impossible to write about Britain without keeping at least a weather eye on the world beyond the Atlantic archipelago, not least because Britain's borders and populations constantly shift and change in nature, relation, and scale. To "do" British cultural criticism is, I firmly believe, to commit oneself to a methodology and a set of values that are inherently internationalist. This is especially important when one is interested, as I am, in questions of nationalism and the nation-state. I realize that these statements are also true for many other places and cultures, but given my home country's long and toxic combination of racist imperialism and intellectual Whiggism, an internationalist perspective remains peculiarly important for scholars of British culture.

I'm getting off track here, so I'll just clarify that my commitment to internationalism does not add up to a commitment to the global. I don't believe in the "global," either as a historical fact or as an ethical or aesthetic desideratum. A planetary perspective makes sense for astronomers and ecologists, I agree—and so perhaps also for those scholars working in the environmental humanities. But my work on the representation of immigration detention and removal, to give one example, constantly reminds me of the borders that exist within and among nations, states, regions, languages, and so on. Many of those borders ought to be torn down; but some might justly remain, be reinforced, or be built for the first time. In any case, as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have recently argued, borders are not disappearing but are proliferating. As a matter of fact, borders, thresholds, and frontiers are

not the antithesis of so-called globalization; they are integral to the way our world system functions.

This is, obviously, a complicated debate in which no side has a monopoly on virtue or perspicacity. Gloria Fisk has recently written about how critiques of "world literature" sometimes lapse into academic turf-protection and exaggerate the political significance of rather insular intradisciplinary debates. Nevertheless, as a student of culture and as an immigrant—even as a privileged, well-traveled, and worldly sort of immigrant—the language of the "global society" means almost nothing to me. I'm perhaps most sympathetic to the approach that Christopher Bush describes as "critical regionalism": the pursuit of "new (or renewed) geographies that go beyond the nation but resist the centrifugal pull, the temptation, of 'the world'" (n.p.). Regions need not be contiguous (the Caribbean) or even primarily territorial (the Silk Road, the Middle Passage). A network such as a smuggling ring has a very different relation to geocultural space-time than does a continent or ocean. What all these figures share with a more traditional region such as Asia is the possibility of matching scholarly method to the experiential scale of human culture without straining, hubristically, for the whole globe. Areas and regions might be "less sublime than the world," Bush notes, but "they should prove sufficiently challenging to most of us" (n.p.).

As I attempt to find common ground between my academic work and my cross-cultural, media-saturated, everyday life in New York, I find myself torn between the desire to generalize—the urge to enlarge, reframe, and draw together—and the equal imperative to resist such expansion and drill down into the particular, relishing the subtle differences that help make the human experience of making and creating so worthwhile. If I could make one bet, it would be that our field, and scholarly associations such as ASAP, will remain at the forefront of this debate. We shouldn't be surprised, however, if the study of the contemporary arts provides few reliable answers to such a venerable and considerable problem.

SC: To not quite answer Andy's question, I will say that an interesting trend that I see in the field is the absence of any one new dominant trend in the field. That is, while there are new interests developing across national literatures and periods and even media (including attention to nonliterary media), my sense is that this is a time more characterized by the presence of a multiplicity of ways of doing things.

Certainly there are turns toward aesthetics and ethics, but these have been coming for some time and are only two of many such shifts in attention. I think this multiplicity that I'm talking about can be ascribed at least in part to the rise of what Jeff Williams has called the posttheory generation —of whom Louis Menand has said something along the lines of "We all recognize the posttheory people: they're the theory people." By this he meant that the "post" is not a turn against or a being over but a common level of theoretical knowledge and engagement that makes less prevalent the devotion to a single theoretical orientation. I also think that this lack of a strong dominant trend might be due to this being (in my view) a moment when there is more work being done revisiting and reevaluating existing subjects, theories, and methods than there is work that seeks to invent new ones. This would be hard to prove, but it's my impression that there's a lot of the former kind of activity—rethinking what we've always said kind of works. I know this is something that Post•45 explicitly says it wants to promote in its series, and I'm seeing a lot of it in my series as well, books that want to take a new look at various established critical and theoretical categories, or institutions, or historical figures, and not simply by applying a hot new theory to them but rather by reconsidering them in the light of a host of different ideas. My series has a number of books out or in the works redefining particular genres, for example.

I think it's a fertile time in our field because of this multiplicity: typical divisions between different kinds of approaches—say, the economic or political from the aesthetic or literary historical—seem to matter less, and this relaxation of the border guards allows for a microversion of interdisciplinarity that is leading to interesting stuff being written. Just as Matt notes an increasing transdisciplinarity in criticism—at the moment of my saying this, it seems that everyone I know in English studies is talking about a book by an economist—I think we are talking to each other more within the field as well. I wonder if the growth of field-dedicated scholarly organizations, conferences, and journals is facilitating this development; if so, my hat is off to the people working to build them. And we return to my hat.

DJ: Having the cheeky advantage of being able to see everyone else's responses to this question also affords me the privilege of spotting useful affinities. Conspicuous among these is the enthusiasm we all seem to share for the sheer diversity of methodological aims and innovations currently

circulating in the field and an equal enthusiasm for embracing the challenges these pose (the "tough, tough work" Amy mentions). It's clear that the borders of our "specific subjects" of study—to glance for a moment at those particular "things" that Andy actually *isn't* asking us to consider—have become more porous, encompassing ways of artistic making that lie well beyond the ambit of literary studies alone. This scene of proliferation could well describe what's happening within—as well as between—discrete approaches: as Amy rightly notes, the ethical "turn" is itself internally diverse, and it seems we're still some way from obtaining any sort of consensus about what ethical criticism is and does. Of course, methodological variability, self-scrutiny, and disagreement may be precisely the ethical point of it all. Furthermore, that kind of critical self-examination need not be a telltale sign of academic insularity but could rather be an indication that we're adopting a shrewd, suitably watchful stance (as Matt appears to have done vis-à-vis the "global") toward critical keywords and tactics that are shaping our times and driving our institutional labors.

With the appeal of politically instrumentalist forms of criticism now waning, literary studies—gradually finding ways of freeing itself, as Rita Felski has shown, from the obligation to "critique," as though that were the only approach worth our investment—is entering an unprecedented phase of expansion, both in terms of what it examines and the way it examines it. However, is "a multiplicity of ways of doing things," in Sam's words, immediately or necessarily compatible with the kind of "transdisciplinarity" that Amy highlights? Maybe this is splitting hairs, but *trans*disciplinary objectives offer an intriguing adjustment (not merely in name but also in procedural praxis) of the kind of *inter*disciplinary ideals that were all the rage not so long ago. Looking back at the shifting postmillennial landscape of the humanities in Britain, "interdisciplinarity" was especially fashionable for grant bodies eager to channel funds through collaborative networks that yoked distinct subject domains, a funding model often favored over the more traditional form of "lone" scholarship that provides the foundation for most monographs. To be sure, this is the cynical vision of our interdisciplinary turn, one that risks translating into an institutionalized ill what is clearly an intellectual opportunity (moreover, of course, by regarding it *as* a "turn" or trend we imply that it's to some degree unprecedented, when in fact the desire to commune with other disciplines is hardly new, as any historian of nineteenth-century scientific culture will tell you). New modes

of thinking, conversing, and writing across—*trans*—received disciplinary borders are flourishing, and organizations like ASAP are facilitating this outgrowth without diminishing the integrity or vitality of discrete areas of specialization.

But with any boundary-breaching conversation comes the possibility of cross-purposes. Transdisciplinary work raises exacting questions about analytical competency and about the pragmatic viability of deep reading widely beyond one's immediate domain of expertise. This is not to say that transdisciplinarity is somehow impractical, outside the more discursively fluid and forgiving exchanges of a multidisciplinary network, reading group, or conference. But if we can observe—as part of that very ethical-aesthetic reorientation which we've all touched upon at various points in this dialogue—the development of a new set of priorities concerning the nature of the literary, or about how we elucidate the political work of historically and formally localizable techniques, then the demands of maintaining a level of fluency that enables one to attend robustly to a spectrum of cultural forms regardless of their medium-specific properties are formidable indeed.

Still, we're in the best possible position to meet these demands today, thanks to what Sam calls the impulse to revisit and reevaluate existing approaches. It's now more necessary than ever for us to be willing to reassess current methodological protocols in light of alternative institutional pressures upon scholarly independence and economic contexts for research subsidy. Among such pressures, perhaps the most unsettling is the increasing obligation placed on the humanities to articulate why they publicly matter, less in philosophical terms than in ways that satisfy bureaucratic targets and ends-driven funding mechanisms. At its most productive, this environment has spurred literary and cultural studies to place questions of value—including the task of articulating to the public what the value might be of work carried out in the more specialized corners of the humanities—firmly back on the agenda. In fact, rather than seeing this as an imposition or a threat to autonomy, the urgency of such conversations about our self-definition could be a real opportunity for enabling the intellectual commitments of individual specialisms to shape broader decisions about the way literary studies is portrayed to institutions beyond the university.

Precisely because literary studies continues to expand its interpretive and disciplinary reach, it also faces new and challenging tests of accommodation:

tests that also apply to our willingness not to overstate our own material influence or political consequence, despite the occasionally hubristic claims of the field's newest trends. In this respect, it's worth pondering Helen Small's shrewd reflection that it's "not self-evident that the humanities have special rights or responsibilities . . . over disciplines with more obvious claims to understanding the operations of modern government and modern economies" (139). So, as methodological ambitions evolve and morph, the question facing any preference for transdisciplinary approaches is whether their agility and analytical richness can boldly navigate the instrumentalizing demands placed on literary studies to defend its own futurity, but without casting as somehow reactionary more regional, specialized, or downright modest forms of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, among the many things I've learned to appreciate in my time as a book-series editor is the importance of identifying work that doesn't simply promote methodological pluralism for its own sake and that avoids the pieties rehearsed by critical models whose progressivism is more self-assumed than actually earned.

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009.

Ballard, J. G. *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton, An Autobiography*. 2008; New York: Liveright, 2013.

Bush, Christopher. "Areas: Bigger than the Nation, Smaller than the World." American Comparative Literature Association State of the Discipline Report. 23 April 2014. <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/areas-bigger-nation-smaller-world>.

Duvall, John N. "Introduction: A Story of the Stories of American Fiction After 1945." *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction After 1945*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012. 1–14.

Fisk, Gloria. "'Against World Literature': The Debate in Retrospect." *The America Reader*. <http://theamericanreader.com/against-world-literature-the-debate-in-retrospect>.

Hayot, Eric. *On Literary Worlds*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Hungerford, Amy. "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary." *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (2008): 410–19.

Mao, Douglas, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. "The New Modernist Studies." *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 737–48.

Menand, Louis. "Dangers Within and Without." *Profession* (2005): 10–17.

Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2013.

Owens, Craig. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86.

Small, Helen. *The Value of the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

Williams, Jeffrey. "The Posttheory Generation." *Symploke* 3.1 (1995): 55–76.

PART II | THE POSTMODERN REVISITED

BRIAN McHALE

BREAK, PERIOD, INTERREGNUM

If it remains somewhat unclear whether we have actually got beyond postmodernism yet, nothing could be clearer than that we have left its peak years behind us, presumably somewhere in the 1970s and '80s, and its onset (whenever that was) even further back. Enough time has elapsed for us to be able to discern more of the internal articulation of the era—its successive moments or phases. Initially, the tendency was to view postmodernism either as a *break*, sharply profiled against the preceding modernist era (e.g., McHale, *Postmodernist*), or as a single monolithic *moment,* consistent across its entire span, reflecting the "cultural logic" of a particular world-historical phase (e.g., Jameson, *Postmodernism*). Looking back from our perspective in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, it is easier to grasp what Jameson calls the "dialectic of the break and the period" in late twentieth-century cultural historiography. There is, Jameson says, "a twofold movement in which the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent and unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break; while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right" (2002 24; see Wegner 20). Bring enough reflective pressure to bear on a period, and it begins to look like a break; squint intently enough at a break, and it begins to look like a period.

Squinting hard, then, at the postmodern break or moment, what kind of internal temporality begins to come into focus? How might we begin to distinguish subperiods and locate internal thresholds, constituent moments within the postmodern moment? It is in the nature of the periodizing enterprise that every gesture of temporal delimitation is a kind of thought experiment or enabling fiction, necessarily arbitrary, though not for that reason inconsequential. On the contrary, every such decision has knock-on consequences for the kind of period or subperiod one constructs and the kind of cultural-historical narrative one tells: choose a particular onset date or threshold moment, and particular continuities and discontinuities, causes and effects, themes and figures, leap into focus, while others recede into the background; choose a different date, and different continuities, discontinuities, and so forth emerge. Suppose we ask, when did postmodernism begin?

Onset

Though earlier dates have sometimes been advanced, a consensus view might be that postmodernism can be dated to the "long sixties," spanning the years from the late 1950s to the early '70s (see, e.g., DeKoven; Jameson, 1988 194–95). Particular years have been proposed, more or less seriously, in the spirit of Virginia Woolf's "on or about December 1910. . . ." (4). Nineteen fifty-eight, advanced by the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins as the onset of what he called "postcognitive" art, once seemed compelling to me but now appears too early, reflecting not postmodernism's onset so much as the achievement of "critical mass" by a certain postwar avant-garde (Black Mountain, the New American Poetry, Higgins's own Fluxus circle, etc.; see Belgrad; Miller). Nineteen seventy-three, favored by Jameson and extensively documented by Andreas Killen, seems to me too late; it correlates, I would rather say, with the relaunch of postmodernism, its consolidation, and the onset of its peak period (see below). Roughly splitting the difference, I once ventured the thought experiment of dating postmodernism's onset to the year 1966 and ended up convincing myself of that year's plausibility as a candidate. Other years (1967, 1968) may have a more self-evident claim to attention in world-historical terms, though it is hardly the case that 1966 lacks landmark events. Nineteen sixty-six, after all, is a year during which US involvement in the ground war in Vietnam escalated steeply, as did antiwar protest on the homefront. Moreover, it is the year when both the feminist National Organization for Women (NOW) and the black-separatist Black

Panther Party were founded, and, perhaps most consequentially of all, when Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in China. In any case, even if the import of 1966's events pales in comparison to the seismic shifts of 1968, this might actually strengthen its utility for my thought experiment. The relative (but only relative) "uneventfulness" of 1966 makes it a test case for the hypothesis that movements in culture are not necessarily in synch with world-historical epochs, that asynchonicity, slippage, and semiautonomy prevail across the different partial histories that make up capital-H History.

If one were trying to make the case for 1966's threshold status as a kind of Year Zero of *cultural* postmodernism, a place to begin might be architectural theory. Not one but two manifestos of what would come to be called postmodernism in architecture appeared in that year: Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, forerunner of his later polemics against modernist purism, and the Italian architect Aldo's *Architecture of the City*, which proposed a vision of architectural historicism and urban form at odds with orthodox modernism. Theory in general achieved breakthroughs on several fronts in 1966: in Paris narratology was launched with the appearance of a special issue of the journal *Communications*, while poststructuralism arrived in the United States by way of a celebrated Johns Hopkins conference. Other European cultural imports of that year included art-house films such as Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Masculine Feminine*, and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, which resonated with homegrown American "underground" cinema, such as Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*.

The reorientations of the year 1966 are symbolized by the reenvisioning of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books by Grace Slick in her song "White Rabbit," performed that year with The Great Society (and the next year with her new band, Jefferson Airplane)—the first of a series of postmodern *Alices* extending down to the present. A number of conspicuous art-world and rock-music careers hit speed bumps in 1966 and underwent more or less drastic reorientations. Warhol renounced painting in 1966 (though not for the first time; he had already renounced it in favor of film a couple of years earlier). Pushing his art further toward the "dematerialization" that became typical of postmodernism, he produced art environments such as the shiny, bobbing, helium-filled pillows of *Silver Clouds* and mixed-media performances of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, featuring the Velvet Underground. Both the Beatles and Bob Dylan had highly creative years, and then stopped touring—the Beatles permanently, retreating from the road into the

studio, Dylan only temporarily, after a motorcycle accident. Leonard Cohen reoriented his career, too, but in the opposite direction, publishing his second and last novel, *Beautiful Losers*, then renouncing fiction for the life of a singer-songwriter and occasional poet.

The British science-fiction writer J. G. Ballard completed a tetralogy of apocalyptic science fictions begun in 1962, then reoriented his fiction toward the technological fetishism of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969) and *Crash* (1973). His American counterpart, Philip K. Dick, published three of his weaker novels in 1966 but spent the year writing the texts on which his posthumous fame would later rest—the ones that would form the basis of the films *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Total Recall* (1990)—as well as his masterpiece of world-unmaking, *Ubik* (published 1969). In 1966 the Beat writer William S. Burroughs published a revised version of his 1961 text, *The Soft Machine*, the first of his full-length novels to employ cut-ups and fold-ins, while John Ashbery and Allen Ginsberg both published long poems produced by collaging found materials, Ashbery in "The Skaters," Ginsberg in *Witchita Vortex Sutra*, composed orally and recorded on a tape machine bought for him by Dylan. Truman Capote launched the hybrid fact/fiction novel (*In Cold Blood*), Jean Rhys inaugurated the practice of postmodern "rewriting" of canonical texts (*Wide Sargasso Sea*), and John Barth (*Giles Goat-Boy*) consolidated the encyclopedic "megafiction" genre that would come to dominate American fiction in the postmodern era. Arguably the most important literary threshold of the year, however, was the one crossed by Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, by many accounts the text that marks the frontier between modernism and postmodernism.

Peak

Pynchon, of course, is closely identified with postmodernism; he is generally regarded, I think justifiably, as its paradigmatic figure. If his *Lot 49* marks the onset of postmodernism, then his next novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, dating from 1973, ushers in its major phase. The appearance of *Gravity's Rainbow* in that year coincides with other indicators of the major phase's onset around the years 1972–1974. The architectural critic Charles Jencks, for instance, notoriously dates what he regards as the onset of postmodernism to July 15, 1972, at precisely 3:32 p.m., when part of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis was demolished, demonstrating for all to see the manifest failure of the utopian aspirations of the high-modernist international style

and the need for an alternative. That alternative emerged in that same year, 1972, in the form of *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi's manifesto (written with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour) of what would soon be called "postmodern architecture," which built upon his *Complexity and Contradiction* of six years before. One of the most telling indicators of the onset of the major phase was the gradual adoption of the term "postmodernism" itself, first in literary studies (by Fiedler in 1970, Hassan in 1971, Spanos in 1972, etc.), then around 1975 by architects, who disseminated it to ever wider circles of the culture. Having learned how to name itself, postmodernism could now emerge as a concept, which it did from the late 1970s to the mid-'80s in the writings of Lyotard, Jameson, Huyssen, and others. Thus, if postmodernism does not actually begin in 1973, it at least *rebrands* itself in that year.

The "grand narrative of 1973," which, according to Joshua Clover (9), has yet to be told, would have to include the kind of synchronicities that Andreas Killen abundantly documents: the Yom Kippur War and the start of the Arab oil embargo, the Paris Peace Accords, and the repatriation of the American prisoners of war: the beginning of the end of the Nixon presidency as details of the Watergate break-in emerged; the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision; and so on. Killen overlooks one other world-historical landmark of 1973: the founding of the first fully neoliberal regime anywhere, in Chile, following Augusto Pinochet's bloody, CIA-backed coup (Harvey 7–8). Neoliberal economics is more typically dated from the changes inaugurated a little later and somewhat less bloodily during the years 1978–1980, when Deng Xioping began the liberalization of the Chinese economy and Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were each elected to lead their respective countries; nevertheless, Chilean neoliberalization came first. Harvey (42) explicitly associates neoliberalism in economics with postmodernism in culture, and even if they do not coincide perfectly, the overlap of world-historical events and cultural developments in 1973 is striking.

On the cultural front, 1973 was the year not only of postmodern architecture's arrival on the scene but also of the new, iconoclastic American "director's cinema" (Scorcese, Altman, Peckinpah, Malick, Woody Allen). It was the year when reality TV (not yet called that) was invented in PBS's *An American Family*; the year when the New York Dolls enjoyed their brief heyday, anticipating punk by several years; a year when Warhol was a ubiquitous figure in American culture, high and low. In other words, unlike

1966, 1973 is a year when world-historical and cultural-historical thresholds *do* synch up.

Few would dissent, I think, from the proposition that the period between the early 1970s and the late '80s represent the peak phase of postmodernist culture. This is the phase during which, in the wake of *Gravity's Rainbow*, megafictions proliferated, from Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* (1974), Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* (1975), Don DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* (1976), and Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977) to Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1979), John Barth's *LETTERS* (1979), Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and William T. Vollmann's *You Bright and Risen Angels* (1987). The category of megafiction overlaps with other genre categories often regarded as distinctively postmodern, notably "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon), which challenges the master narratives of official, received history and proposes counterhistories, combining the metafictional difficulty of postmodernism with the accessibility of popular fiction. The magic realism of the Latin American literary "Boom" of the 1960s was internationalized. Cyberpunk science fiction was invented, and along with it the blueprint for cyberspace, to be realized by the World Wide Web in the '90s.

During these same years, the American metafictionists and surfictionists of the Fiction Collective defected from the publishing industry, while their European counterparts, the intransigent experimentalists of OuLiPo, broke through to a wider public with Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (1978) and Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler.* High theory flourished, as the anglophone world absorbed, piecemeal and belatedly, the writings of Continental thinkers: in a first wave, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and—more in the United Kingdom than the United States—Althusser; in subsequent waves, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and feminist theorists such as Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. Language Poetry emerged; so did the punk and hiphop sub-cultures, arguably reflecting the "postmodern" phases of their respective subcultural spheres.

The hierarchical structures of culture that kept the "high" and the "low" apart in separate categories suffered erosion, as witness phenomena as diverse as postmodern architecture, minimalist music, and the popular success of cerebral genre novels such as Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* (1985–1986) and, even more spectacularly, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980). The fine arts, "dematerialized" by conceptualism and related practices in

the late 1960s and early '70s, was "rematerialized" again with the rediscovery of painting in the '80s (Basquiat, Fischl, Salle, Schnabel, Yarber, the German and Italian Neo-Expressionists), driven by an overheated art market. This bare list subjects the era to drastic foreshortening, of course, and all of these developments could be submitted to finer-grained analysis into successive mutations, constituent moments, sub-subperiods. Nevertheless, this is what we talk about when we talk about postmodernism.

Interregnum

All too obviously, the next threshold can only be 1989–1990. Once again, Pynchon is a reliable bellwether of postmodernism's phases; his long-awaited new novel, *Vineland*, appears in 1990. Manifestly, 1989–1990 is another of those thresholds where cultural-historical and world-historical transitions coincide (see Clover). The question here is, the threshold of *what*? The transition to *what*?

One answer is that the historical fissure that runs through the late 1980s and early '90s, comprising not only the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its empire but also the events at Tiananmen Square, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the beginning of the end of apartheid, and so on, mark the end of postmodernism and the onset of something else. Christian Moraru proposes to call this "something else" "cosmodernism": cosmopolitanism but shorn of that concept's inevitable association with first world privilege. A form of modernism in which modernity's imperialist rationality gives way to a planetary *relationality*, Moraru's cosmodernism is something like the "cultural logic of late globalization" (39), as long as we understand "globalization" here not as a euphemism for one-size-fits-all Americanization but as including all the forms of dialogue and interaction among cultures that our hypernetworked condition makes possible: multilateral, not unilateral, globalization; globalization in which *the globe writes back*.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, global culture falls into relationality and, according to Moraru, it is a fortunate fall. His account of the "cosmodern turn" around the year 1989 is perhaps too euphoric for complete comfort, too compatible with Francis Fukuyama's notorious claim about the "end of history" in the triumph of the Western idea and the collapse of capitalist democracy's sole rival. The alternative view might be Joshua Clover's, that 1989 signals not the end of history but the end of historical *thinking*—not

at all the same thing—or, in other words, the final triumph of postmodernism. In or about 1989, the promise, or threat, of postmodernism is finally realized in full, and (to use Jameson's terminology) "culture . . . become[s] the economic, and economics . . . become[s] cultural" (quoted in Clover 115); or, in Clover's own terms, henceforth "history is now itself pop, and pop, history" (109).

By one account, then, 1989 ushers in the next big thing, while by another it marks the apotheosis of the same old same old: so, either *post*-postmodernism or *more* postmodernism, perhaps in a *late* form (Green). Impatience with postmodernism, and eagerness to get "beyond" it somehow, is pervasive in the early 1990s, as reflected in, for instance, the Stuttgart "End of Postmodernism" conference (1991), the *In Memoriam to Postmodernism* volume (1995), and, perhaps most memorably and influentially, David Foster Wallace's articulation (1993) of postmodernism's discontents (Wallace; see Burn). But impatience and expressions of discontent are not the same thing as breaking through to the "post-post," as Wallace's career in the '90s arguably demonstrates, and it may be that the very *resistance* to postmodernism has turned out to be merely a late *form* of postmodernism itself.

A different option is the one articulated by Philip Wegner, according to whom the "long '90s," the phase after the symbolic turning-point of 1989, represents a kind of interregnum, a "place between two deaths," "experienced as a moment . . . of openness and instability, of experimentation and opportunity, of conflict and insecurity," one where "history might move in a number of very different directions" (24). During this "strange interlude" in global affairs, the dualistic or manichaean world-view of the Cold War era was temporarily suspended, replaced by a vision of multipolarity, or even *a*polarity, that was at once baffling, risky, and rich with possibilities. The American triumphalism that is commonly attributed to the presidency of the first Bush, who presided over the "New World Order" of the early '90s, did not extend as far, or last as long, as has sometimes been assumed (Chollet and Goldgeier). How to understand and articulate this interlude troubled even policy makers such as Clinton's secretary of state Madeline Albright, who is reported as saying, "You couldn't keep talking about the post–Cold War world. It was an era that was hard to explain to people. It was like being set loose on the ocean and there wasn't really any charted course" (Chollet and Goldgeier 69–70). The situation that Fukuyama was trying to capture

by associating this interregnum with the Hegelian "end of history" was real enough, but he used the wrong trope: it wasn't the *end*, but *in between*.

This condition of "being set loose on the ocean" also expresses itself through the cultural production of the '90s interregnum, especially in the years immediately after the fall of the wall. This was an episode of multipolarity not only in world affairs but also in culture and the arts. The early '90s were the years of efflorescent multiculturalism and of the backlash against it in the so-called "culture wars." It was the era of apartheid's unraveling, reflected in William Kentridge's "Drawings for Projection" (1989–2003), which captured the South African experience of "living in the interregnum" (Rothberg). Early-'90s culture was characterized by the proliferation and flowering of various subcultural and paracultural alternatives, including, as Clover reminds us, the brief heyday of grunge and the emergence of gangsta rap. Perhaps most important of all, in the long run, was the short-lived utopian and communitarian phase of the Internet. Though the Internet itself, in the sense of the networked electronic infrastructure that enables the online exchange of information, had already existed for some time, the World Wide Web, the most popular and ubiquitous of the services making use of that infrastructure, dates from the very same threshold years as the onset of the interregnum period itself, 1989–1990. The Web became generally available to Internet users just in time to succumb to the frenzy of commodification and monetization of cyberspace that drove the dot-com boom of the '90s.

As skeptical as Clover is about the utopian potentialities of this early '90s episode, even he has to admit that "in such volatile moments, with one dominant toppling and another not yet consolidated, the field flies open, or at least so it feels" (41). This volatility, the feeling of fields flying open, or of what Clover elsewhere characterizes as a sensation of "boundlessness" (120), pervades culture in the interregnum. Nineties culture has a quality of weightlessness, of being "light"—or rather "lite," in the sense of, say, "lite beer" or "lite music" (Friedman and Squire). Its characteristic phenomena—New Age belief, the cult of celebrity, TV "infotainment" and "reality" programming, radio call-in shows, the Internet and online "life" generally, shopping malls, Disney World and other artificial pseudo-communities, even the hypermediated Persian Gulf War of 1991 (which Baudrillard viewed as entirely simulacral, claiming, provocatively, that it "did not take place")—all

share the quality of being not-quite-real, somehow *lighter* than reality: reality *lite*. Fine art of the decade, too, sometimes warrants the epithet "high art lite," in the sense of "art that looks like but is not quite art, that acts as a substitute for art" (Stallabrass 2). A case in point might be the "Young British Artists" (YBAs), including Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Chris Ofili, and others, whose reputations were amplified by shrewd self-publicists such as Hirst and by the marketing savvy of the collector Charles Saatchi.

The lightness/liteness of high art lite is literalized by Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), perhaps the most recognizable and iconic of all the YBA works, in which the body of a full-grown tiger shark is literally suspended in a tank of formaldehyde. Similarly iconic of the decade's aesthetic of lightness are the airborne game of quidditch played at Hogwarts School in the enormously popular series of young-adult novels about the education of the young sorcerer Harry Potter (1997–2007) by the British writer J. K. Rowling; the spiritual exaltation that some evangelical or fundamentalist communities anticipate at the moment of Rapture, when the saved remnant of humanity will be caught up into heaven, leaving the rest of us behind to struggle on, the subject of the *Left Behind* series (1995–2007) of Christian-apocalyptic thrillers by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins; the gravity-defying stunts in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which introduced moviegoers worldwide to Chinese cinematic conventions of levitation and flight; and the fusion of these Chinese cinematic techniques with the technology of CGI in the Wachowski siblings' *The Matrix* (1999), right at the end of the decade.

But the most apt emblem of '90s lightness was the popular iconography of the angel that was a hallmark of the era. Revitalized by postmodernists such as Pynchon, James Merrill, Wim Wenders, and Laurie Anderson in the '70s and '80s—a development that climaxed in Tony Kushner's Brechtian drama of the AIDS epidemic, *Angels in America,* just as the '90s were getting underway—angel iconography was disseminated throughout popular culture in the '90s. Largely dissociated from orthodox religious contexts, angels appeared on television and at the movies, on greeting cards, calendars and T-shirts, on coffee mugs and in coffee-table books, to the point that their ubiquity earned them a *Time* magazine cover story on December 27, 1993. Angels were the perfect icons of the era, airborne images of what Milan Kundera mordantly called "lightness of being," and Jameson, "the

antigravity of the postmodern" (1991 101), capturing the experience of in-betweenness, volatility, multidirectionality, a bubble economy. There is also a dark side to this angel imagery, however, associated with the experience that the controversial Harvard psychologist John E. Mack called "ontological shock" (26, 44), the shock of recognizing that there are other worlds besides this one, other orders of being beyond our own; that these other orders are at least potentially in communication with our own; and that we live not in a single unitary world but a *plurality of worlds*. Mack developed his account of ontological shock in response to the testimony of supposed alien abductees, and the motif of alien abduction is another of the hallmarks of the in-between era of the '90s. The angels' opposite number, their "dysphoric" counterpart, one might say, was *The X-Files*.

Equally symptomatic of the interregnum were science-fiction thought experiments involving a world order *without America*. American triumphalism, short lived as it was, was far from the only imaginative response to the end of Cold War bipolarization. Another response involved imagining a world in which America's global leadership, rendered redundant by the disappearance of its Cold War adversary, simply disappeared along with its opposite number. What, or who, might fill the gap? As early as 1962 Philip K. Dick had imagined a world (partly) dominated by Japan in his novel of alternative history, *The Man in the High Castle*, and a Japan-centric future became a *topos* of cyberpunk science fiction, from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) through William Gibson's two cyberpunk trilogies of the 1980s and '90s. Speculation about a "Japan-centric" world cooled markedly, however, after the Japanese real-estate bubble burst in 1991 and Japan's economy lapsed into its Lost Decade. In place of Japan, other candidates were substituted in science-fiction thought experiments about a future world order.

The most interesting of these thought experiments involved speculation about an alternative global order based on Chinese cultural dominance—a "China-centric" future—in the British SF novelist David Wingrove's cycle of eight immense novels appearing under the collective title of *Chung Kuo* (1990–1997). Wingrove imagines a future planet Earth entirely covered by seven continent-spanning mega-cities, each governed by one of seven ethnically Han coemperors. Han civilization dominates everywhere, having submerged or eradicated all other world civilizations, including the European and American cultures. Though lingering traces of paranoid fantasies of Asian domination and a certain amount of exoticizing orientalism can

be detected in Wingrove's fiction, his sympathies are very evenly divided between the Han overlords, who struggle to maintain order in a world on the verge of chaotic breakdown, and the submerged populations, some of whom are beginning to resist the Han world order.

A kind of capstone of this entire development is Kim Stanley Robinson's alternative-history novel *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002), in which Robinson imagines an alternative past in which the fourteenth-century pandemic of bubonic plague destroyed, not a third of the population of Europe (as it did in real-world history), but 90 percent of it. World history, in this alternative reality, develops without the Europeans or the Euro-Americans. Thus, it falls to the Chinese to discover the New World; Renaissance science emerges first in the cities of the Silk Road, between the Islamic and Chinese cultural spheres; the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution begins in South India instead of Great Britain; the Great War of the early twentieth century is fought not among the European powers but between China and Islam; and so on. Robinson's thought experiment about a world without Europe reflects the interregnum sensibility but arrives belatedly in 2002. By then, the depolarized world of the post–Cold War interregnum had already been *re*-polarized—to the manifest relief of some, who welcomed a return to the Manichaean certainties of a new (or renewed) "clash of civilizations," albeit one differently oriented than the old one. *The Years of Rice and Salt* stands as a monument to the monstrous and sublime experience of alternativity and multidirectionality of the in-between years, foreclosed by the war on terror.

Does this return to business as usual in the imagination (and practice) of geopolitics coincide with another mutation in postmodernism or mark its true end? Does it constitute a break, signaling the onset of a new period, or a period in itself? Both, of course, and neither, if Jameson is right about the dialectic.

WORKS CITED

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. 1991. Trans. Paul Patton. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.

Belgrad, Daniel. *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Burn, Stephen. *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*. London: Continuum, 2008.

Chollet, Derek, and James Goldgeier. *America Between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11:*

The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2008.

Clover, Joshua. *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About.* Berkeley: U of California P, 2009.

DeKoven, Marianne. *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.

Friedman, Ellen G., and Corinne Squire. *Morality USA.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man.* New York: Free Press, 1992.

Green, Jeremy. *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* New York: Oxford UP, 2005.

Higgins, Dick. *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes toward a Theory of the New Arts.* New York: Printed Editions, 1978.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction.* New York: Routledge, 1988.

Jameson, Fredric. "Periodizing the Sixties." 1984. *The Syntax of History. The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986.* Vol. 2. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988. 178–208.

———. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

———. *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present.* London: Verso, 2002.

Jencks, Charles. *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture.* 4th ed. London: Academy Editions, 1984.

Killen, Andreas. *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2006.

Mack, John E. *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens.* New York: Scribner's, 1994.

McHale, Brian. "1966 Nervous Breakdown; or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?" *MLQ* 69.3 (September 2008): 391–413.

———. *Postmodernist Fiction.* London: Methuen, 1987.

Miller, Tyrus. *Singular Examples: Artistic Politics and the Neo-Avant-Garde.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2009.

Moraru, Christian. *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2011.

Rothberg, Michael. "Progress, Progression, Procession: William Kentridge and the Narratology of Transitional Justice." *Narrative* 20.1 (January 2012): 1–24.

Stallabrass, Julian. *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s.* London: Verso, 1999.

Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1997. 21–82.

Wegner, Phillip E. *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. London: Hogarth P, 1924.

HARILAOS STECOPOULOS

COLD WAR POSTMODERNISM

For some time now, twentieth-century studies scholars have accepted the idea that the Cold War state co-opted modernism. The evidence is persuasive, particularly in the literary arts. One has only to recall the mid-1960s scandal over the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom's (CCF) covert sponsorship of such respected US literary journals as *The Paris Review* (founded by, among others, then CIA agent Peter Matthiessen), *The Kenyon Review* (edited for a time by CIA agent Robie Macauley), and *The Partisan Review* to realize that the US state sought to exploit literary modernism as a propaganda tool. That the US State Department and the US Information Agency (USIA) sent on cultural diplomatic missions such writers as Robert Frost, William Faulkner, Langston Hughes, and Katherine Anne Porter makes a certain anti-Communist investment in modernism all the more apparent. To be sure, conservative US politicians and citizens also decried modernism's excesses, arguing that avant-garde aesthetics subverted American values. Senator Joseph McCarthy's lieutenants burned modernist as well as "left" American works during their notorious purge of USIA libraries in 1953. But some of the Cold War state's more savvy propagandists, particularly James Jesus Angleton, Cord Meyer, and the other literature aficionados of the CIA, recognized that, if properly exploited, maverick writers and texts could both call attention to Communist oppression and highlight

the distinct cultural achievements of an individualistic people. Rather than challenge the status quo, the avant-garde would end up serving the state.

Late twentieth and early twenty-first century critics tend to privilege this historical narrative for a number of reasons, but surely one explanation for the story's appeal has to do with the fact that it leaves contemporary literary culture largely exempt from critique. Sensitive to the Cold War history limned above, David Harvey, Alan Nadel, and other influential scholars have argued that postmodernism entailed rejecting the politically compromised and cultural commodified version of the avant-garde that emerged during the early twentieth century. The modernists and their critical followers may have been co-opted by the state, but the "pomo" mavericks—John Barth, Robert Coover, E. L. Doctorow, Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut—scorned and resisted the power elite during the long legitimation crisis that extended from the assassination of JFK through the drawn-out defeat in Vietnam to the resignation of Richard Nixon and beyond. By deploying pastiche and parody, metahistory and multiculturalism, these "new mutants"—to use Leslie Fiedler's powerful phrase—staked their radical claim to American literature and challenged the status quo in the process (Fiedler 505). The ensuing culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s made this subversion palpable as conservatives worked furiously to discredit these writers and their novels. Or so we in the academy like to claim.

I don't want to discount completely this oft-told tale of countercultural postmodernism—there is value to it—but I'd like to suggest that there is another side to the story, and nowhere does it appear more visibly than in the long-neglected world of literary propaganda or, more generously, literary diplomacy.[1] While the US government never again attempted to establish a massive and covert cultural front like the CCF, and never again succeeded in hiring such sophisticated spies as Angleton, the various agencies and bureaus tasked with waging the late cultural cold war hardly ignored the emergence of new avant-garde literary and cultural aesthetics. They couldn't afford to. As the Frank Zappa– and Kurt Vonnegut–loving Czech rebels of the Prague Spring made abundantly clear, some Eastern European insurgents adored the counterculture decried by US conservatives. "We like very much the experimental," declares one dissident in John Updike's "Bech in Czech," a tale of US literary diplomacy behind the Iron Curtain. These rebels identified in "the experimental" many of the same qualities of freedom

and individualism the state's savvier propagandists had long sought to associate with T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, and other modernist writers. Beginning in the late 1940s, cultural diplomats argued that the formal difficulty of literary modernism solicited the individualistic response of the autonomous reader and thus encouraged resistance to political manipulation. Modernism and democracy were allied in the struggle against Communism. That propaganda strategy persisted into a new avant-garde era even as conservatives sought to limit US cultural diplomats' export of postmodernism, particularly during the culture wars of the 1980s. Wrestling with intermittent denunciations from the far right, cultural diplomats slowly began to promote innovative contemporary writing in the Voice of America's Forum Lecture broadcasts, particularly those organized by Hennig Cohen (1969) and Richard Kostelanetz (1981), and through State Department– and USIA-sponsored trips by such postmodern luminaries as Edward Albee (the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia), John Ashbery (Poland), William Gaddis (Japan), Susan Sontag (Poland, Taiwan), and Kurt Vonnegut (Czechoslovakia).

What made such tours possible was a growing distrust of the Soviet Union and China among some members of the US literary avant-garde, and an increased willingness to champion the cause of the beleaguered writer trapped in the iron cage of the communist state. Beginning in the late 1960s, protest letters decrying the censorship and imprisonment of Czech, Polish, and Soviet dissident intellectuals began to appear with some frequency in the *New York Review of Books* and the *New York Times*, and American publishers issued English translations of such *tamizdat* works as Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and Bruno Schulz's *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. While these developments hardly meant that radical American writers had made common cause with US anti-Communists, the possibility of rapprochement seemed more likely than it had in years. Norman Mailer and Kurt Vonnegut, cochairs of the 1986 International PEN Conference in New York, would suggest as much when they invited Secretary of State George Shultz to address the visiting writers on the conference theme, "the writer's imagination and the imagination of the state." In his speech, Shultz drew on hackneyed Cold War rhetoric—"Freedom . . . is what we are talking about. . . . And the writer is at the heart of freedom"—but he ended by gesturing toward the odd

phenomenon of Cold War postmodernism we've been pondering here (qtd. in Mehren 12). "Don't be . . . surprised," Shultz informed the gathering, "by the fact that Ronald Reagan and I are on your side" (qtd. in Mehren 12).

Shultz's presence shocked many writers—legend has it E. L. Doctorow grew apoplectic—but the celebrated essayist Susan Sontag most likely found acceptable the secretary of state's lecture to the assembled literati. Four years before, at a New York Town Hall meeting in support of Poland's Solidarity movement, Sontag had dismissed those who worried over finding themselves echoing the foreign policy pronouncements of the Reagan Administration. As she put it in 1982, "What the recent Polish events illustrate . . . is a truth that we should have understood a very long time ago: that Communism is Fascism—successful Fascism, if you will . . . Fascism With a Human Face" (qtd. in "Susan Sontag Provokes" 27). Once notorious for her New Left sympathies, Sontag had by this fateful meeting done an ideological about-face; her former anti-Communist adversaries now seemed worthy of emulation. As she explained on the same occasion, "Imagine, if you will, someone who read only *The Reader's Digest* between 1950 and 1970, and someone in the same period who read only *The Nation* or *The New Statesman*. Which reader would have been better informed about the realities of Communism. . . . Can it be that our enemies were right?" (qtd. in "Susan Sontag Provokes" 27). Sontag's public endorsement of *Reader's Digest* reveals the intensity of her intervention. Eager to critique Communism, Sontag proves willing to jettison, however briefly, her legendary commitment to the avant-garde and applaud a magazine notorious among intellectuals for promoting both retrograde politics *and* retrograde aesthetics.

In certain ways Sontag's ideological shift followed a well-worn revanchist narrative. Over the course of the late 1940s and '50s, Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol, and many other former Communist and Socialist New York intellectuals had recanted the "red" beliefs of their youth to embrace an incipient neoconservativism. Sontag's political transformation at once recalls that narrative and diverges from its hardline implications. While Hook et al. wrestled with the politics of the 1930s, Sontag grappled with '60s' debates; while her forebearers struggled with the Old Left, Sontag battled with the New Left. Sontag suggests as much in a 1980 *New York Times* interview when she reevaluated the antiwar movement: "If the justice of the protests (against the war) was undeniable, there were also illusions and misconceptions about what was possible in the rest of the world. . . . It was not so clear

to many of us as we talked of American imperialism how few options many of these countries had except for Soviet imperialism, which was maybe worse. . . . It was not clear to me then that [Cuba and North Vietnam] . . . would become Soviet satellites. . . ." (qtd. in Kakutani 5). Labeling the Soviet Union an imperialist power, Sontag rejects left-liberal political naïveté ("illusions and misconceptions") in a manner reminiscent of her New York intellectual predecessors. At the same time, however, she hesitates to rehearse their political conversion to the point of farce.

Needless to say, Sontag's and Shultz's respective speeches infuriated the many American writers who saw themselves as inherently opposed to the US state and its Cold War policies. Yet for those who like Philip Roth published the works of dissidents in the United States during the 1970s and '80s or who like Edward Albee traveled to Czechoslovakia in order to support dissident playwright Vaclac Havel, the notion that the US state, even a Reagan-run state, was on their "side" may have been more welcome than we imagine. This was in part reflective of the fact that the US state infrequently engaged in overt and ham-fisted censorship, and sometimes promoted certain kinds of free expression overseas. As the narrator of Joyce Carol Oates's cultural diplomatic tale, "Warszawa: 1980," explains with reference to characters modeled on literary ambassadors Sontag and John Ashbery—"The . . . Americans 'of literary distinction' who have come to Warsaw for the conference, can never get themselves into trouble . . . for anything they might say or write. Their defiance of their government might be published in foot-high headlines, or engraved in stone, and they will never be arrested or imprisoned or executed or even interrogated" (140). Yet the state was also on these writers' side because in continuing its cultural cold war against Communism in Europe and Asia it offered US writers a new way of finding a public voice during a legitimation crisis that had taken a toll on the world of letters as much as it had undermined the nation's faith in policy and policy makers. Compromised by their association with CIA "fronts," challenged by a society of the spectacle that seemed to reject the word in favor of the image, threatened by the growing valuation of popular culture, and, perhaps most important, anxious over a capitalist system that brooked no possibility of significant political change even as it tolerated endless criticism, Western writers needed new ways to find ways to value themselves and their work. Judith Horne, the Sontag-like character in "Warszawa" laments, "Does anything we say or write or publish *matter* . . . when we risk nothing?—we who

are free" (142). Postmodernists adopted different ways of addressing this crisis, needless to say—consider their outrageous formal experimentation and withering social critiques (e.g., Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*)—but one important and understudied strategy emerged from a new identification with and advocacy for their beleaguered fellows beyond the Iron Curtain. Roth suggested as much when he famously declared in a 1984 *Paris Review* interview, "It occurred to me that I work in a society where as a writer everything goes and nothing matters, while for the Czech writers I met in Prague, nothing goes and everything matters" (Lee 184). Pankaj Mishra errs in claiming that in the 1980s Roth "seemed almost envious of writers in Communist Eastern Europe" (35), but there is little doubt that the novelist and many of his American peers found in the cause of the Eastern European intellectual a new way of shoring up the declining position of the literary intellectual in the United States. Their denunciations of Communist censorship constituted a commentary on—and attempt to redress—their marginalization at home. At a time when the Western writer seemed less significant than ever before, decrying the totalitarian East seemed to promise a new means of self-legitimation.

And yet contemporary representations of the US writer abroad suggested that even this strategy might fail—that the last gasps of the cultural Cold War might not prove sufficient to rescue late twentieth-century literature from coming after, from suffering the prefix "post." The various works from the era that engage with literary diplomacy often leave their main characters unsure of who or what they are upon visiting the Eastern bloc. Philip Roth's Nathan Zuckerman finds himself summarily expelled from Czechoslovakia for trafficking in samizdat and muses that "to be transformed into a cultural eminence elevated by the literary deeds he performs would not seem to be my fate" (84). Joyce Carol Oates has Judith Horne experience Warsaw as a prison of the ethnic past; at one point, Horne declares the Polish city "the place of [her] undoing" (31). And John Updike's Henry Bech worries that his experience in Prague augurs the end of life itself: "His panic felt pasty and stiff and revealed a certain shape: he feared that once he left his end of the gentle arc of the Ambassador's Residence, he would, like millions and millions before him, cease to exist" (33).[2] In their willingness to dally with the state, contemporary American writers didn't so much rescue their oppressed literary brethren from behind the Iron Curtain as recognize

that all litterateurs are at the mercy of historical forces they can never fully reimagine or claim as their own. Cold War postmodernism instructs, but it doesn't console.

NOTES

1. For other scholarship that also engages in a revision of received narratives of Cold War culture, see Belletto and Grausam.

2. As these examples may suggest, much of the contemporary US writing focused on the plight of the Eastern European writer also examines the position of Jews and Jewishness in the region. I deal with this issue and its relation to US literary diplomacy in a longer version of the piece.

WORKS CITED

Belletto, Steven, and Daniel Grausam. *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment.* Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012.

Fiedler, Leslie. "The New Mutants." *Partisan Review* (September 1965): 505–25.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989.

Kakutani, Michiko. "For Susan Sontag, the Illusions of the Sixties Have Dissipated." *New York Times* (11 November 1980): C-5.

Lee, Hermione. "The Art of Fiction LXXXIV: Philip Roth." *Conversations with Philip Roth.* Ed. George J. Searles. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992. 162–87.

Mehren, Elizabeth. "Is PEN Mightier in Imagination Than the State?: George Shultz Speech Enlivens 48th Worldwide Writers' Congress in N.Y." *Los Angeles Times* (15 January 1986).

Mishra, Pankaj. "How Well Does Contemporary Fiction Address Radical Politics?" *New York Times Sunday Book Review* (22 September 2013): 35.

Nadel, Alan. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.

Oates, Joyce Carol. "Warzsawa." *Kenyon Review* 3.4 (Autumn 1981): 1–47.

Roth, Philip. *The Prague Orgy.* New York: Vintage, 1985.

"Susan Sontag Provokes Debate on Communism." *New York Times* (27 February 1982): 27.

Updike, John. "Bech in Czech." *New Yorker* (20 April 1987): 32–33.

DAVID JAMES

HOW POSTMODERNISM BECAME EARNEST

In summer 1996 the *New Yorker* reported that Thomas Pynchon had become a groupie. According to this "Talk of the Town" story, the novelist had sparked some "concern in the literary world" that he'd swapped reclusiveness for Indie fandom, as the band Lotion claimed that Pynchon contributed liner notes to their album *Nobody's Cool* (Essex 44). Pynchon himself wasn't altogether "cool" either, so the group recalled. Pictured as an "older guy" emerging from the crowd at one Cincinnati gig, he "was wearing a Godzilla shirt and ill-fitting pants" and "introduced himself as Tom" (44). Thickening the plot, Lotion's Jim Ferguson also claimed that he happened to have been reading the 1984 *Slow Learner* at the time; Pynchon, noticing the volume lying backstage, allegedly asked, "Who's reading my book?" The bond between writer and rockers was therein sealed, and this cute story leaves us with the portrait of Pynchon as a geekily clad "guardian angel" of Lotion, whose tours he then earnestly followed "all over the country" (Essex 44).

A quaint tale, if ever there was one, but a tall tale it would turn out to be. For a decade later, the band revealed that their supposed encounter with Pynchon was a hoax—a counterfactual story perfectly befitting this paragon of postmodern fiction. Admitting to the prank, former lead singer Tony Zajkowski described it as their "big bullshit story," a fable they recycled for numerous reporters and crafted to sound "as Pynchonesque as possible"

(Galzek n.p.). In 2009, the *New Yorker* tried to set things straight by verifying that "Pynchon did attend some Lotion shows . . . but not in Cincinnati," while adding that he "didn't wear a Godzilla T-shirt" and—contrary to Lotion's claim that Pynchon paid for everything in cash—that he "used a credit card like everyone else" (Galzek n.p.). If the original story was a fabrication, however, the impression it gives us of the iconic postmodernist captures something closer to a literary-historical truth. Framed as a deliberately unhip and endearingly sincere fan, Pynchon in this fantasy embodies a sensibility that's apparently oblivious of, and indifferent toward, self-irony.

Such unselfconscious behavior, to be sure, cuts against the grain of so much we associate with literary postmodernism, a phase for which—however diverse and diffuse its strands—an elevated degree of artistic self-reflexivity is an essential ingredient. But what if, for a moment, we entertain the idea that an earnestly motivated and assiduously maintained dedication to the possibilities of fiction was as integral to postmodernism as our more ingrained accounts of ludic pastiche and generic fatigue would have us believe? Might we need, that is, an adjusted lexicon for gauging the compositional mood of the late postwar period, so as to engage with the temperament of novelists who don't quite fit the archive of playful self-referentiality or "experimentation for the sake of shock, surprise, or cleverness" (Matz 127)? As a category for literary culture, the postmodern has of course long been as unshapely as Pynchon's reputedly "ill-fitting pants." Arguably it functions better as a loose placeholder, one that's more effective at grouping stylistic inclinations than specifying creative practices as pervasive and affiliated across cultures. Retrospectively viewed, postmodernism has become a useful critical appurtenance, allowing us to pinpoint as though they were prevalent certain artistic and political convictions bonding otherwise unrelated writers. At the same time the postmodern can itself become a victim of unfair disparagement, easily ridiculed, lampooned, overgeneralized. And in what follows, I don't mean to minimize postmodernism in either theory or practice, or to suggest that it's not historically helpful for describing shared tendencies among postwar fiction's multiple trajectories. Rather, I want to track from within the baggy formal and thematic realms of postmodern writing the emergence of something like a counterplot in the story of late twentieth-century fiction. In this version, writers reassess ideas of aesthetic integrity in an era of (self) irony, and the earnestness with which they do so offers us an alternative arc for tracing literary narratives across

familiar generational divides. Shifting earnestness from a characterological domain to a formal one, I show how it operates, not only thematically in posture, manner, or other affective experiences, but as the very substrate of aesthetic creativity—readjusting the way we might link intention and invention, sensibility and style, without recourse to exclusively postmodern benchmarks as the sole criteria for adventurous fiction at this time.

To suggest that John Barth takes an initial role in this account might well seem counterintuitive, if not downright wrongheaded. Like Pynchon, he's typically viewed as an archetypal postmodernist. Yet Barth's own brand of earnestness was everywhere apparent in his prognosis for the condition of postwar fiction. "Passion and virtuosity are what matter," he declared, in a preface to his paradigmatic—though sometimes misconstrued—meditation on creative enervation. Where his own "temperament" was concerned, Barth reflected "the mix of romantic and neoclassical is so mutable that I hold no particular belief either for or against programmatic experimentalism" ("Literature of Exhaustion" 64). This impartiality is germane to Barth's capacious notion of the novel's potential for renewal, a potential he surely had in mind when suggesting that "if the term 'postmodernism' describes anything worthwhile, it describes this freedom, successfully exercised" ("Spirit of Place" 129). Barth didn't seem content, therefore, simply to suggest that writers "embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty," which Patricia Waugh (2), among others, has identified at the heart of postmodern metafiction. Instead he recommends that virtuosity rather than self-scrutiny in constructing narrative is "a virtue," such that "what artists feel about the state of the world and the state of their art is less important than what they do with that feeling" (64).

This sense of sheer drive rather than deflation, of renovation rather than resignation, found its English equivalent in the similarly earnest manifestos of B. S. Johnson. Appearing, tragically, the same year as his suicide, Johnson's impassioned defense of the novel, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs* (1973), attaches considerable responsibility to technique by arguing that "[f]orm is not the aim, but the result" (16). For Johnson, experimentation was no pastime; literary innovation had its social obligation and moral imperative. Thus if the writer "is serious," claimed Johnson, adopting the masculine pronoun rather unquestioningly, "he will be making a statement which attempts to change society toward a condition he conceives to be better, and he will be making at least implicitly a statement of

faith in the evolution of the form in which he is working" (16). For Johnson, such "aspects of making are radical" (16). Compared, though, with what he praised as "a continental European tradition of the *avant garde*," he judged that across the British scene "there are not many who are writing as though it mattered, as though they meant it, as though they meant it to matter" (29).

Meaning it to matter: it's this impulse to ensure that innovation makes some kind of sincere difference, that aesthetic strategies have social efficacies, which gains thematic substance across Johnson's pyrotechnic oeuvre. He reaffirmed Barth's belief in the need to keep questing for and testing fiction's formal freedoms. Throughout his short career, Johnson grappled too with that essentially Barthian dialectic of decomposition and reformation, exhaustion and replenishment. Such works as *Albert Angelo* (1964), *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973), and *The Unfortunates* (1969) thus stage within their very craft what Carol Watts describes as Johnson's "discovery of sometimes incontrovertible limits" (80). For all their constructional self-consciousness, they earnestly generate considerable pathos. Indeed, when we read Johnson it's hard to avoid associating his impulse to breach formal "limits" with what he was striving to achieve politically: a radicalized pathos of the sort that, as Watts points out, "has social correlatives for all its turning inwards," despite the "private intensity of feeling" that so often generates it (80).

Nowhere more candidly is this kind of pathos mobilized than in Johnson's autobiographical *Trawl* from 1966. We follow the narrator's self-imposed exile aboard a fishing vessel as he finds in marine isolation the perfect environment for reckoning with a private past. Undoubtedly, the constructed texture of language is foregrounded, made tangible; but this occurs not in the metadiegetic interests of formal self-examination we associate with postmodernist reflexivity. Instead, Johnson strives for some kind of knit between expression and emotion, as the novel's parataxis replicates the queasily rhythmic unison of its narrator's surging recollections with the trawler's dips and swells:

> She wallows, wallows, slops from side to side irregularly, at the sea's whim, force five only this morning, but oh she wallows when there is no way on her, when we haul! . . . But soon they will have shot again, they do not like it to be up out of the water long, the trawl, not useful, not earning for them, for long, though exactly when, I do not know, I cannot tell,

> down here, when they will shoot, but it will be soon, I hope, the sooner the, twenty minutes perhaps, being hauling and shooting again, it cannot come soon enough, perhaps I can think again then, or sleep, better to sleep, of course, but to think would be welcome, for which I am here, to shoot the narrow trawl of my mind into the vasty sea of my past. (9)

Trawl anticipates not only in backdrop but also in its lilting, occasionally archaic diction (note the late-sixteenth-century adjective, *vasty*, in that closing clause) Barth's opening story to *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), "Night-Sea Journey," where our attention is drawn to "what seems to be a kind of vasty presence, song, or summons from near upstream" (10). Implicit affinities with Barth also extend to the use of figurative space, as *Trawl* supports Barth's hunch that "the 'postmodern' writer may find that the realistic, even tender evocation of place . . . is quite to his purpose" ("Spirit of Place" 129), for tenderness is indeed germane to the portrait Johnson offers in *Trawl*. "Why do I trawl the delicate mesh of my mind over the snagged and broken floor of my past?" he asks (21), in a self-querying yet sincere idiom that triggers some of Johnson's most verbally athletic sequences, as his narrator rocks between reminiscence and the embodied present, enumerating degrees of his culpability:

> Discipline, order, clarity, truth. • • • • FOUR. If none of the previous three points of analysis, singly or together, completely explain Joan's betrayal, defection, whatever, (and they do not) then the only other reason must be a character fault in me, which is unknown to me. And which I will allow to remain unknown for the moment, until I am forced, perhaps by similar conclusions from other analyses of memories, if they are not too tedious, to examine, later. • • • • • As though reasons help, in any case. • • • •
> • What had I from it, afterwards, in the end? •
> • New knowledge of my body's faculty. • •
> Confidence from consummation of my full intention, for however brief a time. • • • • No lesson that I learnt well enough to avoid later painfulness. (24–25)

Placing typography in mimetic relation to inner thought, Johnson splinters the fluid syntax into dotted spaces of interruption and digression. This reproduces in visual terms the narrator's uncertainty in justifying the

rationale for using personal history as a premise for broader philosophical excursions, with Johnson invoking quotidian memories—much like his primary model, Beckett—as an index to wider epistemological questions about all that "is unknown to me." But further fissures emerge not just in the wake of self-analysis but also between emotion and articulation, content and style. For although Johnson accentuates the pathos of realizing how futile it is to seek retrospective "points of analysis," his narrator occasionally acquires an assured eloquence that contrasts his voyage's faltering sense of purpose. With resonant alliteration and its suave modulation from an anapestic to a trochaic meter, the narrator's claim to gaining "confidence from consummation of my full intention" expresses a rhetorical ease that's quite at odds with the very sentiment that provokes it. Johnson plays on this dissonance between verbal control and mental disturbance, so that *Trawl*'s sonorous discourse not only compensates for but also periodically counterpoints the narrator's concession that his desire through retrospection to obtain a stable self-portrait is wishful. For all its typographic bravado, then, the impulse behind *Trawl*'s conceit is far from self-ironizing; there's a sense of gravity to the whole endeavor. Throughout a confessional tenor complements and amplifies this earnest purpose, of course; but accompanying it there is also an authorial vulnerability, movingly affirmed by the novel's autobiographical substrate.

As in the most artfully self-probing of postmodern texts, Johnson's characters may be "aware of their own fictive natures," as Julia Jordan observes (xix). Yet they are also capable of soliciting a kind of unmediated and absorbing pity, making "elegiac calls into the void" that capture the way Johnson "articulates a kind of mourning for the reader's presence" (xviii). If William Gass insisted in 1969 that "the writer must not let the reader out" (144), then for Johnson the task was to recapture the attentive reader in an era when metafiction seemed to be curbing "traditional" moments of immersion and enchantment. Even the dots have a motive, one more affective than ostentation alone: such typographic features are meant to matter, not simply to titillate or beguile us. Even so, in subsequent years—as his reputation among the leading players of British postmodernism grew—Johnson would come to "doubt," in *Trawl*'s case, "whether these dots were necessary." And maybe he was right, for the use of decimal points in that novel to symbolize "breaks in the mind's workings" are ultimately less effective than what's achieved, as we have seen, at a subtler level of tone and lexis (1973 23). But again the very

sincerity of Johnson's self-doubts here in particular serves only to underscore the earnestness of his approach to innovation in general, an approach that remains perhaps his most important legacy.

At once audacious and earnest, then, Johnson's work represents something of a pivot point for the postwar novel. Arguably the form is seen to pivot still, not least when arguments persist around irony and sincerity as they jostle for prominence as defining epithets for our age.[1] To stipulate one as more endemic than the other, of course, is perhaps to miss how dialectically imbricated they have become in contemporary culture. In any case, "it's obviously difficult," as Jonathan Fitzgerald notes, "and arguably impossible" to try to "define the ethos of an age" (n.p.). Nonetheless, cultural commentators elsewhere have taken up the gauntlet, finding irony still to be the most fitting symptom of our times. In Christy Wampole's tetchy account, irony remains the antithesis of "humility and self-effacement," becoming today "the most self-defensive mode, as it allows a person to dodge responsibility for his or her choices, aesthetic or otherwise" (n.p.). For Wampole, the Web has only exacerbated things, as the "Internet age has undoubtedly helped a certain ironic sensibility to flourish" (n.p.): always connected yet increasingly self-preoccupied, we find ourselves "prioritizing what is remote over what is immediate, the virtual over the actual," when "absorbed in the public and private sphere by the little devices that take us elsewhere" (n.p.). Wampole's diagnosis of irony's pandemic is not only culturally homogenizing. By somewhat parodying irony, it also partly emulates a cheerfully cynical style of exaggeration one might attribute to the very postmodern irony against which Wampole asserts the need for "undertaking the cultivation of sincerity" (n.p.). Such inadvertent complicities aside, the global conditions she brings into domestic focus—namely, the fact that "our incapacity to deal with the things at hand is evident in our use of, and increasing reliance on, digital technology" (n.p.)—are indeed the conditions that concern so-called New Sincerity writers.

Emerging with this supposed group, Dave Eggers has nonetheless remained quite capable of qualifying the very sincerity models critics might like him to satisfy, as though testing the post-irony stance that he allows his characters to negotiate. "It should *matter* where something was made!" (13), complains one belligerently nostalgic character in Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* (2012), implicitly recalling Johnson's plea for writers to invent "as though they meant it to matter." Moving from an English working-class

avant-gardist of the '60s to Eggers's post-millennial chronicle of the insecure, middle-aged salesmen, Alan, on a business trip to Saudi Arabia, might seem a bit of a swerve. But points of conjunction resonate across time that illuminate these two writers, bookending the postmodern era while calling its hallmark persuasions into question. Just as Johnson's zealous commitment to literary experimentation was significantly determined by how earnestly he cared about experimentation's social ends, so Eggers in *Hologram* is purposively "political but never preachy," as J. Robert Lennon puts it, "comic" yet "without depending on . . . easy irony or zany serendipity" (15). Like Johnson, Eggers is equally unwilling to compromise a novel's economy of feeling with formal gamesmanship. In *Hologram*, he aims to offer a "story of globalism as it develops," in Pico Iyer's phrase, "and, simultaneously, to unfold a much more archetypal tale of struggle and loneliness and drift" (n.p.). Thus, just as Johnson sought out the "social correlatives" of private thought, so Eggers endeavors to reclaim larger implications—albeit tentative, protean, inconclusive—from Alan's private moments of reflection:

> He walked down the promenade, a bending design of inlaid bricks, thinking it all through. He was fifty-four years old. He was dressed in a white shirt and khakis and was walking along what might someday be a seaside path. He had just left his team, three young people tasked with setting up and demonstrating holographic communications technology for a king. But there was no king, and they were in a tent, alone, and there seemed to be no knowing when any of this would be rectified. (71)

Bluntly descriptive—with few elaborative clauses that would give Eggers a chance to intrude and accentuate the scene's more pathetic associations—the string of declarative sentences here build cumulatively, itemizing and thereby summing up Alan's position of professional and existential isolation. By being so deadpan, Eggers invites us to take Alan seriously but without sentimentality; scenes such as this stand out nakedly, shorn of the rhetorical dressing of a heterodiegetic commentator who could gesture at profundities beneath all the banalities.

An exhibition of impartial poise, *Hologram* derives its strength from these uncompromising sequences of patient characterization, from the very "conviction," as Iyer calls it, "with which Eggers plunges into the kind of regular working American we don't see enough in contemporary fiction, and gives voice and heft to Alan's struggles in an information economy in which he

has no information and there's not much of an economy" (n.p.). Indeed, Eggers re-inscribes Alan's lack of professional purchase in the depiction of setting itself, as the "landscape was flat and blank. Anything built here, an unrelenting desert, was an act of sheer will imposed on territory unsuited for habitation" (34). In an "age that is so equipped," argues David Marcus, "to abstract . . . the commodities we buy from the conditions in which they are produced" (n.p.), physical places in *Hologram* function connotatively within the larger scheme of the Eggers's indictment of depersonalized domains of global exchange: "The road straightened out and again cut through desert without feature or form. Streetlights were placed every twenty feet or so, but otherwise there was nothing at all, the whole thing like a recently abandoned development on the moon" (41–42). Amid this environment of abstraction, Eggers returns us to what affectively matters to Alan—the everyman figure whose emotional life is evoked with tender particularity. In Marcus's view, Eggers—along with his friend Zadie Smith—is part of a generation of writers who depart from the epic visions of Pynchon and DeLillo, in order "to map out more local, more empowering connections," and whose work suggests that "what we need today is a more sociological realism: a social novel capable of capturing not only the ways we experience life but also the ways in which it happens to us" (n.p.). But how useful, let alone accurate, can such a label be, not least when "realism" can nowadays often seem wobbly, banal, or tendentious according to the critical occasion?[2] If what "matter[s]," as Johnson insisted, is "realising that the novel is an evolving form, not a static one" (1973 12), while acknowledging in turn that writers "must evolve . . . forms which will more or less satisfactorily contain an ever-changing reality" (16–17), then we should expect the social novel to stray significantly beyond the perimeters of realism—or at least beyond the critical preconception that social critique and realist technique always make an ideal match.

Prescient of such pitfalls, John Barth suggested that a "particular work ought always to take primacy over contexts and categories" ("Literature of Replenishment" 200), implying that we only get so far in classifying trends through representative modes before an era's fiction starts to elude our cherished models. At opposite ends of postmodernism's notional timeline, Johnson's earnest avant-gardism and Eggers's tragicomic sincerity exemplify how the very tenets of postmodern writing have been fundamentally reconfigured and resisted, both at its moment of emergence and in its aftermath.

Then again, perhaps we would be better off conceding, by this stage in our attempts to chart paradigms of the until recently new—and by virtue of our unprecedented vantage point today in retrospectively mapping a literary-historical terrain that was once so contemporary—that in fact, as Jonathan Lethem attests, "what postmodernism really needs is a new name" (80).

NOTES

1. For an authoritative discussion of literary sincerity as a motivating affect and formal trait shared by a range of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century American writers, see Adam Kelly's contribution to this volume, in addition to his "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction" (in *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*, ed. David Hering [Austin: SSMG Press, 2010], 131–46).

2. Peter Boxall offers an insightful engagement with the conceptual history of realist writing, using as a springboard Zadie Smith's provocative yet somewhat catch-all notion of "lyrical realism" as a contemporary epidemic in fiction. See Boxall 39–68.

WORKS CITED

Barth, John. "The Literature of Exhaustion." *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Nonfiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984. 62–76.

———. "The Literature of Replenishment." *The Friday Book*. 193–206.

———. "Night-Sea Journey." *Lost in the Funhouse*. New York: Anchor Books, 1988. 3–13.

———. "The Spirit of Place." *The Friday Book*. 127–29.

Boxall, Peter. *Value of the Novel*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2015.

Coe, Jonathan. *Like A Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson*. London: Picador, 2004.

Eggers, Dave. *A Hologram for the King*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012.

Essex, Andrew. "Godzilla meets Indie Rockers." *New Yorker* (24 June 1996): 44.

Fitzgerald, Jonathan D. "Sincerity, Not Irony, is Our Age's Ethos." *Atlantic* (November 2012).

Galzek, Christopher. "The Pynchon Hoax." *New Yorker* (11 August 2009).

Gass, William H. "The Concept of Character in Fiction." *New American Review* 7 (1969): 128–43.

Iyer, Pico. "Desert Pitch." *New York Times* (19 July 2012).

Johnson, B. S. *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* London: Hutchinson, 1973.

———. *Trawl*. 1966. Reprinted in *B. S. Johnson Omnibus*. London: Picador, 2004.

Jordan, Julia. *Well Done God! Selected Prose and Drama of B. S. Johnson*. Ed. Jonathan Coe, Philip Tew, and Julia Jordan. London: Picador, 2013. xv–xx.

Lennon, J. Robert. "Ageing White Guy Takes Stock of His Life." *London Review of Books* 35.2 (January 2013): 15.

Lethem, Jonathan "Postmodernism as Liberty Valance: Notes on a Ritual Killing." *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, etc.* London: Vintage, 2013. 77–83.

Marcus, David. "Post-Hysterics: Zadie Smith and the Fiction of Austerity." *Dissent* (Spring 2013). <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/post-hysterics-zadie-smith-and-the-fiction-of-austerity>.

Matz, Jesse. *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Wampole, Christy. "How to Live Without Irony." *New York Times* (17 November 2012).

Watts, Carol. " 'The Mind has Fuses': Detonating B. S. Johnson." *Re-reading B. S. Johnson*. Ed. Philip Tew and Glyn White. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984.

LEEROM MEDOVOI

REPERIODIZING THE POSTMODERN

Textualizing the World System Before and After 9/11

In my living room stands a globe that was issued some time during the post–Cold War years of the 1990s. When I compare it to an older globe I purchased in the 1970s, there are a number of striking differences; the former republics of the old Soviet Union have transformed into the great pink swaths of Khazakstan and Ukraine, the orange of Belarus, the green of Turkmenistan. Those differences, of course, appear far less visually dramatic than the transformations that resulted in the collapse of European empires. A contemporary globe, meanwhile, would show almost no changes at all from the one issued in the 1990s; we now see only the smallest handful of new nations in places like South Sudan or East Timor. Yet for anyone who has lived through the period that began with the collapse of the Cold War through the present moment, we all know that the geopolitical affect of the globe we currently inhabit is remarkably different from that which emerged with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Deep transformations have taken place that the seeming continuity of global mapping cannot represent.

Fredric Jameson's so-called "aesthetics of cognitive mapping" gets at precisely this unrepresentable element. An aesthetic feature of cultural texts, cognitive mapping is what happens when a text imaginatively produces a

"new heightened sense" of one's "place in the global system," particularly within the basic world-system relations of core and periphery (Jameson, 1984b 92). The significance of cognitive mapping, however, is not that it envisions these deeper world-systemic relations per se, but rather that it illuminates the logic (psychic, affective, cultural) that structure their relationship to the surface of the globe. Slavoj Žižek once famously noted that the "secret" of the unconcious was not to be found in the "buried" wish that is belied yet expressed by the visible symptom. The secret is rather contained in the enigmatic relationship *between* the wish (latent content) and the symptom (the form in which it appears). So too with cognitive mapping, the "secret" of globality in world literature could be said to concern the logic of the evolving relationship between the global surface (and its color-coded nation-states) to deeper transformations in the world system.

When Jameson famously defined postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, the year was 1984. Much has changed since that time, leading many scholars of literature and criticism to claim that ours is a distinctively post-postmodern moment. Rachel Adams, for example, argues that the literature today has left behind postmodernism's pessimistic experimentalist disengagement for a kind of impassioned, even ebullient globalism that engages with urgent new social conditions. In this view, the experimental style, formal complexity, narrative irony, and fatalist sensibility of high postmodernism, as found in the writings of Pynchon, Coover, DeLillo, Vonnegut, Acker, and others, is abandoned; theirs *was* a pessimistic literature grounded in a bygone Cold War era characterized by "sharp polarization of the globe, fears of looming nuclear apocalypse, and newfound distrust of a government" (Adams 249).[1] This contrasts with the new sensibility that Adams calls "American literary globalism" (250). In the writing of Karen Yamashita, Sandra Cisneros, Chang-rae Lee, Junot Díaz, Ruth Ozecki, and others, we encounter the new insights and sensibilities of migrant writers who, unlike their predecessors, are not weighed by the "burdens" of engaging with Euro-American modernism or the politics of Cold War. Tapping a new "global archive of literary traditions" (268), these writers introduce both new themes and a multicultural polyvocality that engages with transnational cultural flow.

While I would respectfully disagree with Adams that the "postmodern" literature of the Cold War was somehow less global than what follows,[2] she is surely correct that engagement with these themes changed in style and

tone by the 1990s: less ironic, sometimes still experimental, more translingual and politically hopeful. But this raises some interesting questions. If something has now come *after* postmodernism, what do we do with the Jamesonian thesis? Does the end of postmodernism disprove any one-to-one correspondence between a "late capitalism" that we presumably still inhabit and the now expired cultural logic of postmodernism? Or does it instead suggest a shift that has taken place within "late capitalism" itself, a new development that has, as yet, no name?

Jameson, of course, derived his concept of "late capitalism" from Ernest Mandel, who indicated by it a postimperial regime of accumulation marked by the rise of multinational corporations, global markets, and finance capital after 1945 (Jameson, 1984b 55). If we imagine this mode of capitalism to extend to the present moment, it represents a broad periodization indeed that is worth parsing more finely. I agree with Adams that the post-postmodern literature of the 1990s represents a distinct shift from the global affect of Cold War late capitalism; I will also argue, however, that the attack on the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 represents yet another transition, one that ushered in an end to what she identifies as the optimistic tone of "American literary globalism." There are thus two distinct developments in the literature that follows postmodernism, separate phases in the cultural logic of what we might call "lat*er* capitalism."

Before doing justice to such a line of thought, we must first observe that Jameson *already* conceived of postmodernism in a relationship to late capitalism's intensified globality during the 1970s and '80s. If we read his famous 1984 essay on postmodernism alongside "Periodizing the 60s" (also from 1984), as well as the 1986 essay "Third World Literature," it becomes evident that he never viewed postmodernism as an iron cage spelling the end of history; he approached it rather as a particular predicament of the global north that emerged out of quite specific post-Fordist geopolitical conditions. Postmodernism is, as Jameson puts it in "Periodizing the 1960s," "what happened to culture in the 60s," to be precise, what happened to the political epistemology of culture in the global north after the *failure* of the sixties. If the social movements of the sixties enthusiastically embraced a tremendous expansion of culture as an apparent space and instrument of freedom, the world of necessity was violently reasserted in the early 1970s with the global economic crisis of Fordism (which had "funded" the inflation of culture's domain in the first place) and in the growing defeat of New

Left and Third World revolutionary movements. From this perspective, the 1960s represented the grand finale of claims inherent in modernist movements, which held out a transformational potential derived from its utopian negation of bourgeois society. It was the collapse of the revolutionary potential of the late sixties, Jameson concludes, that ushered in a "postmodern condition," whereby culture was increasingly reduced in status to the stylization of commodity production.

At first blush, this telescoped summary of Jameson's thesis still seems an "iron cage," a story of culture's inexorable "subsumption" by late capitalism's expanded capacity to reorganize life and absorb all opposition.[3] However, as Emilio Sauri has stressed, Jameson understood postmodernism to be an epistemic condition peculiar to the global north (476).[4] True, from the 1970s onward, hybrid neoliberal strategies that combined financial and military power managed to defeat decolonization efforts in the South, reasserting colonial power in a new register.[5] Nevertheless, this did not lead to the "postmodernization" of Third World literature, which maintained (per Jameson) its capacity to map cognitively (and critically engage) its location in the geopolitical order. "Magical realism" in Latin America, for instance, can be understood as a late Cold War alternative to postmodernism in North America, a formal counterstrategy for global literary intervention and cognitive mapping after the failure of the sixties.[6]

Even in the global north, however, the fate of the artist operating within a postmodern cultural logic was not necessarily that of commodity culture's dupe. The rise of the simulacrum and the abolition of critical distance were both predominant yet locally reversible conditions with which the postmodern artist (much like Jameson himself) would simply need to *contend* in metropolitan locations such as the United States. Put another way, artists aspiring to a critical negation of their late capitalist society could no longer rely on a bourgeois norm in which culture was presumed to serve this utopian function. Yet that does not mean that artistic aspirations had been epistemologically crippled so much as their prospects for effective cultural intervention diminished. Hence we see the rise of pessimism, irony, and conspiratorial expression as pervasive sensibilities in literature and the arts.

Hence Jameson casts the global pessimistic outlook of postmodernism as a creative response to the implosion during the 1970s of certain '60s-era American solidarities with Third World globalism, themselves expressive of a Fordist logic of cultural revolt that I have discussed at length elsewhere.[7] The

global signification of postmodernism can therefore only be deciphered if one first parses out a certain moment in late capitalism (the geopolitical aftermath of the sixties), and at the same time changes scales, zooming out from the United States to gain perspective on the "cultural logic" of first-world predicaments as distinguished from the possibilities still open to contemporaneous writers in the global south, authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, whose narratives synthesized experimental form, historical memory, and geopolitical engagement. For American postmodernism, the line between a text that *critiques* the north's epistemological blindness within the world system and one that represents but a *symptom* of that same epistemological blindness becomes necessarily blurry, caught up in such theoretical problems as authorial intentionality and readerly decoding processes. Nevertheless, we can reinterpret the "postmodern" moment of the '70s and '80s as one situated in the waning decades of the late capitalist "age of three worlds," when the tripartite imaginary of world-system geopolitics had already faced the crumbling of its most utopian prospects without yet any inkling of the imminent passing of the "three worlds" themselves.

It's instructive, in this light, to reconsider the shock of the immediate post–Cold War years by way of Philip Wegner's book, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989–2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*. Like Adams, Wegner reads post–Cold War cultural energies as ebullient, expressing a hopefulness associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which by ending not only the Cold War but the "age of three worlds," initiated new geopolitical aspirations. That event led to a resurgence of culture's status as a site for efficacious imaginings of possible futures. Unlike Adams, however, for Wegner, 1989 represents only the "first death" (the death of the age of three worlds). Twelve years later, a "second death" occurred with the fall of the twin towers, which Wegner reads as a symbolic repetition of the prior event (22–25). In Wegner's analysis, 9/11 ultimately contained the inchoate energies of the "long nineties," reconsolidating them in the form of Bush's "Global War on Terror."

Like Adams, Wegner stresses cultural globalization and emergent new media technologies as idealized elements in that long decade's notable political and cultural energies (5). It was a utopianism that would lead to Hardt and Negri's vision of "the multitude," notions of queer belonging, anti-globalization activism, and (though he does not make this point) perhaps the global network solidarities that Adams finds so compelling in 1990s fiction. Daniel Worden has framed Wegner's characterization of 1990s American

literature and culture as a form of "late postmodernism." I would argue instead that '90s culture is better understood as *early post-postmodernism*.

For Wegner, optimistic US literary globalism was decisive *only* during the '90s, in the interregnum between the "two deaths"; it constitutes a cognitive mapping project specific to that moment, with its own symptomatic limitations. The only genuine "death" associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall, after all, was that of the "second world," the Soviet-led Communist bloc. The ideological rivalry of East and West ended by way of the latter's apparent triumph. Coupled with the Clinton-era Silicon Valley tech boom (and the illusion it briefly provided of a new productive basis for the US economy), America's perceived victory in the Cold War presaged its resurgence as the undisputed metropole of a capitalism no longer restrained by Cold War frontiers. The "second death," inaugurated by the events of 9/11, meanwhile, implied at least symbolically the passing of the first world. The United States responded with a show of military force and reasserted imperial might that briefly led to neoconservative celebrations of a benighted return to imperial power. Yet that celebration was short lived.

The symbolic murder of the first world staged in the smashing of the World Trade Center hardly portended the end of capitalist power, of course, but we can understand it as a global sign of America's waning status as the hegemon of the late capitalist world system. This at least is the view of the late great Marxist sociologist-geographer Giovanni Arrighi, who argued that the capitalist world system has always required a key military-economic state power to configure and manage a geopolitical order that organizes the current pathways of capital flow. Arrighi suggests that each such regime of accumulation eventually reaches the structural limits posed by that hegemon's particular configuration of the world, leading capital to flow elsewhere in search of a more capacious configuration that might renew the accumulation process.

Each previous hegemon of the world system—Genoa, Holland, and Great Britan—experienced what Arrighi calls a "signal crisis," followed by a brief era of finacialized reassertion of its hegemony that he terms its "belle époque." These good times, however, ultimately consist in a process of investing in emergent rivals that financially empties out the hegemon's remaining economic power base. In each case, this eventually precipitates a "terminal crisis," sometimes through acts of imperial overreach by the waning hegemon. For Arrighi, the 9/11 attacks, followed by the failed Bush wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan, represent precisely this kind of terminal crisis in American power. The severe damage to American economic dominance caused by the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis would seem further confirmation of Arrighi's basic thesis.

Arrighi's propositions are highly suggestive for our reflections on American fiction in both the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. In the case of the "long nineties," I would propose that we reframe the post-postmodern phenomenon of "American literary globalism" as a distinctive American textualization of the world system in that transitional moment that Arrighi calls the "belle époque" of US power. Nineties-style "glocal" writing (at once cosmopolitan and regional, transnational yet ethnically positioned) supplanted the reflective irony of the preceding "postmodern" cultural logic of the global north in response to the simultaneous post–Cold War reopening of geopolitical possibilities for transnational alliances *along with* the apparent resurgence in American power. Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* here exemplifies the assembled techniques of plural narration and flat characterization (the global north's postmodernism) alongside fantastic and allegorical strategies for critiquing the power of capital (the global south's magical realism). The novel maps certain newly opened political possibilities in the era of NAFTA—a new phase of late capitalism organized on the one hand by the briefly expanded power of American-led transnational capital, and on the other, by the increasingly porous borders of North America that enabled bottom-up modes of counterglobalization ("another world is possible").

Yet even as Yamashita drew on magical realist traditions for her 1996 novel, we should note that contemporaneous fiction in Latin America was moving rapidly away from the 1960s/'70s magical realist aesthetic and toward what we might playfully call the parallel 1990s phenomenon of a *Latin* American literary globalism. Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez's 1996 Latin American literary manifesto *McOndo*, for example, proclaimed the arrival of a new kind of writing that, by leaving behind García Marquéz's rural, magical "Macondo" for McDonalds, Mac computers, and condos in the global south's new urban centers, sought at last to represent Latin American urban consumerism and the globalization of culture. *McOndo*, if it constitutes a retreat from the explicit political aims of magical realism, has also sometimes been viewed as tantamount to postmodernism's belated arrival in Latin America (Palaversich). Certainly *McOndo* features many of the key elements that Jameson associated with postmodernism: an embrace

of consumer culture, a weakening of historical memory, and a collapsing of critical distance. Even one of its principal champions, Alberto Fuguet, has referred to the movement, with playful irony, as "magical neo-liberalism," a literary expression of Latin American literature's transformation by the socioeconomic changes induced during the 1980s and '90s by the (Chicago) schooling of the world market (Fuguet). Put another way, *McOndo* might appear as the flip side of American power's increasing fragility, as Latin America grows increasingly *semiperipheral*, superficially "Americanizing" while growing ever less economically dependent on the United States as it builds lateral ties to other semiperipheral sites, especially China.

How then do we interpret what comes after the belle époque, after the ebullience of American literary globalism in the 1990s? Early twenty-first-century American novels suggest yet another twist in the range of the post–Cold War geopolitical aesthetic. In recent novels by Peter Mountford, Teddy Wayne, Benjamin Kunkel, and Gary Shteyngart (the writer I will focus on most closely in the remainder of this essay), as well as others further afield from America (Mohsin Hamid, Salman Rushdie) we see one version of the much-discussed reassertion of "realism." Coherent narration revives along with the aspiration to represent (however impossibly) a global social totality. But these writers also employ a set of specific narrative strategies, cognitively mapping geopolitical space across a temporality that often juxtaposes a "before" to an "after" of the September 11 attacks.

What interests me here is the way that 9/11 seemingly functions in these novels as an "event" in Alain Badiou's sense: as a multiple, a diversity of elements, that did not make sense in relation to the situation then known as "globalization" but that forced an intervention, a rupture through which that former ensemble of nonevents could come to make sense. While 9/11 could (and does) mean many things—the onset of a new era of nonstate warfare; the world's need for a renewal of American empire; or, as Arrighi suggests, the coming into visibility of America's terminal crisis in its hegemony: any of these situations would seem to entail the end of globalization as the paradigm of the world situation. For works of literature, the representational impossiblity of world-systemic totality could be circumvented in some finite way by deploying the "before" of 9/11 against the "after."

This is not to say that the temporal setting of these novels necessarily includes the calendar day of September 11, 2001. Some, like Peter Mountford's *A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism*, begin only after that date. Others,

like Gary Shteyngart's *Absurdistan*, end before we have arrived there. What's crucial, however, is how their narrative temporality revolves around the notion that 9/11 constitutes an historical event, a moment that will make a certain kind of globalism (the optimistic kind discussed by Rachel Adams) impossible. However partial their narratives or inadequate their attempted construction of geopolitical space, the use of 9/11 as a kind of "zero hour" permits a diversity of literary reckonings with a turbulent world system confronting the unraveling of American hegemony as the stabilizer of its capitalist geopolitics.

Globalizing *Absurdistan*

Born in 1965, Shteyngart is a "migrant writer" of the very generation that literary critics like Adams tend to associate with post-postmodern writing. Yet Shteyngart's personal history as a Soviet Jew who migrated to the United States demonstrates, contra Adams, the ongoing relevance of the Cold War as a signifying "burden" for post-postmodern "globalist" fiction. Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* retroactively explores how the globalist 1990s were at once *post*–Cold War (shaped by that global war's aftermath) and *pre*-9/11 (surreptitiously anticipatory of the marked change in America's status vis-à-vis the globe after 2001). Superficially, Shteyngart's novel deals with what, in my introduction, I called the "surface change" of the post–Cold War globe: the new states birthed by the breakup of the former Soviet Union. Save for a few flashbacks to the United States, *Absurdistan* occurs entirely in the former Soviet Union, exploring the impact of the end of the Cold War on Russia, the Central Asian republics, and the United States.

A fusion of Philip Roth-like comic Jewish psychodrama with the geopolitical thriller, *Absurdistan* is written from the abject perspective of the obese Misha Vainberg (aka SnackDaddy), whose father, a former Jewish Soviet dissident, became a super-rich criminal oligarch after the Soviet Union's demise. Misha lives in St. Petersburg, which by 2001 "had taken on the appearance of a phantasmagoric third-world city, our neoclassical buildings sinking into crap-choked canals, bizarre peasant huts fashioned out of corrugated metal and plywood colonizing the broad avenues with their capitalist iconography" (3).

There is no ambiguity regarding the real meaning of the second world's death: "Let us be certain. The Cold War was won by one side and lost by another. And the losing side, like any other in history, had its countryside

scorched, its gold plundered, its men forced to dig ditches in faraway capitals, its women conscripted to service the victorious army" (Shteyngart 57). Misha himself, however, had left in the early 1990s to study with the Cold War's American victors. At "Accidental College" he majored in multicultural studies (133), then briefly moved to New York, whose displays of global power and wealth he adores, especially in the iconic form of the twin towers, those "emblematic honeycombed 100-story giants that glowed white gold in the afternoon sun. They looked to me like the promise of socialist realism fulfilled, boyhood science fiction extended into near-infinity. You could say I was in love with them" (27).

Misha's professed love of the towers encapsulates the stakes of this 2006 novel's complex temporality. Narratologically speaking, both the story and discourse of *Absurdistan* end on September 10, 2001; the post 9/11 moment that terminated "American literary globalism" never arrives. Yet the novel works as a retrospective commentary on what it means not to have recognized its omens. Misha's infatuation with the towers reflects the haplessness of his desire for a globalist America whose approaching deflation he fails to anticipate. *Absurdistan* is animated by Misha's frustrated desire to return to New York, home to the transnational networks and encounters that are the hallmarks of 1990s globalism. In *Absurdistan*, while Russia has become an impoverished has-been nation-state, America is the victorious metropole of both economic and cultural globalization, the place where the world's peoples come and comingle. Misha's American girlfriend, Rouenna, "Half-Puerto Rican. And half German. And half Mexican and half Irish. But . . . was mostly raised Dominican," represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of his desire for the transnational (32). But Misha can't return to his former life with her in New York because, his father having murdered an American, the INS has banned entry of the Vainberg family.

In the novel's second half, the scene shifts dramatically. Misha departs St. Petersburg for the former Soviet republic of Absurdistan, the presumptive oil-wealthy "Norway of the Caspian," to buy a Belgian passport that may improve his chances of returning to the United States. The fictional Absurdistan satirizes the *generic* changes to the surface of the post–Cold War globe that would be obscured by specifying any particular former Soviet republic.[8] "Absurdistan" is a term coined in the 1990s to name any post-Soviet state failing to form a viable democracy in the face of Western hegemony, the continued power of Soviet-era elites, and an ingrained distrust of the public

politicking inherited from the Soviet era.[9] Shteyngart deploys it here, however, for a uniquely twenty-first-century purpose. What is ultimately absurd about *this* Absurdistan is the speciousness of its claim to nationhood: beyond the historical antagonism of its two distinct peoples (the "Svani" and the "Sevo"), the resurgent civil war that breaks out during Misha's stay appears largely a battle over which comprador class will administer a pocket of petroleum reserves for American oil companies.[10] The Sevo flag parodically captures this condition with its image of a Caspian "sturgeon leaping up over an oil derrick against a background of red and green—red for the blood of the Sevo martyrs and green for the color of American dollars" (259). Hints appear, however, that even this reading of Absurdi politics covers for something else; as the hotel manager observes, the derricks at the new oil fields seem out of use. The petroleum company representatives leave abruptly when the civil war begins, while employees of KBR (Kellogg, Brown, and Root), the parent company of Halliburton, arrive in force. Is there really any oil in Absurdistan? At a KBR party, the Sevo's parrot keeps repeating the words "cost plus," a term, not for petroleum extraction, but for uncapped military contracts.

Misha, however, seems either unable or unwilling to pursue these signs, having fallen in with the daughter of the Sevo leader, whose organization ("SCROD") wants to hire him as Minister of Sevo-Israeli Affairs (the Sevos hope that the Jewish Misha can get the Israelis to persuade America to support their side in the growing Absurdi conflict). True to his romance with American ways, Misha insists on calling his new post instead the Ministry of "Multicultural Affairs," from where he imagines facilitating the development of a more tolerant multiethnic Absurdistan. Misha here embodies an ideological fantasy about cosmopolitan American ways in the age of globalization that bedazzled many during the 1990s.[11] But, in fact, multiculturalism in Shteyngart's Absurdistan amounts to little more than the elite ideological self-justification of the capital city's "international terrace," which includes corporate skyscrapers, urban shopping, and what Misha calls the "multicultural zone" of the Hyatt Hotel. As soon as he leaves the international terrace for the other parts of the city, Misha observes that "we had left a fledgling Portland, Oregon and arrived in Kabul," by which he means a destitute third-world city, but a particular one that we, as post-9/11 readers, are privileged to know will soon plunge into war (140).

Despite the apparent intrigue around the oil fields then, *Absurdistan* is

not an example of petro-fiction; no oil is left in Aburdistan. The KBR visitors intend to profit in a different way. Hiring Ukrainian mercenaries to fire rockets across the capital, they trigger a full-blown civil war that will allow them to claim a "cost-plus" military contract—a blank check from the Department of Defense—for working in a "war zone." As the mercenaries pulverize the city, and as the situation in Absurdistan spirals out of control, Misha boards a luxury American Express train. He escapes on September 10, 2001, eagerly anticipating the next day's magical airplane flight that will return him at last to his girlfriend in his beloved New York City.

In this play of dates, the novel leaves ironically unstated the outcome of Misha's enthusiastic plan to return to America, just as it need not speak where America itself is heading. And yet, *Absurdistan*'s fiction about the KBR's extraction of unlimitied profits from the US Department of Defense is easily recognized as a trial balloon for what is to come in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Absurdistan* directly names George W. Bush Jr. in but one brief scene where the Sevo rebel leaders express their frustration at being banished from the global media news cycle due to coverage of a murdered antiglobalization protester at a G-8 meeting in Italy (224). This is an oblique reference to the pre-9/11 political energies of left globalism that here briefly stand in the way of the KBR-Sevo plot. After the 9/11 attacks, it is the antiglobalization movement that will disappear from the media in favor of a neoconservative global war on terror replete with "cost-plus" contracts. The novel hence casts a future-perfect glance at the shadowy forces that *will have closed out* the "global nineties" and, with them, *will have ushered in* the terminal crisis of American power. The Absurd civil war functions retroactively as a fictional precursor for the impending wars in Afghanistan (the real Kabul) and Iraq, where the Halliburton-Bush administration will soon plunder American state coffers, destroying two other countries in the process, all while happily upending the celebratory post–Cold War vision of American multiculturalism. Watching midway through the novel as the Ukrainian mercenaries prepare to fire their rockets at the capital, Misha expresses fascination with these "afficianados of destruction born [like him] under the shadow of the Red Army." He reflects that "like any empire in decline, ours was becoming ever more brilliant at knocking things apart, at raising palls of smoke over cratered school yards and charred market stalls" (253). *Absurdistan* cognitively maps a world that will only arrive after its last page, when American soldiers are doing much the same thing, and for much the same reason.

Absurdistan seemingly shares features of both the literature of postmodernism and the "literary globalism" that succeeded it in the 1990s. Like Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*, it bears all the hallmarks of conspiratorial narrative, flat characters, ironic voice, comic narration, and implied political pessimism. Yet, as is confirmed by the ease with which its plot may be summarized, its narrative is far more linear than Pynchon's. What it shares with Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, meanwhile, is an active exploration of globalized space and the transnational flows of wealth and people. Put another way, Yamashita's novel expresses a distinct "globalist cultural logic" that accompanied the blossoming of post–Cold War late capitalism in its early neoliberal phase, its promise of free markets and the deregulation of flows so that rational choice might prevail. This moment also possessed a distinct utopianism, a promise of a different kind of globalization from the bottom. Shteyngart's novel proffers its own global imaginative frame, but in this latest phase of "late capitalism," both the exuberance for official economic globalization and the hope for an effective counterglobalization have become unsustainable in the face of the world system's growing turbulence. Since 2001 it has become very hard to believe in neoliberalism but equally difficult to have faith in any alternatives.

The twenty-first-century fiction I have described does not represent a radical break from the exuberant post-postmodernism of the 1990s; rather, the two phases constitute a kind of dialectic. In dividing the temporality of the turn of the century into a pre- and post-9/11 time, these works invite a retroactive mode of analysis that passes judgment on that moment of optimism that emerged in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It invites a backward glance that questions the pollyannic celebration of globality and multiculturalism. Had we only read the signs correctly, it seems to suggest, we would have known, we should have seen all of this coming. This new mode of realism harbors no nostalgia for the belle époque of American hegemony, for the end of postmodernism, but neither does it find anything to celebrate in the tumultuous global condition that is coming to replace it.

NOTES

1. For Adams, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* epitomizes that outmoded pessimistic sensibility. Pessimism would seem a curious emotive frame to place around the heady year of 1966, when Pynchon's novel was published. Nevertheless, if one views *The Crying of Lot 49* as anticipatory of a "literature of exhaustion" in the 1970s,

a writing increasingly persuaded of the indefatigability of the military-industrial complex's power in its asymetrical, conspiratorial war against the flagging energies of the sixties, then Pynchon appears prescient and pioneering in his ironies.

2. US literature and culture were profoundly global during the Cold War, a time when America's attention was trained squarely on Southeast Asian "dominos" at one end of the political spectrum and on heroes of African and Latin American decolonization at the other. It similarly seems odd for Adams to assume that Asian American and Latin American migrant writers are not "burdened" by the Cold War, whose international effects are made very clear in such studies as Odd Westad's *The Global Cold War*. Jodi Kim's "From Mee-gook to Gook," offers a fine example of how Cold War forces shape a text like Korean American writer Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. Consider also Juno Díaz's *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a narrative written in relation to the Cold War dictator novels of Latin America, and against the backdrop of US support of Trujillo as part of its hemispheric anti-communist strategy.

3. The entire tradition of thinking about cultural or "immaterial" labor can be understood as an extension of this thesis of the subsumption of culture. For an especially rich and thoughtful version of this argument, see Jason Read's *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Jeffrey Nealon develops an account of "post-postmodernism" that utilizes this thesis of expanding subsumption. For Nealon, however, post-postmodernism is ultimately just postmodernism intensified. By taking up an Arrighian position, I aim to show how the contemporary situation does not simply represent more of the same (another turning of the late capitalist screw) but a substantially new geopolitical phase of later capitalism.

4. Emilio Sauri's essay on Benjamin Kunkel's *Indecision* shares my interest in how a return to Jamesonian cognitive mapping might refashion our perspective on the status of American literary globalism as a successor to postmodernism. I am deeply indebted to a number of Sauri's insights and critical moves.

5. Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* illuminates how these new neoliberal strategies, fomented by partisans of the Chicago School of Economics, worked to defeat decolonization movements.

6. Consider the paradigmatic case of Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, which directly addresses the history of resistance to US-supported Latin American dictatorships during the Cold War.

7. See Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* and "Cold War American Culture as the Age of Three Worlds."

8. Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* collapses the various former republics. Both Khazakstan and Turkmenistan have borders on the Caspian's eastern shores, but Azerbaijan (on the Caspian's western coast) alone has a coastal capital. We are told that Absurdistan is near Iran, was invaded by the Ottomans, is predominantly Christian,

but has a Muslim minority. It is also referred to as neighboring the Caucasus. Azerbaijan is therefore the best candidate for the fictional nation, but Azerbaijan is predominantly Muslim, nor generally included among Central Asia's "stans."

9. See Robert Elias's 1992 essay, "Scenes from Absurdistan," which addressed Havel's challenges in post-Soviet Czechoslovakia, a nation that did eventually divide into two. Elias notably compares the '90s Eastern Europe to the southern cone of South America, also emerging from an authoritarian era bolstered by foreign domination. See also Lubomvr Luciuk and Paul Magocsi's 1994 collection, *Welcome to Absurdistan: Ukraine, the Soviet Disunion and the West*. Clearly the idea of "Absurdistan" extended well beyond Central Asia to express the predicament of any post–Cold War neo–banana republic.

10. Petroleum is, of course, a very real source of geopolitical intrigue today, with the development of the Kazahkstan-China Oil Pipeline and Azerbaijan's pipelines to Europe.

11. Note Arjun Appadurai's "The Heart of Whiteness," his essay on the United States, which affirmed that

> there could be a special place for America in the new, postnational order, and one which does not rely either on isolationism or global domination as its alternative bases. The United States is eminently suited to be a sort of cultural laboratory and a Free Trade Zone for the generation, circulation, importation, and testing of the materials for a world organized around diasporic diversity. In a sense this experiment is already under way. The United States is already a huge, fascinating garage sale for the rest of the world (804).

WORKS CITED

Adams, Rachel. "The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 248–72.

Allende, Isabel. *The House of the Spirits*. Trans. Magda Bogin. Random House Digital, 2005.

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Heart of Whiteness." *Callaloo* 16.4 (1993): 796–807.

Badiou, Alain. "The Event as Trans-Being." *Theoretical Writings*. Trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano. New York: Continuum, 2005. 99–104.

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Penguin, 2007.

Elias, Robert. "Scenes from Absurdistan." *Humanist* 52 (1992): 19–24.

Fuguet, Alberto. "Magical Neoliberalism." *Foreign Policy* (2001): 66–73.

Fuguet, Alberto, and Sergio Gómez, eds. *McOndo*. Barcelona: Mondadori, 1996.

García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2007.
Jameson, Fredric. "Periodizing the 60s." *Social Text* 9/10 (1984a): 178–209.
———. "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984b): 53–92.
———. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.
Kim, Jodi. "From Mee-gook to Gook: The Cold War and Racialized Undocumented Capital in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*." *MELUS* 34.1 (2009): 117–137.
Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Macmillan, 2007.
Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. New York: Riverhead, 1995.
Luciuk, Lubomyr Y., and Paul Robert Magocsi. *Welcome to Absurdistan: Ukraine, the Soviet Disunion and the West*. Kingston, ON: Kashtan P, 1994.
Mandel, Ernest. *Late Capitalism*. London: NLB, 1975.
Medovoi, Leerom. "Cold-War American Culture as the Age of Three Worlds." *Minnesota Review* 55–57 (2000): 167–86.
———. *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.
Mountford, Peter. *A Young Man's Guide to Late Capitalism*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011.
Nealon, Jeffrey. *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012.
Palaversich, Diana. *De Macondo a McOndo: Senderos de la Postmodernidad Latinoamericana*. Mexico: Plaza y Valdes, 2005.
Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
Read, Jason. *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present*. Albany: SUNY P, 2003.
Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown*. New York: Random House Digital, 2009.
Sauri, Emilio. "Cognitive Mapping, Then and Now: Postmodernism, *Indecision*, and American Literary Globalism." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3/4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 472–491.
Shteyngart, Gary. *Absurdistan*. New York: Random House, 2006.
wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1986.
Wayne, Teddy. *Kapitoil: A Novel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010.
Wegner, Philip E. *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989–2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009.
Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Worden, Daniel. "Late Postmodernism." *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 1.2 (2010): 12–16.

Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange: A Novel*. Minneapolis: Coffee House P, 1997.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso, 1989.

EMILIO SAURI

MAPPING POSTMODERNISM AND AFTER

Toward the middle of Benjamin Kunkel's *Indecision* (2005), Dwight B. Wilmerding tells his sister Alice, "I feel like I'm *event-proof*. That's one idea for a major problem I must have" (141; emphasis in original). Recalling the end of the Cold War, Dwight notes that "the Wall came down, whole world changed, now we're not going to die in a nuclear holocaust anymore. But it really didn't *feel* like anything was happening—not to me. I feel like I have a certain resistance to events" (140; emphasis in original). What Kunkel's protagonist means when he describes himself as "*event-proof*" is that he cannot "feel" history itself, and this is confirmed later, when, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, he remembers being "amazed . . . that I continued living my life, doing everything . . . like it was somehow regular and automatic" (183). Dwight's "major problem," then, is that this "resistance to events" prevents him not from *knowing* history but from *experiencing* it, and it is this incapacity to "*feel*" world-historical events like the end of the Cold War and 9/11 that marks his character throughout—so much so that his Argentine-Belgian love interest, Brigid, will eventually complain, "Nothing can happen to you. You are that type" (175). Meanwhile, the fact that Dwight cannot experience history is also presented as both source and symptom of his abulia, a condition that not only leaves him with a chronic inability to make

any decision, no matter how trivial, but also incapable of conceptualizing historical change: "I couldn't think of the future," Dwight explains, "until I arrived there." But if this unique condition animates an almost exaggerated form of self-consciousness that contributes to what a number of critics have cited as the novel's equally unique narrative voice, Dwight's indecision will also bring to mind what Fredric Jameson described nearly three decades ago as a distinctly postmodern predicament: namely, the "waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (1991 21). Thus, if Dwight is, in Brigid's words, a "type," he is a markedly postmodern one; and indeed, one cannot help but think of that subject Jameson identifies as having "lost its capacity to organize its past and future into coherent experience" (25) when, for example, Dwight recounts living "from day to day as if . . . on a bridge swaying in the wind while . . . past and future . . . disappeared in foggy weather" (19). And if for this reason |Kunkel's novel can be understood best as an effort to dramatize what Jameson calls a "weakening of historicity" (1991 6), then it is perhaps not surprising that the possibility of overcoming what Dwight recognizes as his inability to experience or feel history is also imagined in the novel as having decidedly political consequences, which, taking the form of a political awakening, will also speak to our understanding of postmodernism, and particularly to the possibility of imagining what might come after it.

To be sure, efforts to define our present cultural moment in terms of this *after* have recently provoked various reflections on and reevaluations of postmodernism as a periodizing term, as a form of literary experimentalism, or as a particular style, especially in relation to what has been widely conceived as the exhaustion of those thematic and formal investments that characterized much postwar American literature.[1] In the context of American literary criticism, however, these reflections have also been attended by a growing concern with the apparent globalization of the American novel. Rachel Adams, for example, has proposed that contemporary US fiction has borne witness to the emergence of an "American literary globalism," which, taking "other spatial and ideological imaginaries as its setting," marks both the "ends of postmodernism" and the "ends of America" (248). Against the "postmodern vision of global geography," which had been "filtered through Cold War divisions and anxieties," the globalization of American literature, Adams argues, offers the image of a "planet that is tied together through the increasing interpenetration of economies, cultures, and kinship." Whereas

the postmodernism of a novel like Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) fails to perceive these connections as anything other than the "figments of an individual" and paranoid "imagination," more recent works like Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) represent these same connections as a "shared perception of community" to reveal how "populations in one part of the world are inevitably affected by events in another" (269). For Adams, then, authors like Yamashita achieve what a postmodern writer like Pynchon could not by drawing on "multiple literary precursors" from a variety of traditions (not least Latin American magical realism), and by "presenting a story that must be told by multiple characters from across the spectrum of race, class, gender, and geography" (264). And if American literary globalism succeeds where literary postmodernism had failed, its success lies squarely in this multiplication of positions and perceptions, which help locate the national and cultural-political situation of the United States within more global processes.

Importantly, Adams offers this reading as a corrective to Jameson's account of postmodernism, which, she maintains, is a "periodizing concept, but one with no apparent end in sight" (250). Yet, the break with postmodernism Adams sees in the novel's broadening of settings, influences, and perspectives also recalls the aims of what Jameson has long described as an aesthetic of cognitive mapping: "to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (54). The effort to provide the subject with this "heightened sense" of its position in the global system thus appears to be just as essential to a concept like American literary globalism as it has been to Jameson's notion of a "political art" (54), though, as I will show, the concern with locations, mappings, and positions in the former has become a means toward preserving the economic inequalities that underlie the political configuration of the global economy today, undermining any effort to imagine an alternative to this same system. What looks like a departure from the cultural logic of late capitalism will turn out to be its refinement.

To understand why, we should first remember that, for Jameson, the "weakening of historicity"—what Dwight calls his "resistance to events"—is itself a product of a "mutation in space," which "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (1991 44). Needless to say, the

"situation" that Jameson's essay repeatedly identifies as "our own" (42) is not transhistorical in any sense, but rather one that finds its origins in alterations within global capitalism that have generated a new type of space appropriate to its functioning. This is, in other words, the situation of the subject for whom daily life in core societies (formerly known as the "first world") appears utterly disconnected from the wider and more global processes of contemporary capitalism. In this sense, "postmodernism" is simply another word for the enlargement of a representational impasse—"to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (38)—though, importantly, Jameson's essay insists that this transformation in space has also had far-reaching effects on our perception of time, and particularly on "what used to be historical time" (66). Hence, the "waning of our historicity," whereby the thought of historical change, and the possibility of intervening in history (the possibility, that is, of a politics), appear to have capitulated to the perpetual present of consumer society. Importantly, things stand somewhat differently on the peripheries of capitalism, where, as Jameson suggests elsewhere, the brutality endemic to a more violent process of capital accumulation is everywhere legible in that daily life that makes up the very content of national literature. Postmodernism is therefore not only the name given to "our own" situation in the first world but also a marker of the inequality that underlies the difference between the third world and first.[2]

No doubt this weakening of historicity would eventually find its exemplary expression in the so-called "end of history," the conviction that the end of the Cold War signaled not only the triumph of liberal capitalism over communism but also the end of all ideological conflict. Indeed, it is this same conviction that had underwritten Francis Fukuyama's notorious claim in 1989 that in the "post-historical period," such conflict or struggle "will be replaced by economic calculation" and the "satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands" (178). That globalization today involves what Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman identify as a "certain configuration of time—one that cannot imagine an 'after' " (2) suggests that this ideological entrenchment of the market as the ultimate horizon of all human possibility (economic, ethical, political) only attests to a further weakening of historicity. For Jameson, nonetheless, the way back into history, so to speak, is through space. For this reason, his essay on postmodernism proposes that a "model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern" (51). The mark of this "genuine political

culture" (47)—or an aesthetic of cognitive mapping—is thus conceived in Jameson's account as the subject, which, in mapping its position within that "unrepresentable totality" (51) of global capitalism, might yet articulate an alternative to that system and stage something like a reactivation of history. But while the conclusion of Jameson's essay also suggests a certain skepticism with regard to the realization of this "political art" ("if it is possible at all") or "political form of postmodernism" ("if there ever is any" [54])—it is the same "heightened sense" of the subject's position in the global system that Kunkel's narrator will experience by means of a fruit conjured up in the jungles of Ecuador.

In *Indecision*, then, the subjective gap between Jameson's first and third world is given an immediate geopolitical content in Dwight's journey from a post-9/11 New York City to a post-Bolivarian-Revolution Latin America. No doubt this same itinerary has gained a particular significance in the context of contemporary American literature and criticism, and as Adams makes clear, similar efforts to lay bare the "interpenetration of economies, cultures, and kinship" has given rise to a "re-alignment of the field's geographic parameters" in Americanist literary criticism that reflects "multiple Americas that are more mobile and expansive than the borders of the US nation-state" (267–68). Thus, if the "ends of America" can be said to mark the "ends of postmodernism," then it is because what Adams cites as a "creative remapping" (268) in Americanist literary study successfully locates US literature within transnational networks of cultural exchange. The particular kind of attention to space Jameson believes any attempt to grasp postmodernism's "moment of truth" (49) requires is here transformed into a means toward exploding the disciplinary boundaries of nation-based criticism to produce what has been variously called the transnational turn in American studies, inter-American studies, and Western hemispheric studies.

Thus, in their introduction to a special issue of *American Literary History*, Caroline Levander and Robert Levine turn to the question of space to demonstrate how the geographical and discursive frame of concepts like "the Americas" function as a "corrective" (401) to those social and cultural histories that emphasize the political and economic dominance of the United States. Against those accounts that "call the beneficiary the 'center' that tacitly shapes everything else," Levander and Levine envision a "*polycentric* American hemisphere with no dominant center" (401; emphasis added). And once the center is decentered, so to say, the distinction

between first and third world, center and periphery, is transformed into the difference between what they call "multiple locations and perspectives" that are no more privileged than any other. For Levander and Levine, this "realignment" of the field will consequently give rise to a "hemispheric politics of location," which, in providing a means toward mapping so-called "cultural geographies" (404), produces a "fissuring and relativizing of America" in which new "perspectives would come into focus" (398). The thrust of this particular emphasis on space, then, is decidedly toward identifying what Adams calls "other spatial and ideological imaginaries" and what Levander and Levine call "multiple locations and perspectives," imaginaries and perspectives that correspond to those different positions individual or collective subjects assume within transnational networks of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture. What these critics describe as a "creative remapping" and a "politics of location" is, in this sense, directed at the production of a horizontal (or "polycentric") plane of difference capable of leveling vertical hierarchies of domination.

Nevertheless, we might say that what makes the thought of an "after postmodernism" possible here is, in fact, a homogenization of space resulting in the ostensible erasure of what Jameson has described elsewhere as a "situational consciousness" that contrasts with the "epistemologically crippling" (1986 85) standpoint of first-world postmodernism. For while these and other critics agree that the differences between the United States and Latin America—and between wealthy nations and poorer ones more generally—find their origins in the unevenly developed flows of capital between the peripheries and the center, that history is nonetheless rendered extraneous to this remapping precisely because acknowledging it requires us to recognize the United States as the incontrovertible "center" of the Americas, and among one of the many "centers" of the world system. Which is to say that the commitment to the multiplication or mapping of different locations, perspectives, or positions can be considered political only within a space utterly removed from the contingencies of history. Yet it does not take a very strong historicism to note that the expansion of global capitalism has long involved much more than the annihilation of cultural difference, even when the dynamic it names shifts into the expansion of a "Western" or "American" monoculture under the sign of globalization; as plainly as we can see that both the United States and Latin American nations like Ecuador are equally implicated in the development of this system, it is just as clear that

each occupies a radically unequal position within it. And what this means is that insofar as we understand the positions populations within the United States, Bolivia, Argentina, or Ecuador occupy in the world system not as merely *different* but as radically *unequal*, we can begin to see how this commitment to the multiplication of positions not only fails to provide a more complete picture of the relationship between these and other nations but also—and perhaps more important—makes any attempt to formulate an alternative to this system impossible.

The "heightened sense" Dwight experiences in *Indecision*, then, will turn out to be the upshot of something like this commitment, which emerges in Brigid's description of utopia. "Eden or paradise or utopia" (206), she tells Dwight, is a place "in which there is no lack of time" and everyone has "such an excellent memory that eventually . . . everyone will have *been* someone else," so that "for once finally we will treat each other well" (207; emphasis in original). Brigid subsequently conceives of a fruit that would help realize this utopia, and tells Kunkel's protagonist that "when you eat from this fruit then whenever you put your hand on a product, a commodity, an article, then, at the moment of your touch, how this commodity came into your hands becomes plainly evident to you" (216). No doubt the fruit Brigid evokes in the jungles of Ecuador is nothing less than a means toward overcoming what Marx refers to in *Capital* as the "fetishism of the commodity," whereby the "definite social relation between men" assumes "for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (165); and indeed, she suggests as much in noting that with this fruit "there is no more mystification of labor, no more of a world in which the object arrives by magic—scrubbed, clean, no past, all of its history washed away" (216). In contrast to Marx's critique, however, Brigid imagines that this demystification not only hinges on our ability to *feel*, "like a shock from a door handle . . . any pain involved in the making of the product," but also entails immediate political consequences: a world in which we feel this pain would, according to Brigid, "be a difficult world to bear," and "so then—changes" (216).

Yet this is a solution to Dwight's "major problem" that will not only allow him to feel history in a strangely literal manner, but also provide him with that global sense of connectedness that critics like Adams want from an American literary globalism. And while this image of utopia similarly raises questions about the politics of such connectedness, Kunkel's novel ostensibly disregards these when Dwight undergoes what he eventually describes

as his "conversion experience" (222). Having eaten the fruit (and with the aid of a powerful hallucinogen), Dwight tells us, "I saw it all at once" (216), the "entire system of neoliberal capitalism disclosed itself to me" (217). And if seeing "it all at once" has the virtue of making Brigid's "fantasy" (206) into a reality, this is not simply because this vision makes Dwight feel "somewhat grim" (216) but because it results in a political awakening of sorts: a newfound commitment to democratic socialism and "better economic arrangements" (235). That Dwight had been "terrified of becoming a socialist" (211) a few pages earlier attests to the power of this fantasy; and, in fact, it is as if in encountering the "unrepresentable totality" of global capitalism Dwight cannot help but become a socialist. In this way, however, *Indecision* will transform cognitive mapping into a means by which the subject can claim a political commitment without being convinced, even though Jameson suggests that nothing necessarily follows from the "heightened sense" such a map may provide. To think otherwise is essentially to confuse what he, following Lukács, understands as "standpoint"—the cognitive possibility of representing the whole—with what might be called "viewpoint"—an experience (feeling, seeing) afforded by occupying a particular position (or perspective) vis-à-vis that whole. For reasons we have already touched on, however, experience, according to Jameson, posits itself as a limit that must be overcome. For Dwight, nonetheless, seeing is believing.

What Kunkel's characters suggest, then, is that the conviction to change the world (politics) derives exclusively from the things one feels, sees, and experiences, in assuming a given set of subject positions. Which is to say that insofar as the question of political commitment is understood as a question of experience, and insofar as that experience is a product of the subject-position one assumes within wide-ranging networks of social relations as, say, men, women, Americans, or Argentines, then the commitment to an ideology like democratic socialism is nothing more than a product or expression of one's identity. To think of one's political convictions as products of one's identity, however, is to render any and all reasons for one's beliefs irrelevant; it is to imagine a means whereby the normative distinction between beliefs (fair/unjust, better/worse) becomes the descriptive distinction between identities (different/similar). Furthermore, that Brigid believes the realization of a world in which "we will treat each other well" depends on the possibility of occupying every possible subject-position suggests that the content of this utopia is something like multiculturalism, a commitment

to difference that militates against the exclusion of any identity, but which in so doing must disregard the question of political commitment altogether. From this perspective, *Indecision* can be said to dramatize what Walter Benn Michaels identifies as the "posthistoricism" of contemporary fiction, which, in the years immediately before and after the Cold War, had borne witness to the production of various "technologies (e.g., multiculturalism) for reconfiguring ideological difference (i.e., disagreement) as cultural, linguistic, or even just geographical difference" (15). To put the point this way, however, is to suggest that what Dwight regards as a "conversion experience" not only transforms questions about belief into matters of identity, but also precludes any possibility of choosing between neoliberal capitalism and an alternative like democratic socialism, and therefore offers no way out of the "end of history." Not unlike the effort to map imaginaries, perspectives, and positions we've identified with both a certain version of a literary "post-postmodernism" and a globalizing Americanist criticism, Dwight and Brigid's investment in the subject's position might similarly be understood as marking the impossibility of imagining something like a "post-posthistorical" politics in the present.

Nevertheless, considering the fact that Kunkel himself has insisted that "you'd have to be a fool on the order of Dwight to be convinced of a political position by reading my book" (Rosenberg 81), then we might begin to see that what Dwight's narrative provides is not so much a blueprint for what the novel believes a political art might look like today but rather its negative. To understand why, we should note that Brigid's reflections on eternity—as well as what Dwight sees "all at once"—also recall the work of another Argentine equally fascinated with the concept of eternity: namely, Jorge Luis Borges, in whose short story "The Aleph" (1945) we discover something like the underlying structure of that sense of utopia that Kunkel's characters stumble upon in the middle of the Ecuadorian jungle. For what the Aleph affords as both a "point in space that contains all other spaces" and the "place where, without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist" (10) is the possibility of occupying every subject position found within the universe. Further, we might recall that it is this possibility that motivates Carlos Argentino Daneri's attempt "to versify the entire planet" (7) in the form of a poem entitled *The Earth*. What Daneri himself imagines as the mark of his artistic genius instead makes him a joke, and as the narrative makes clear, his work is a testament to

the ridiculousness of a poet that Borges regards with contempt. In contrast to Daneri, and unlike Kunkel's characters, however, Borges proposes that nothing (literary, ethical, political, or otherwise) necessarily follows from the experience afforded by the Aleph: Carlos Argentino does not become a better poet, and Borges, the narrator, can even deny having undergone that experience, using it to his cruel advantage. But "The Aleph" is as much about a fantastic encounter with the infinite as it is about the literary itself, and what Borges points to here is also the impossibility of bridging the gap between the work of art and experience. Recalling his encounter with the Aleph, Borges tells us, "What my eyes saw was *simultaneous*; what I shall write is *successive*" (13; emphasis in original), so that the presence of this "ineffable center" (12) or totality in his narrative begins to mark the distance between experience ("What my eyes saw") and text ("what I shall write"). Thus, in reading Borges's short story, we do not experience the Aleph as much as understand the impossibility of doing so.

And it is precisely a similar effort to preserve the distinction between experience and text that ultimately provides *Indecision* with its critical edge. This is not because literature cannot produce effects and experiences the way an hallucinogenic drug or pharmaceutical might, but rather because the novel's investment in a particular narrative voice everywhere refuses the logic of identification. Following his decision to take the pharmaceutical Abulinix to counteract his chronic indecision, Kunkel's protagonist thinks, "it might be good to be with a potentially wise person in kind of a non-aligned country—Quito's not in Cuba is it?—so that I could gain some kind of objectivity when I'm thinking about the decisions I'll be making once the drug kicks in" (58). The effect of this and similar comments, of course, is to underscore his apparent ignorance of Ecuador, and Latin America more generally, though this ignorance is no less apparent in Dwight's style of narration, "As easy as talking" (238). What his style of narration highlights, in other words, is a form of naïveté that continuously reminds us that Dwight, as Kunkel himself puts it, is an "idiot" (Scott 38). But what the author has in mind when he calls his narrator an "idiot" is not so much an evaluative term as it is a marker of a formal investment underwritten by the novel's more political ambitions. That is, insofar as Kunkel's investment aims to forestall the possibility of recognizing Dwight's experience as our own, then it also denies the possibility of seeing and feeling the same things he does and, in

this sense, of occupying the same position he does. Needless to say, it is the very opposite of this denial that Brigid has in mind, when she thinks that in an "Eden or paradise or utopia," "everyone will have *been* someone else," and this is no less true of American literary criticism's "creative remapping." In this way, *Indecision*'s narrative voice provides an answer to the question of political commitment in the work of art, and particularly in literature, but only to insist on the irreducibility of that commitment to experience.

For all that, if the desire to break with postmodernism's weakening of historicity is given a real political content in *Indecision* on the level of form, it isn't entirely clear what this politics might look like; even less clear is whether the novel's formal investments speak to the so-called ends of postmodernism. Kunkel's narrative, to be sure, remains skeptical of a politics founded on the commitment to locations, perspectives, and positions, a commitment that, underlying Dwight's political "conversion," is revealed to be an enlargement and intensification of postmodernism's inability to think the future. But even as this critique already suggests something more than a staging or refinement of a postmodern predicament, the question remains whether the novel itself should be read in terms of a reactivation of history —should be read, in other words, as the realization of that "political form of postmodernism" of which we only catch a glimpse in Jameson's account. Jameson himself provides one possible answer in a more recent formulation of utopia, a concept that has long been central to his own work. "Utopias," he observes, "do not embody the future but rather help us grasp the limits of our images of the future, and indeed our impossibility of imagining a radically different future" (2010 13). Seen in this light, what Jameson's essay on postmodernism had understood as the aims of a political art, or, more specifically, of an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, is not to reduce history to an experience as Dwight's "conversion" does but rather to reveal the very limitations that are built into that experience. From this perspective, *Indecision*'s genuine utopia is found not in the jungles of Ecuador, but in a narrative voice that allows us to grasp the limits constitutive of not only the literary but of contemporary thought as well. And it is in this utopia that *Indecision* locates a space in which the decision to choose a future unlike the present is still ours to make, and where we might yet see the other side of postmodernism's end of history.

NOTES

1. Andrew Hoberek provides an incisive account of the difficulties attendant on any effort to conceptualize a break with literary postmodernism in his introduction to the special issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction*.

2. This becomes all the clearer when Jameson's essay is read alongside later works like "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital" (1986) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), in which he discovers the dialectical flip side, so to speak, of postmodern subjectivity in the "embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (1986 69). From this perspective, any effort to map the relationship between a particular situation and this same ensemble of global processes becomes all the more difficult the closer one moves to the core. Importantly, Jameson has also described his essay on third-world literature as a "pendant to the essay on postmodernism" ("Third-World Literature" 88). At the same time, this is precisely the kind of distinction between "core" and "periphery" that Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle have recently cautioned against in *Cartographies of the Absolute*. Following the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz, they argue that "we should resist the temptation to treat cognitive mapping as a problem of the 'core,' as if the latter were simply more capitalist and thus more prone to the disjunction between the personal and the political-economic experience and abstraction" (20). Instead, they explain, we might "consider the disjunction between perception and abstraction to be a problem that is not resolved by the supposedly more direct, more visible exploitation at the periphery, but rather one that is inflected by the unevenness of capitalism and its geographically-differentiated formations" that make cognitive mapping a more diffuse and "common problem" (20). Obviously, Toscano and Kinkle's adaptation of Jameson's mapping aesthetic deserves greater attention, though it remains beyond the scope of this essay due largely to considerations of length.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Rachel. "The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 248–71.

Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Aleph." *The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories*. Ed. Carlos Fuentes and Julio Ortega. New York: Vintage, 2000. 3–16.

Cazdyn, Eric, and Imre Szeman. *After Globalization*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick O'Meara, Howard D. Mehlinger, and Matthew Krain. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000. 161–80.

Hoberek, Andrew. Introduction. *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction*. Spec. iss. of *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 233–47.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.

———. "A New Reading of *Capital*." *Mediations* 25.1 (Fall 2010). <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/a-new-reading-of-capital>.

———. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

———. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 65–88.

Kunkel, Benjamin. *Indecision*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Levander, Caroline F., and Robert S. Levine. Introduction. *Hemispheric American Literary History*. Spec. iss. of *American Literary History* 18.3 (Fall 2006): 397–405.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin, 1990.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004.

Rosenberg, Amy. "First." *Poets & Writers* 33.5 (September-October 2005): 77–81.

Scott, A. O. "Among the Believers." *New York Times Magazine*. 11 September 2005: 38(L).

Toscano, Alberto, and Jeff Kinkle. *Cartographies of the Absolute*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015.

PART III | THE POSTWAR RECONFIGURED

MARY ESTEVE

THE IDEA OF HAPPINESS

Back to the Postwar Future

Anybody seeking an introduction to the contemporary discourse of happiness could do worse than start with Richard Powers's 2009 novel *Generosity*. As we've come to expect from a Powers novel, it exhibits the author's command of the relevant scientific idiom—in this case, positive psychology and neuroscience. He mobilizes their conceptual staples (hedonic set points, allelic correlations, peak experiences, negativity biases, contentment graphs, illusory self-reports, etc.) to portray Americans' obsession with happiness. Like other dark yet playful satires (e.g., DeLillo's *White Noise*), the novel waxes hyperbolic as it depicts a biotech-consumer-media complex committed less to society's well-being or persons' life satisfaction than to the acquisition of the sheer experience of happiness. For this world's movers and shakers the sooner the happiness gene can be isolated and marketed by biotech futurists the better.

Satiric exaggeration, however, does not obscure the novel's credible picture of the ideological and institutional conditions enabling happiness science to elevate the *techn*Ð of happiness above—and largely to segregate it from—other matters of social and political import. In this world the status of happiness is settled: as contemporary America's uppermost value, it is a

utility that affirms itself. This premium on happiness has a long, venerable history, dating back (in Western thought) to Greek antiquity, but in the contemporary era the happiness cult has generated a good deal of opposition. Among postmodern critics, specifically, objections range from the epistemological to the political: for Slavoj Žižek happiness permits the evasion of difficult knowledge and desire; for Claire Colebrook happiness insists on giving a life narrative meaning; for Heather Love and Sara Ahmed happiness perpetuates compulsory social norms; for Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri happiness is bound up with proprietary bourgeois hegemony. Yet for all the pressure such critiques have put on the value of happiness, they turn out, in an important sense, to reinforce rather than to unsettle its privileged status. In what follows I argue that postmodern and poststructuralist criticism effectively collaborates with happiness science to segregate happiness from normative politics, specifically from considerations of welfare economics and distributive justice. I track the parallel ascendance of happiness science's disavowal of everything political, owing largely to its behavioral and geneticist methodologies, and of postmodernism's displacement of welfare economics by a politics of recognition and/or radical deterritorialization coded as "joy." Both modes of disowning normative politics serve only to strengthen what Powers suggests is technofuturism's co-optation of happiness. This co-optation, moreover, strengthens technofuturism's hold on the very idea of the future.

It is important, however, not to draw too dismal conclusions from this unwitting collaboration of postmodern opposition with the dominant culture, or to presume the absence of viable alternatives. That's why I turn, in the final pages of this chapter, to the postwar origins of contemporary happiness studies. Social theorists and commentators in this era, including the welfare economists I focus on here, were often concerned to cluster (rather than to segregate) questions of happiness together with questions of economic and social justice. Elsewhere I have examined midcentury literary representations of happiness's crucial function in signifying social-democratic values embedded in local and global institutions such as the municipal library and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[1] Here I want briefly but more directly to consider the postwar era's discourse of welfare economics and social choice theory, so as to bring into sharper focus the relevance of happiness to systemic articulations of political economy and

justice—and, conversely, the relevance of political economy and justice to the legitimization of happiness claims.

To return to Powers's novel, its portrayal of contemporary technofuturism provides a seriocomic glimpse of the hazards of a cultural obsession. Intercutting three parallel narratives, the novel revolves mainly around the well-intended but nearly disastrous efforts of Russell Stone, a part-time university instructor of creative nonfiction, to protect one of his students, the Kabyle-Algerian refugee Thassadit Amzwar, from the biotech-consumer-media complex that wants to profit from her DNA, her ova, and her genuinely glowing personality. She's a genetic freak whose "hyperthymia" makes her happy all the time. This condition affects not only her preponderant experience of positive affect over negative affect (her PA to NA ratio) but also her overall sense of life satisfaction, despite enduring all kinds of terrible misfortunes. In addition, the novel tracks the comings and goings of Dr. Thomas Kurton, the neuroscientist and biotech entrepreneur who will eventually sequence parts of her genome, as well as Tonia Schiff, the producer-host of a popular television science show, who has made Kurton a household name. All three narrative arcs dramatically intersect when Thassa appears on an Oprah-like talk show. Russell is in the studio audience (along with Candace Weld, the psychotherapist he has recruited to help Thassa and his subsequent love interest); Kurton is a fellow guest on the show; and Schiff and her crew are filming the show for their own show. They all witness Thassa's near meltdown, an event that precipitates her devolution into little more than a spectacular object and subject of happiness.

The web formation of these storylines allegorizes the mutually reinforcing conditions, in the "consumer-genomics era," of the happiness cult and the commercialization of science (271). Powers portrays this matrix as both dynamic and ominous: it enables biotech futurists, television hosts, bloggers, and YouTubers alike to propagate the fantasy of genetically enhanced well-being for all. Or at least for those who can afford it: ironically, the main thing standing between *Brave New World*'s happiness dystopia and us, the novel suggests, is unregulated capitalism. The "British ethicist" Anne Harter who spars with Kurton on television may well criticize his expensive "breakthroughs" for widening the gulf "between the haves and have-nots" (61), but Powers makes the proposition of ubiquitous happiness resulting from socioeconomic equality seem even worse. In the novel, Kurton is the

one who thinks ubiquitous happiness would be wonderful. He deems Huxley's book "one of the most dangerous, hope-impeding, ideological rants ever written"; the author must have been "stunted by some virtuous vision of embattled humanism" (192). He thinks that "for most of human history" storytelling compensated for "short and bleak" lives; and "now that we're on the verge of living the long, pain-reduced lives that our brains deserve," we need a different kind of art (151). But "we" readers of *Generosity* are meant to have more trouble identifying with this biotech maverick than with Powers's "throwback characters" (236), the melancholic Russell and solicitous Candace. We are encouraged to be glad for once we can't afford something. For if biotech's envisioned therapies were technically feasible and economically available, we might never be able to justify being cranky or sad, much less to enjoy reading about characters who are. While everyone who meets Thassa adores her, one of her classmate-groupies worries, "Is there something broken with her? Or something really . . . fixed?" (50). Is it, for instance, a good thing that, after another classmate-groupie sexually assaults her, Thassa harbors no anger and refuses to press charges against him?

Generosity never fully answers whether Thassa's hyperthymia is a good thing or a bad thing *for her*; the genetic condition seems both to endanger and protect her. But the novel does imply that what's really "fixed," in a quite different sense, is the contemporary language game of happiness. It at once trivializes happiness by isolating it and monetizes happiness by promoting it. The novel, I've suggested, attributes this fix to the contemporary moment's fluid systemic forces. This moment, it goes without saying, has a history. In addition to the biotech-consumer-media complex that Powers depicts, the last three decades both of the social science of happiness and postmodern cultural theory have also done much to fix the language game of happiness. The social science of happiness gets its kick start, according to many in the field, in 1984, when Ed Diener published his landmark article on subjective well-being in *Psychological Bulletin*—the same year, notably, that Fredric Jameson published his landmark article on postmodernism in *New Left Review*. As it happens, the two articles perform similar functions within their respective disciplines. They both take stock of an area of inquiry emerging from the postwar era. Where Jameson identifies postmodernism's general break with modernity as a late '50s phenomenon (53), Diener identifies the roots of his discipline in the work of mid-century humanistic psychologists (such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers) who

broke with moderns' Freudian and behaviorialist past (547). Moreover, as they proceed to describe and evaluate these developments, each proposes methodological innovations meant to improve his discipline's strategies of inquiry, offering these proposals as instructional *maps*.

Diener opens his essay with a succinct declaration that clears the way for happiness science's segregation and promotion of its object of study: "Throughout history philosophers considered happiness to be the highest good and ultimate motivation for human action" (542). This theory of value and motivation becomes the discipline's operative premise. Rarely subject to intramural challenge, it presumes a social consensus, beyond the discipline, of happiness's supreme utility. Yet now, as Diener observes, that external criteria for defining and evaluating happiness (such as Aristotelian virtue and Christian holiness) have been superseded by subjective criteria (such as the frequency and intensity of positive affect and assessments of life satisfaction), of paramount interest to him is the development of better techniques for measuring and defining subjective well-being. Hence the need to sort out correlations from causes, to reduce distortions in self-reports, and to elaborate theoretical approaches (primarily theories of motivation and causes) that "can be tested empirically in relation to SWB" (563). This subjective turn certainly conforms to liberal modernity's respect for individual self-determination (Haybron 36), but it also steers happiness science toward a "prudential psychology" (Haybron 21), which no longer considers happiness's relation to liberalism's other core values. Diener's methodology thus enables researchers "to map more completely" but also more exclusively the terrain of subjective happiness (563).

Jameson's widely influential theory offers postmodern criticism similar methodological leverage. Combining historicist description and historiographical assertion, his 1984 essay identifies "the constitutive features of the postmodern" (58). These features have become so familiar as hardly to need mentioning: simulacral depthlessness; the waning of historicity alongside the waxing appeal of a perpetual present; the waning of affect alongside the fragmentation of the subject; the waning of political or critically active artistic expression alongside the allure of the commodity form. As these phenomena render postmodernism "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism" (85), they register what Jameson calls "a whole new economic world system" (58). If Jameson's description has encouraged critics to dwell on (and claim as emblematic) certain cultural patterns while ignoring

others, equally significant is the way Jameson supplements his historicism with a critical methodology appropriate for inhabiting the "totalizing space of the new world system" (88). His idea of "cognitive mapping" is meant in part to replace the purportedly obsolete dream of "critical distance" (87). Rather than being merely "mimetic" (89)—that is, rather than restricting its epistemological reach to empirical phenomena and falsifiable theory, as Diener's map does—Jameson's cognitive map will "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to [a] vaster and properly *unrepresentable* totality" (90; emphasis added). No one gets anywhere in the postmodern world without a guide to its immanent evanescence.

With cognitive map in hand, cultural critics may now (to borrow Jameson's idiom) transcode Althusser's old duality of ideology and science into a new dialectic of material situation and unrepresentable totality and thereby find themselves in inventive relation to the world's immanence (91). For Jameson's methodological instruction makes available a new kind of affective-critical orientation. Instead, for instance, of reading Bob Perelman's "schizophrenic" poem, "China," as evidence of morbid alienation and anxiety, the cognitive map reveals the poem's gesture toward "*absent* text[s]"; thus "the unity of the poem is no longer to be found within its language, but *outside* itself" (75). Jameson's brief but exquisite reading of Perelman's poem reveals how the schizophrenic style "becomes available for more *joyous intensities*" (74; emphasis added here and above). Yet aesthetic relief from late capitalism is not all Jameson seeks. The dialectic he proposes between the world and its unrepresentable, absent, radical otherness is also meant to enable utopian-minded political activists to "regain a capacity to act and struggle" in the "political form of postmodernism" (92). From aesthetic intensification to political intervention, then, the cognitive map offers its users "radically new forms" of engagement (92).

The influence of Jameson's critical paradigm is evident in postmodern critiques of happiness—for instance, in the work of Sara Ahmed, a prominent critic in affect, queer, and cultural studies, and of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, coauthors of best-selling academic books of political theory. This influence is registered in their respective projects of transcoding "joyous intensity" into affective and political alternatives to mainstream happiness. In 2008 Ahmed edited a special issue of *New Formations* on the politics of happiness; more recently she has published a monograph on the subject. In 2009 Negri and Hardt concluded their massive trilogy—*Empire*, *Multitude*,

and *Commonwealth*—with a brief chapter on happiness. I take both sets of criticism to be particularly robust examples of the postmodern assault on the political-liberal function and value of happiness. They both take part, alongside happiness science, in undoing liberalism's dialectical tension between happiness and justice. Ahmed's and Hardt and Negri's specific modes of intervention reveal, in my view, troubling implications of rubbing normative happiness off the political-economic map.

For Ahmed, the brave new world portended by Huxley and Powers has already arrived. Long before the pharmaceutical industry's success in marketing ever-new variants of somalike drugs, and long before any fictional or real biotech industry's dream of isolating the happiness gene, sociopolitical claims to the promise of happiness became the scourge of modernity. The trouble arose from "philosophy's foundational tautology: what is good is happy and what is happy is good" (202). In this moral economy, happiness is what conventional moderns desire; happiness is what they feel when they obtain or achieve that desire; happiness is a sign of their moral desert. Ahmed thus accepts as social truth Diener's premise of happiness's cultural status as the highest good and ultimate motivation. Despite their incompatible approaches to the politics of happiness, this premise is what allows her to isolate happiness no less than Diener does as the great problem to focus on.

Ahmed is deeply suspicious of this dominant structure of feeling; she contends that happiness marginalizes negative emotions and the people who have them. But not just anybody who has them: the figures of significance are melancholy migrants wounded by racism, killjoy feminists angered by gender subordination, and unhappy queers estranged by familial hope. For unlike most people who have internalized the imperative to be happy, marginalized persons suffer delegitimation twice over: they are socioeconomically underprivileged and nobody likes their attitude. It gets worse: the "powers-that-be . . . in wanting our happiness," might also "forbid recognition of sadness as that which gets in the way" both of manifest happiness and the desire for it (213). Ahmed takes more interest in the recognition of psychosocial injury than in the potential redress of political-economic conditions that underlie susceptibility to such injury. By her lights, negative affect performs the same function as other, more recognizably permanent, markers of identity: it grants political authenticity and authority to fixedness.[2]

From the liberal-democratic standpoint, oppressed persons usually have good reason to be angry and frustrated by unfair practices of discrimina-

tion and inequality. But Ahmed does not look at things from the liberal-democratic standpoint. She is as suspicious of consensus liberalism's structural formation as she is of modernity's cult of happiness. Indeed, the political structure and the psychosocial cult are functionally homologous. The promotion of happiness "involve[s] an immanence of coercion, a demand for agreement": if you find the right things agreeable then "those around you 'agree' with your agreement" (212). This is how institutions arising from democratic consensus menace the population. "After all, agreement can mean not only the action of pleasing or contenting" but also "the act of consenting" (212). Ahmed's style of rhyming here bespeaks her sense of an unbroken continuum between social psychology's capture of affective life and the social contract's capture of political will.

More precisely, this rhyming bespeaks the collapse of the political realm into the affective realm. The whole point of being an "affect alien" is to register "unhappiness with and rage about injustice" (222). But this focus on the negative affect of persons whom liberals are bound (both likely and obligated) to recognize as victims of injustice makes it difficult to see the ideological corner into which Ahmed has backed the politics of happiness. Not only is it a corner organized around the preference of recognition over redress; it also construes an alignment between *un*happiness and righteousness—without, however, offering an account of justice. Ahmed relies on the immediate legibility of the very kinds of injustice that consensus liberalism, with its commitment to equal rights and fairness, makes legible. She thus exhibits symptoms of cryptonormativism, resembling innumerable postmodern critics who, to borrow Ruth Leys's description, "implicitly espouse certain political beliefs and norms, such as the value of democracy, without providing reasons for these beliefs because their theoretical position precludes them from doing so" (Leys 452).

The preclusion of liberalism's mechanisms for promoting future justice and happiness helps to explain why Ahmed defends queer theorist Lee Edelman's notorious antifuturism as "still affirming something in the act of refusing affirmation" (161). Such ineluctable affirmation dovetails with her own sense that it's important as a political activist to affirm "something." It turns out by the end of the book that Ahmed can't entirely dis-affirm happiness. She takes up the project of transcoding Jameson's sense of joyous intensity into the figure of the "silly" and "happy-go-lucky" person who puts the "hap" back into happiness by being open to contingent "possibility"

(218). The utilitarian tautology of the good being happy and the happy being good is thus displaced by a postmodern tautology of the good being chancy and the chancy being good. In neither scenario is there room for liberalism's dialectical tension between the institutional promotion of objective fairness and the experiential value of subjective well-being.

From the standpoint of governmental policy it's difficult to imagine without drifting into cartoonish fantasy what a quirky, happy-go-lucky institution would even look like. And yet, this is close to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have in mind when, at the end of their book, *Commonwealth*, they return to Spinoza's concept of joy as the solution to the problem of bourgeois proprietary happiness. Writing joyous intensity jumbo-large—institutionalizing it globally—they envision "altermodernity's" displacement of modern, postmodern, antimodern, and hypermodern regimes. In the era of modernity, Hardt and Negri argue, Enlightenment government's "faith in progress" was fine for its time (378). But it's too teleological for today's globalized multitude; it's too predictably driven toward contemporary theories of social democracy (such as those advanced by Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls), which remain preoccupied with inequitable distribution of wealth and the scarcity of resources (Hardt 18). In altermodernity, there's no property and no scarcity; government thus embraces Spinoza's intuition that "we still don't know . . . what a body can do and a mind can think. And we will never know the limits of their powers" (379). In this new nonorder government's key function is to promote the potentiality of "becoming," of "growing powers," and of "open[ing] new possibilities" (378, 379). In other words, happiness, redescribed as joy, becomes the affective proxy for political agency. It infuses a charmed circle in which radical novelty is good and the good is radically novel. This is how, as Bruce Robbins notes in his review of *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri's fans are encouraged to "confuse politics with science fiction" (n.p.). They adopt a Weltanschauung that seems to relish technofuturism even more than Powers's Kurton does.

In Powers's near-futuristic novel, to recall, it is a message of radical, joyous difference that Thassa embodies, that her genetic freakishness delivers to the biotech-consumer-media complex in the form of hyperthymia. And the scientist-entrepreneur Kurton devises an ethos to fit the moment, one that any Spinozan could appreciate. He expresses it in the television debate, cited earlier, with the ethicist Anne Harter—whose surname indicates her big heart but whose presence recedes as the novel unfolds. Her ineffectualness

signals the hegemonic triumph of Kurton's capitalizing technofuturism, whereby "ethics" itself will have to "catch up" to the popular desire to "live longer *and* better" (Powers 63; emphasis in original). Earlier we learn that in addition to his research work in isolating gene complexes, Kurton "writes ecstatic pieces about the coming transhuman age" (24). The only "duty" he recognizes "is to proceed as if limits to our ability did not exist. We are collaborators in creation" (25). Here Kurton's fantasy of the transhuman becomes indistinguishable from Hardt and Negri's prophecy of Spinozan possibility.

In sum, Powers's novel and Ahmed's and Hardt and Negri's theories of the politics of happiness suggest why subverting the nation-state's plans for the future well-being of its citizens—by remaining true to recognizable, identitarian misery; by seizing the silly, unplanned day; or by inventing radical new powers—possesses so much allure. These actions are constitutively dramatic, at once rebellious and playful. But they also severely scant the potential for conceptualizing a dialectical relation between happiness and liberalism's formal yet also pragmatic sense of possible justice. In the postwar era this dialectic commanded lively attention. For one thing, despite the era's relative prosperity, welfare economists were by no means prepared to abandon the reality principle of scarcity; the optimization of resource allocation remained a central concern. What did evolve, however, were ideas about the types of value to take under consideration in modeling the social welfare function. As Amartya Sen has recently observed, the 1950s were marked by dramatic turns in social welfare analysis, largely brought about, on the one hand by Kenneth Arrow's "birth of the modern discipline of social choice theory" and, on the other, by John Rawls's "pioneering" work on the related question of redistributive justice (92, 57).[3] Though each advanced a normative political agenda their divergent approaches to the social welfare function entailed divergent ideas of happiness as well.

Arrow's *Social Choice and Individual Values* (1951, 1963) advanced what would soon be called his "impossibility theorem"; it exposed the inadequacy of current methods for identifying and choosing optimal states of collective well-being. Formally delineating minimal and conventional conditions for evaluating and ranking states of social welfare, Arrow proved that no welfare function determining social preference could satisfy all of them at once. Supplemental criteria would have to be introduced to dissolve the various scenarios of logjam. At issue, among other things, was the seemingly innocuous principle of aggregating individual preference satisfaction

or happiness, whether according to ordinal utility ranking, as in Arrow's argument, or to cardinal utility measurement, as in classical utilitarianism. As economist Edmund Phelps put it in 1973, "Arrow's very definition of a social welfare function excludes us from making use of our information or beliefs about which persons live happy or any rate rewarding lives and which persons live unhappy or unrewarding lives" (19–20). Not only did Arrow's social welfare function ignore the effect of social choice on the least advantaged members of society (by relying on aggregations and excluding interpersonal comparisons); it also excluded the relevance of any objective assessment of well-being.

Rawls, for his part, in "Justice as Fairness" (1958, elaborated in his 1971 magnum opus, *A Theory of Justice*), responded by drawing on contractualist liberalism to introduce minimum postulates of fairness, equity, and liberty, which constrained certain of Arrow's criteria while resolving dilemmas inhering in others. For instance, Rawls's idea of a constitutional procedure in which everybody entertains the same sense of justice did away with dilemmas of decisiveness introduced by Arrow's criterion of non-dictatorship (Rawls, 1999b 124). Arguably more important, the very assumption "that individual preferences have value as such" was questionable. For Rawls, individual preference had to be subordinate to "the mutual recognition of principles [of justice] by participants in a common practice [whose] rules . . . define their several relations and give form to their claims on one another" (1999a 66, 70). In classical or hedonic utilitarianism, the utilities (i.e., pleasure, happiness, preference satisfaction) could be measured individually and cardinally; thus their (total or average) aggregation indicated society's happiness; justice, in turn, amounted to efficient executive decisions that maximized society's happiness (1999a 66). While Arrow substituted a system of ordinal ranking for cardinal measurement, he still granted, as Rawls observed, essential priority to individual preference. Endemic to classical utilitarianism as well as to Arrow's theorem, then, was a theory of justice as either a kind of mathematical back-formation or an external criterion.

In Rawls's theory, by contrast, justice was built into the procedure for determining resource allocation. His distributive axiom entailed the "maximin" (or "difference") principle, whereby any Pareto optimum (i.e., preference-driven distribution of efficiency) must also improve the conditions of the least advantaged; this excluded the utilitarian "justification of inequalities on the grounds that the disadvantages of those in one position

are outweighed by the greater advantages of those in another position" (1999a 50). In Rawls's theory individual preferences were subordinate but by no means excluded; they were equivalent to aspirations and desires or, more broadly, to personal (and often interpersonally incommensurate) conceptions of the good. They were distinct from and lower in priority than Rawls's objective index of measurable (and interpersonally comparable [1999c 242]) primary goods: "rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth," and, not least, self-respect (1971 92).

In relation to this redistributive scheme Rawls was interested in happiness less as a subjective "state of mind" than as an objective description of a good life extended over time; it signified the more or less "successful execution" of a life plan, a "human flourishing" reflective of a "life fully worthy of choice" (1971 549, 550). While Rawls understood this life plan loosely (it accommodated, for instance, the person "whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas" [432]), it did imply that a person took seriously her/his incrementally structured future—with provisions for its becoming "relatively less specific for later periods" (410)—just as Rawls's broader scheme took future generations into account (for instance, by way of the idea of just savings [284ff.]). Rawls's idea of an incrementally planned future, in other words, departs from Ahmed's idea of contingent luck, from Hardt and Negri's idea of radical becoming, and from Kurton's idea of transhuman creation. It aims instead to understand noncontingent principles of justice inhering in institutions as commensurate with an equally noncontingent principle of self-respect inhering in persons.

In the face of such exacting propositions for a normative politics that keeps happiness within its purview, happiness science and biotech markets would have a lot to answer for. In contrast to postmodern styles of opposition, welfare economics theory actually challenges their operative logic. A Nietzschean postmodernist like Žižek, of course, will hardly be moved by the endeavor made here to revalue happiness in relation to redistributive justice. For him the latter idea will have as much traction as the sham liberal values from which it emanates. However, for historians and cultural critics who inhabit the contemporary era but haven't completely ceded to its postmodern visions of politics and affect, a consideration of postwar accounts of subjective happiness in relation to social welfare might help to relax the antihappiness reflex that critics of all stripes, bombarded almost daily with media reports on happiness, have understandably developed.

NOTES

1. See my essays, "Postwar Pastoral: The Art of Happiness in Philip Roth" and "Queer Consumerism, Straight Happiness: Highsmith's 'Right Economy.'"

2. For an example of necessary fixedness, Ahmed turns to the Indian-born father of a modernized tomboy in the British romantic comedy *Bend It Like Beckham*. The middle-aged migrant injured in his youth by a racist incident will be diminished, indeed falsified, if he lets geniality take the place of melancholy. His "stubbornness" testifies to the racism that is "going on and ongoing"; further, it testifies to the necessity of defying the socially coercive terms by which "the very act of recognizing injustice in the present is read as a theft of [other people's] optimism" (Ahmed 162). Leaving aside the dubiousness of this zero-sum affective phenomenology, what's important to see here is that the personal quality of stubbornness figures the very impossibility of redress.

3. It's worth noting that Sen, Arrow, and Rawls joint-taught a seminar on rationality and justice at Harvard in 1968 (Amadae 258).

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.

Amadae, S. M. *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.

Arrow, Kenneth J. *Social Choice and Individual Values*. 1951/1963. 3rd ed. Ed. Eric S. Maskin. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2012.

Colebrook, Claire. "Narrative Happiness and the Meaning of Life." *New Formations* 63 (2008): 82–102.

Diener, Edward. "Subjecitve Well-Being." *Psychological Bulletin* 95 (1984): 542–75.

Esteve, Mary. "Postwar Pastoral: The Art of Happiness in Philip Roth." *American Literature's Aesthetic Dimensions*. Ed. Chris Looby and Cindy Weinstein. New York: Columbia UP, 2012. 328–48.

———. "Queer Consumerism, Straight Happiness: Highsmith's 'Right Economy.'" *Post45 Peer Reviewed* (18 December 2012): 1–26.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

Haybron, Daniel M. "Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being." *The Science of Subjective Well-Being*. Ed. Michael Eid and Randy J. Larsen. New York: Guildford P, 2008. 17–43.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.

Leys, Ruth. "The Turn to Affect: A Critique." *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (2011): 434–72.

Love, Heather. "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence." *New Formations* 63 (2008): 52–64.

Phelps, Edmund S. Introduction. Edmund S. Phelps, ed. *Economic Justice: Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Education, 1973. 9–31.

Powers, Richard. *Generosity: An Enhancement*. New York: Picador, 2009.

Rawls, John. "Justice as Fairness." 1958. *John Rawls: Collected Papers*. Ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999a. 47–72.

———. "Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play." 1964. *John Rawls: Collected Papers*. Ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999b. 117–29.

———. "Reply to Alexander and Musgrave." 1974. *John Rawls: Collected Papers*. Ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999c. 232–53.

———. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971.

Robbins, Bruce. "Multitude, Are You There?" *n+1* 10 (2010). <http://nplusonemag.com/multitude-are-you-there>.

Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. New York: Verso, 2012.

DANIEL GRAUSAM

COLD WAR, POST–COLD WAR

What Was (Is) the Cold War?

"It had to do with Cuba and missiles, I'm pretty sure," was the account of the Cuban Missile Crisis offered by Dana Perino, then press secretary to President George W. Bush, to National Public Radio's *Wait Wait, Don't Tell Me* in 2007 after she "panicked a bit" when asked during a press conference about that defining Cold War event (Wiener 216). This is one of the choice incidents in Jon Wiener's recent *How We Forgot The Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America*, a survey of museums and monuments that are directly about—or should prominently feature—the Cold War. It turns out that the officially named "Whittaker Chambers Farm," which refers to the pumpkin-patch National Historic Landmark of Whittaker Chambers (famous for outing Alger Hiss as a supposed Communist), is a National Historic Landmark you could have been prosecuted for visiting, given its no-trespassing sign, though no one seemed to notice for quite some time since almost no one wanted to visit it in the first place.[1] The highlight of a day-long "fun-in" that accompanied the *Back to the 60s* exhibit at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, was a "hippie contest": less "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" than a bunch of children in tied-dyed costumes, the library's programming reveals how even those conservatives most committed

to memorializing Reagan as heroic architect of the defeat of Communism have basically given up (13–28). As Wiener argues, however, they didn't lose to a liberal counternarrative: instead, no one seems to really care at all about memorializing the Cold War, even though we live, as Wiener notes, in a time of unprecedented public interest in history and commemorative culture (2).

The exception, perhaps, might be literary and cultural critics: the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the breakup of the Soviet Union (1991) have given us dozens of scholarly monographs and collections devoted to tracing the comprehensive impact of the Cold War on American culture from the late 1940s to the early '90s.[2] Indeed, it is perhaps now fair to say that "Cold War" can be taken as nearly synonymous with, and perhaps should enjoy a titular presence alongside, two of the key terms (postmodern and postwar) that orient this very collection of essays. Building on Alan Nadel's foundational assertion that the emergence of a fully recognizable postmodern aesthetic in the 1960s was a response to the ongoing contradictions of what he terms domestic "containment" culture (67), recent literary criticism continues to reveal the ways that postmodernism might be seen as a cultural reaction to, among other things, the understanding of "chance" as a key marker of Western democracy during the Cold War; the ontological uncertainty of knowledge produced by the massive expansion of the national security state; the increasing cohabitation of the creative writer and the Cold War–funded, and massively expanded, postwar research university; or the problems of historicism and temporality brought about by the conflict's thermonuclear threat.[3] And as Cold War studies has moved away from a primary focus on the McCarthy period or the "long 1950s," it has explored the ways in which wide swathes of postwar culture that don't necessarily directly reference global geopolitics might nonetheless be read as examples of Cold War culture.

More evidence for understanding postmodern culture as a product of the Cold War lies in the now near-consensus that whatever postmodernism was, it had largely run its course by the early 1990s: A recognizable cultural aesthetic seemed to be crumbling at about the same time as both a famous wall and a union of Socialist Republics. The defining foundational document of an emergent post-postmodern aesthetic, David Foster Wallace's often-cited "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" appeared in print in 1993 (as Paul Giles puts it, the essay is something like the post-postmodern

equivalent to John Barth's 1967 postmodern classic "The Literature of Exhaustion" [328]).[4]

But should the Cold War baby meet the fate of the postmodern bathwater? What, in other words, can the concept of the Cold War bring to the third periodizing term in the title of this collection: what does it tell us about what comes "after" the postmodern, "after" the postwar? While it may seem perverse to suggest that the historically demarcatable term "Cold War" continues, past the obsolescence of both postmodern and postwar, to have utility for describing the contemporary, in what follows I want to make exactly that point: as recent fiction reveals, the Cold War is indeed everywhere in contemporary culture, at least in part because it remains a comprehensively unfinished conflict when we take the measure of its ongoing effects. This is to make a stronger claim than one for a kind of lingering nostalgia for the conflict's purported stability (a claim voiced by characters in, for instance, post–Cold War novels by John Updike, Don DeLillo, and Paul Auster) or for the ways in which a Cold War rhetoric showed up in the political language of the Bush administration (which it most assuredly did).[5] If Americans seem, as Wiener suggests, strangely uninterested in official memorial sites related to the conflict, one explanation might reside in a popular culture that tells them that the time of memorialization is not yet here: witness a television program like *The Americans* (2013–) or the uncanny correspondence between the Angelina Jolie spy thriller *SALT* (2010), with its sleeper cells of deep-cover Soviet-trained spies in post-9/11 America, and the real Russian spy ring that came to light in 2010. Or the bewilderment of characters in the cult TV show *Jericho* (2006–2008): after a nuclear attack on the United States a band of survivors is both comforted and mystified when some authority drops food and supplies by air to them: the goods come from China and are accompanied by messages in Chinese, but are dropped using American military parachutes, from Russian supply planes accompanied by MiG fighters. While the remake of a film like *Red Dawn* (2012) might be nothing more than Cold War kitsch, here we have something far more conceptually confusing, a kind of uncertainty about how we might define our present geopolitical moment. And what of the fact that Eric Schlosser followed up such Zeitgeist-y works as *Fast Food Nation* (2001) and *Reefer Madness* (2003) with a book about the historical and contemporary risk cultures of nuclear weapons systems, *Command and Control* (2013)?

And so what happens if we turn to the 1990s and the twenty-first century with an openness to the continuing influence of the Cold War on American literary production? If we were to turn to the fictional work of Wallace, we find in *Infinite Jest* (1996) less a straightforward break with postmodernism and the Cold War than an awkward account of the problems of generational change and inheritance: in the novel's near-future world Hal Incandenza struggles to comprehend the legacies of his father, who was both an eminently postmodern filmmaker and also an elite defense scientist. Here postmodern style and the Cold War state are linked, but in remaining improperly mourned and wraithlike, the father suggests a larger problem of generational (non)change.[6] And moving from literal to figurative fathers: the "Eschaton" section of the novel, in which students at an elite tennis academy play a complicated war game, is a loving homage to the descriptions of the Herman Kahnesque nuclear games and discourse of Don DeLillo's *End Zone* (1972).

The unburied Cold War father also shows up in William Gibson's 2003 *Pattern Recognition* (itself a novel that seems a self-conscious updating of Pynchon's Cold War classic *The Crying of Lot 49*). The father of protagonist Cayce Pollard is a Cold War embassy security expert who may—or may *not*—have died on September 11, 2001, in the World Trade Center attacks. While *Pattern Recognition* clearly is a departure from Gibson's earlier, more directly science-fiction (and postmodern) novels, it doesn't necessarily make as strong a case for an obvious break with the Cold War.[7] British-born, but American-focused, James Flint's 2004 *The Book of Ash* seems nearly until its end to be the story of how to come to terms with a Cold War parent: Cooper James receives in the mail what he believes to be the ashes of his long-absent father (a character based on the atomic sculptor James Acord, who sought to create a "nuclear Stonehenge" at the Hanford plutonium production site in Washington State), a delivery that sends him on a quest across the post-9/11 United States to reconstruct his parent's life. We learn late in the novel, however, that his father wasn't dead when his supposed remains were sent, and so the facts of the father's death—and thus the question of how to properly memorialize the Cold War nuclear project—remain unknown.[8]

A difficult and incomplete story of generational succession after the Cold War is a recurrent feature of contemporary fiction. In Rick Moody's *Purple America* (1996) the central character struggles to make peace with the death

of his weapon scientist father, and we as readers are left to wonder whether his father's mysterious premature death, his mother's failing health, and his own personal pathologies are the result of radioactive exposure. The protagonist of Nicole Krauss's *Man Walks Into a Room* (2002) is a professor of contemporary fiction at Columbia who is found in 2000 at age thirty-six wandering in the Nevada desert with no memories of the years after his twelfth birthday because of a tumor in his brain. Recruited into a scientific experiment that bears more than a whiff of the Manhattan Project, he becomes the first recipient of a transplanted memory, in this case of a 1957 above-ground nuclear test in Nevada. The novel's suggestion is that he may have inherited a memory of something he could never have directly experienced (unborn as he was at the time) but which may have been a causal agent of his own disease—and, in keeping with my larger argument about generational inheritance, the donor of the memory had informally adopted him before the transfer. In her 2006 novel *Half Life* Shelley Jackson is even more direct about a Cold War biological inheritance for a younger generation, as the novel concerns a worldwide group of conjoined twins possibly created by genetic mutations induced by atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons. And in Lydia Millet's 2005 *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, we have a literal return, as versions of J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and Enrico Fermi reemerge in the early years of the twenty-first century to confront the legacies of the atomic age they fathered.

The anthropologist Joseph Masco helps us to understand these problems of closure when he notes the uniquely doubled temporality of nuclearity: the instantaneity of the potential destruction caused by nuclear weapons, and the multimillennial dangers posed by nuclear waste (11). To turn to the Cold War's nuclear legacies is thus to enter the realm of what Timothy Morton calls the "hyperobject" and to find an example of what Mark McGurl calls the "New Cultural Geology": in short, it forces us to rethink the nature of periodization altogether, since something like plutonium, a pure product of the Cold War weapons complex, remains toxic for 240,000 years.[9] "Nothing ever ends," is how Dr. Manhattan succinctly puts it at the end of the graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986–1987), a point he is particularly qualified to make given his own incorporation into the nuclear economy.[10]

It is a concern with this doubled temporality that animates one of the most important fictional attempts to assess the history and legacies of the Cold War, Don DeLillo's 1997 *Underworld*. Much of the novel concerns

the complex phenomenology of life under the shadow of the bomb, and thus the novel should find a logical conclusion in the wake of the Cold War. Tellingly, the final section of the novel is titled "Das Kapital," and it initially suggests a strong periodizing gesture: neoliberal globalization would seem to replace the Cold War as a global frame when we find Nick Shay and Brian Glassic in a pub that could be anywhere, given its mash-up of world cultures (and the opening line of the section is "Capital burns off the nuance in a culture" [785]). It turns out they are in Moscow, ahead of an event that would seem to mark the definitive end of the Cold War: the disposal of nuclear waste—including "cores from retired warheads" (794)—via nuclear explosion. And Viktor Maltsev, their guide into this new world order, seems almost too perfectly post–Cold War, given his Fukuyamaesque personal story: "I teach history twenty years. Then no more." (789) But the pure replacement of the Cold War with globalization isn't quite as easy as it seems: for all of the "venture capitalists" looking for new forms of commodification, we also have "game theorists" and "bomb designers" who would seem to be from a bygone era (794). This doubled history is extended when Viktor takes Nick and Brian on a postdemonstration tour, the first stop of which is a museum that documents the enormous genetic damage caused by Cold War nuclear tests. That museum seems to take us into a distant, almost mythological, past (at one point they see a preserved one-eyed fetus that Nick imagines as a "cyclops" [799]). But DeLillo immediately undercuts this: the next stop is a radiation clinic that treats the ongoing cross-generational genetic inheritance of local communities; as Nick thinks, "We're not in a museum this time" (800).

But perhaps readers might wonder if I'm in a museum myself: after all, to turn to DeLillo as a primary example of the Cold War's lingering explanatory power might be almost tautological, given how formative that conflict was for his life and fiction. One of the most programmatic statements that a substantive change in American letters was engendered by the end of the Cold War comes in Rachel Adams's provocative 2007 essay "The Ends of America, The Ends of Postmodernism," in which she claims that the "formal and conceptual innovations" of Pynchonian-style postmodernism belong to an "era of literary history that came to an end in the late 1980s," and that they have been replaced with a multicultural aesthetic far more attuned to the globalized dimensions of post–Cold War American culture—a claim difficult to disagree with (250). But the claim that postmodernism was a

literary and cultural response to a whole host of unique historical conditions created by the conflict (a claim that I entirely agree with) gets turned around once Adams suggests that postmodernism has run its course with the end of the Cold War, and thus that the influence of the Cold War has come to an end; as she puts it, a group of celebrated multicultural authors including Jhumpa Lahiri, Sandra Cisneros, Chang-rae Lee, Junot Díaz, Ruth Ozecki, Jessica Hagerdorn, Gish Jen, Bharati Mukherjee, Susan Choi, Oscar Hijuelos, and Edwidge Danticat were "relatively unburdened by the legacies of Euro-American modernism or the politics of the Cold War," and their "fiction reacts against the aesthetic sensibilities of high postmodernism while providing American literature with a new set of genealogical, geographic, and temporal referents" (251).

Perhaps the most exciting work in Cold War studies in recent years has offered us a view of the conflict as less a Manichean standoff between two worlds than as a very active and quite hot conflict fought globally and visibly in an age of three worlds. And it is precisely Adams's multicultural archive that has enabled literary scholars to do this kind of work. As Steven Belletto notes, a text like Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995) reflects "how Cold War norms have been so pervasive that we tend not to even notice them as norms" (*No Accident, Comrade* 135). For the Korean-American Henry Park the Cold War is ready to hand as a set of cultural references, as in when he and his wife Leila would rather watch *The Third Man*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, or *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* than the contemporary "techno-thriller" offered by TV (136). And, Belletto argues, Henry's own complicated minority status in the novel is in part the result of an American cultural amnesia concerning aspects of the Korean War (137), as in when Henry is tasked with a school report about the conflict and he finds only a simplistic binary narrative in his "junior encyclopedia" and so writes an account of the "threat of Communism" and MacArthur's "visionary" status (241–42).

I've focused here on Lee because of how the Korean War (the so-called "forgotten war") is often seen as the sine qua non of the selective cultural memory concerning the interventions of the Cold War period.[11] More broadly, recent work in Asian-American literary and cultural studies has revealed just how comprehensively the superpower rivalry was triangulated through Asia and how the Cold War continues to frame even very contemporary fiction.[12] But one could just as readily claim the Cold War as

an important frame for US-Dominican relations in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* or US-Haitian encounters in Edwidge Danticat's fiction, or one could trace the role it played in the debates that led to the 1965 immigration act, or link the twinned histories of decolonization and Cold War politics that informs many of these writers.[13] All of this is to say that, following DeLillo's Nick Shay, if we are looking in museums for the Cold War's effects we may be looking in the wrong place, or at least at the wrong time in history.

NOTES

1. To be more precise, a local told Wiener that "about two people a year" try to visit the site (64).

2. For an overview of recent scholarship on Cold War literary studies, see Belletto, "Curbing Containment"; Belletto, "Inventing Other Realities"; Belletto and Grausam, "Culture and Cold Conflict." For a bibliography of recent work on Cold War literature, see Belletto and Grausam, "Culture and Cold Conflict" (13n13).

3. For an argument about how chance came to be a key term in Cold War discourse see Belletto, *No Accident*; for an account of how postmodernism was a response to the massive increase in the "Covert Sphere" during the Cold War, see Melley; for an account of how postmodernity (or, in his terminology, "technomodernism") was a product of the Cold War research university, see McGurl, *The Program Era*; for accounts that link postmodernity to the nuclear age, see Cordle, *States of Suspense* and Grausam, *On Endings*.

4. For additional discussion of the importance of Wallace's essay, see Gladstone and Worden, 291. Brian McHale notes that Pynchon's work might be said to bookend one understanding of postmodern periodization: for McHale 1966's confluence of occurrences means that it has plausible status as a year zero of postmodernity, a possibility amplified by the appearance that year of the classroom pomo stalwart *The Crying of Lot 49* (itself a novel that can be read as an extended engagement with Cold War themes). It was 1990, however, that brought us a very different Pynchon with the publication of the "anomalous," "retrospective" *Vineland* (McHale 338, n4).

5. For a discussion of Bush-era Cold War rhetoric, see Melley, 200–3.

6. For a longer account of how *Infinite Jest* reveals the lingering hold of the Cold War, see Grausam, "'It is Only a Statement of the Power of What Comes After.'"

7. For an account of Gibson's link to Pynchon, see Jameson; for arguments about how the novel both supports and critiques ideas about the periodizing importance of 9/11, see Wegner.

8. For examples of Acord's work, see the exhibit catalog *Atomic*, Flint et al.

9. For Morton a "hyperobject" is a thing "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1). McGurl's argument is that contemporary discussions of periodization are now forced to reckon with geologic time scales that dwarf our conventional demarcations of human culture. McGurl directly addresses questions of nuclear waste storage in his "Ordinary Doom." For further discussions of the time-scale problems of nuclear waste, see Bryan-Wilson, Masco, and van Wyck. Recent novels specifically about the problems of nuclear waste storage include Frank Bergon's *The Temptations of St. Ed & Brother S* (1993) and James A. Conrad's *Making Love to the Minor Poets of Chicago* (2000).

10. A similar point is made at the end of Jonathan Fetter-Vorm's graphic novel *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*: its last line is a description of radiation as something that "will outlast our dreams" (151).

11. For a discussion of American cultural amnesia concerning the Korean War, see Hong.

12. See, for instance, Jodi Kim and Daniel Kim.

13. For an account of how decolonization and the Cold War might be linked, see Douglas.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Rachel. "The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 248–72.

The Americans. FX, 2013. TV.

Belletto, Steven. "Curbing Containment: Cold War Studies in the Twenty-first Century." *Contemporary Literature* 48.1 (2007): 150–164.

———. "Inventing Other Realities: What the Cold War Means for Literary Studies." *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*. Ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. 75–88.

———. *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Belletto, Steven, and Daniel Grausam. "Introduction: Culture and Cold Conflict." *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment*. Ed. Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 1–14.

Bergon, Frank. *The Temptations of St. Ed & Brother S*. Reno: U of Nevada P, 1993.

Bradley, Dan. *Red Dawn*. Film District, 2012. DVD.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Building a Marker of Nuclear Warning." *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*. Ed. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004. 183–204.

Conrad, James. *Making Love to the Minor Poets of Chicago: A Novel*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

Cordle, Daniel. *States of Suspense: The Nuclear Age, Postmodernism and United States Fiction and Prose*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008.
DeLillo, Don. *End Zone*. Reprint ed. New York: Penguin, 1986.
———. *Underworld*. New York: Scribner's, 1997.
Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead, 2007.
Douglas, Ann. "Periodizing the American Century: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Postcolonialism in the Cold War Context." *Modernism/Modernity* 5.3 (1998): 71–98.
Fetter-Vorm, Jonathan. *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2012.
Flint, James, et al. *Atomic*. London: Arts Catalyst, 1998.
———. *The Book of Ash*. London: Viking, 2004.
Gibson, William. *Pattern Recognition*. New York: Berkley, 2003.
Giles, Paul. "Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (2007): 327–44.
Gladstone, Jason, and Daniel Worden. "Introduction: Postmodernism, Then." *Twentieth Century Literature* 57.3–4 (2011): 291–308.
Grausam, Daniel. "'It Is Only a Statement of the Power of What Comes After': Atomic Nostalgia and the Ends of Postmodernism." *American Literary History* 24.2 (2012): 308–36.
———. *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2011.
Hong, Christine. "Pyongyang Lost: Counterintelligence and Other Fictions of the Forgotten War." *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment*. Ed. Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 135–62.
Jameson, Fredric. "Fear and Loathing in Globalization." *New Left Review* 23 (2003): 105–14.
Jericho. CBS, 2006–2008. TV.
Kim, Daniel Y. "Rethinking East and West: Asian American Literature and Cold War Culture." *Contemporary Literature* 52.2 (2011): 379–83.
Kim, Jodi. *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.
Krauss, Nicole. *Man Walks into a Room*. New York: Doubleday, 2002.
Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. New York: Penguin, 1995.
Masco, Joseph. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post–Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006.
McGurl, Mark. "The New Cultural Geology." *Twentieth Century Literature* 57.3–4 (2011): 380–90.

———. "Ordinary Doom: Literary Studies in the Waste Land of the Present." *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010): 329–49.
———. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
McHale, Brian. "Break, Period, Interregnum." *Twentieth Century Literature* 57.3–4 (2011): 328–40.
Millet, Lydia. *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2006.
Moody, Rick. *Purple America: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1997.
Moore, Alan. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 2008.
Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013.
Nadel, Alan. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.
Noyce, Phillip, et al. *Salt*. Culver City: Sony Pictures, 2010. DVD.
Schlosser, Eric. *Command and Control*. London: Allen Lane, 2013.
———. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
———. *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
Van Wyck, Peter C. *Signs of Danger: Waste, Trauma, and Nuclear Threat*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004.
Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U. S. Fiction." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 151–94.
———. *Infinite Jest: A Novel*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996.
Wegner, Phillip E. "Recognizing the Patterns." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 38.1 (2007): 183–200.
Wiener, Jon. *How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey Across America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2012.

DEAK NABERS

THE FORMS OF FORMAL REALISM

Literary Study and the Life Cycle of the Novel

"It is impossible to talk about the novel nowadays without having in our minds the question of whether or not the novel is still a living form" (Trilling 255). From our vantage some sixty-five years after the famous opening lines of Lionel Trilling's "Art and Fortune" (1948), such reports of the novel's death would seem to be have been greatly exaggerated. In scholarly terms, the novel was just beginning its life in the late 1940s and early '50s. For W. B. Carnochan, Ian Watt's "realization that the novel's long rise had been a defining feature of the modern world" in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) confirmed that "the time of the novel had fully come" (321) to the world of Anglo-American literary scholarship. And while cynics might search in such academic success for signs of a concomitant collapse in the form's aesthetic vitality, such indications have proven impressively elusive. "[D]o we not bear daily witness to a surfeit of literary excellence?" asks Mark McGurl. "Is there not more excellent fiction being produced now than anyone has time to read?" (2010 410).

Under such circumstances, the moment marked in "Art and Fortune" can only look like an historical oddity, but I would suggest that in at least one particular Trilling's essay seems eerily prescient. Trilling's first paragraph

passes from declarations of the novel's death to a somewhat despondent explication of the terms of its possible renewal. In his "recent book, *The Living Novel*," V. S. Pritchett "writes about the novel with the perception that comes of love," Trilling notes, and Pritchett's very title "disputes the fact of the novel's death." "Yet still, despite these tokens of his faith, he deals with the subject under a kind of constraint, as if he had won the right to claim life for the novel only upon condition of not claiming for it much power" (255). My sense is that this condition weighs heavily on the study of novels in the United States after World War II, if it does not in fact weigh heavily on the production of novels themselves, and my hope is that by thinking carefully about how the implicit bargain works we can begin to reconceive, or at least to deepen, the idea of form as it operates in the study of postwar American fiction.

I will suggest that the intellectual vitality attending to the study of the novel has traditionally derived from several largely unexamined assumptions about literature's significance within the broader intellectual, cultural, and social scene from which it emerges. However plausible these assumptions might be for earlier historical moments, we will see that they are almost transparently untenable for postwar American literature and culture. Although I will focus on the meaning of this problem for the study of the postwar novel, its effects radiate across genres and into the consideration of earlier periods. The historical vantage offered by essays such as "Art and Fortune" can help us clarify what is at stake in our efforts to preserve literature as an appropriate organizing field for scholarly activity even as it seems less and less central to the cultural and intellectual world around us.

The argument I develop is both provisional and tentative. I am more interested in outlining a set of issues and problems than advancing a programmatic agenda. Nor would I pretend that I have treated several of the larger fields I engage (Marxist readings of novels, the new formalism) in anything like a definitive fashion. My analysis will hinge on what Ian Watt identifies as "the lowest common denominator of the novel genre as a whole, its formal realism" (34), but I do not mean to offer an exhaustive treatment of the subject. My goal is instead to outline something like the form of formal realism in Watt's work, and to consider what the study of the novel looks like in the absence of such of a form.

Part of what it means to install the novel as a "defining feature of the modern world" is to configure the form as a gateway to its cultural context

as a whole. For Watt, the novel stands as "the unique expression of modern society" (239); it claims this status by perfectly embodying "a tremendous narrowing of the ethical scale" ongoing throughout the eighteenth century, "a redefinition of virtue in primarily sexual terms" (157). "The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation" (13). It in fact reflects the reorientation so profoundly that it not only represents the social development of its age but even from time to time to anticipates it. The Marriage Act of 1754 "expressed in legal terms the air of pondered contractual protocol which Richardson had already given marriage in *Pamela*" (150). And once we push into the studies of the nineteenth century, even accounts of such intense mirroring would seem to underplay the novel's cultural authority. The Victorian novel often simply gets to constitute its age. D. A. Miller presents the novel in competition with political authority itself, not other forms of literature: "Whenever the novel censures policing power, it has already reinvented it, *in the very form of novelistic representation*" (555; emphasis in original).

The later twentieth-century novel can surely no longer command our attention in this way. By the mid-twentieth century the novel had already begun to lose its status as the preeminent middle-class cultural form, if for no other reason than that no single form could maintain a dominant position in the highly diversified field of the day. It is thus somewhat disingenuous for Franco Moretti to adduce his "ignorance of contemporary matters" as a reason for his disinclination to establish a "true link" between his nineteenth-century subjects and "the present" (23) in his recent study, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (2013). The problem lies less in the difference between what Moretti calls "the American way of life" and "Victorianism" than in the difference between the ways today's bourgeois and those of yesterday relate to Moretti's other subject—literature. While the economic historian Thomas Piketty can comfortably contend that "the differences between [the economies of] the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries are less apparent than they might seem at first glance" (114), his elaboration of the point underscores the strikingly different roles of literature in the two moments. Balzac and Austen play pivotal roles in Piketty's excavation of "structure of capital" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; twenty-first-century literature is absent from his account of more recent economic life. The discrepancy is almost entirely unremarkable. Who would insist, after all, that the cultural coordinates of the contemporary bourgeois

be mapped "between history and literature"? Moretti himself implicitly acknowledges as much in offering Steven Spielberg as the contemporary Dickens—"the most representative storytellers of the two eras" (23).

The point is equally acute when we think of the novel as a form of intellectual practice rather than as an aspect of cultural life. If the novel is the "unique expression of modern society" for Watt, it is also the crowning culmination of the philosophical tradition Watt labels "philosophical realism." The novel is not simply influenced by Descartes and Locke; the novelist instead "shares" "aims" with the philosopher, and in fact refines and surpasses his rival's "methodological emphases" and modalities (27). In the thoroughly institutionalized intellectual life of post–GI Bill America, the boundaries between philosophical discourse and creative writing would not remain so porous. By the mid-twentieth century endless controversy seemed to attend to the question of the novel's relationship to other forms of intellectual inquiry—to the mere prospect that novels might "deal with," as Trilling would put it, "ideas" (273), or that they might engage in, or succumb to, what Clement Greenberg would inevitably and paradoxically call the "literariness" (2:88) of philosophical speculation. The controversies tend to obscure how frequently the novel, and the novel in its realist mode in particular, once derived its authority from such broader intellectual affiliations. If Dickens was the "representative storyteller" of his day, George Eliot certainly had a claim to mantle of the era's greatest social theorist. Lukács would attribute what he called "Balzac's greatness," for instance, precisely to Balzac's "faithful" description of the social "contradictions" implicit in "economic dialectic" of his day (38–39). Balzac presents French life in the most sophisticated terms of social description available in his moment. (The terms in fact remain sufficiently sophisticated for Piketty to use them as "the clearest introduction" to his own exposition of the structural varieties of "income inequality" [238].) Nor should we think that Balzac arrived at them by accident. For Lukács, Balzac was not a polyglot genius equally adept in the distinctive fields of literary craft and social observation. Rather, his social insight was essentially intrinsic to his literary talent. Insofar as some of Balzac's contemporaries and successors failed to offer equally compelling descriptions of capital's contradictions, they failed "*precisely as writers*," not as political theorists (Piketty 248; emphasis in original).

The notion that "art and literature occupy a particular . . . position" in relation to the capitalist social life, one more "favorable" to insight than

that of the various social scientific fields (136), persists into the postwar period largely as an unrealized aspiration or undefended assumption. Norman Mailer could insist upon approaching David Riesman "as a 'novelist' ": "who can claim that the sociologist with his technical jargon is *ipso facto* a better observer than a good novelist?" (196) But even the most scathing critic of the postwar sociologist's technical jargon would not feel entirely comfortable with the sociological achievements of observant novelists. C. Wright Mills no sooner praises "Critics and novelists, dramatists and poets" for attempting to offer the invigorated sociological exposition Mills found lacking in the work of his professional colleagues than he laments that these rivals lacked the "intellectual clarity" required to reach a proper "understanding" of the issues they had taken up (17–18). By the early twentieth-first century it would seem both entirely plausible for McGurl to be interested in "the particular strength of literary studies" (331) for a reinvigorated future sociology and entirely necessary that he would have to reconstruct the terms of interaction between the two fields in order to make this strength visible.

Of course, we do not have to conceive of the postwar novel's cultural or intellectual marginality as a problem—many of the writers we have traditionally found most compelling have operated in highly displaced relations to the mainstream currents of their cultures, and in displaced relation to the academic institutions and practices of those cultures. To a certain extent recent cultural tendencies merely allow us to affirm our commitment to literary study itself. If the literary history of the postwar US novel will not count, in and of itself, as the history of postwar US culture as a whole, and if readings of postwar novelists cannot be assumed to count as reconstructions of crucial episodes in a broader intellectual moment, we might conclude that literature's decreasing cultural and intellectual salience merely underscores its properly formal salience in our own work: having to abandon the hope or illusion or fantasy that literature can serve as an index of something else allows us finally to practice literary history as such.

As I see it, this practice is roughly what the study of the postwar novel has become. Although we would not complain were the novels we study representative of larger cultural trends, and although we might welcome the notion that they could be seen as a part of a larger intellectual vanguard, our commitment to studying the literature of this period depends upon neither of these conditions. The overwhelming pressure within the field to offer our studies as emphatically "literary" projects with specifically literary

conclusions only guarantees that our interest in cultural trends or intellectual vanguards remains subordinated to the history of a literary form.

In this regard we have done little more than follow the novel down the road of its own process of specialization. "The positivist aesthetic of the twentieth century," writes Clement Greenberg, "refuses the individual art the right to refer to anything beyond its own realm of sensations" (2:274). However much we may quibble with the exact terminology here, it is hard to deny Greenberg's basic point. Almost every account of modernism and its aftermath presents the novel as an increasingly specialized form of expression over the course of the twentieth century—a discursive regime more and more keyed to its own internal professional parameters rather than either what Watt calls the "reality it imitates" (11) or even the intellectual culture in which it operates. To conclude, along with McGurl, that the institutional standing of literary production would become over the twentieth century something on the order of that literature's "muse," is simply to give a social form to Greenberg's aesthetic specificity. At least since Kuhn's work from the late 1950s modernism's historiographical project has required the articulation of intellectual practices in terms of the "established facts" (27) of their institutional specification.

In this sense it probably matters less which particular institution we choose to frame our approach to postwar literary history than that we see that we now almost inevitably approach literature in institutional terms. The institution of the university, as McGurl himself notes, works in relation to other less conspicuously *institutional* institutional frameworks—tradition (think of works such as *The Signifying Monkey*), language (in its institutional form usually dressed up as *literary language*), various publishing institutions and protocols, and even the institution of form. What all of these institutions offer is a way of locating the center of gravity in literary studies within the literary field itself, and in so doing they thereby authorize literature's status as something like the default subject for an academic discipline. Work in these veins need not present itself as disciplinarily narrow; indeed it has often presented itself as conspicuously interdisciplinary. But its interdisciplinary energy depends upon literature's remaining more or less untroubled at its center—so that we might study the impact of various contexts upon literary activity, or literature's response to other branches of intellectual inquiry, but literature's status as something worth studying will in no way depend upon the way we work through such considerations. Indeed, the

very fact that we are working through them, rather than some intellectual problem whose coordinates could include literature but would not necessarily require it, indicates the extent to which such a framing decouples literature's intellectual and social relevance from its claim upon us as an object of inquiry.

It is clear enough why we might not wish to rely too heavily upon that relevance. If novelists have been honing their craft in the postwar academy, so too have social scientists, scientists, philosophers, linguists, and the like—and while we do not have to imagine that all of this honing inevitably leads to greater levels of insight about questions that genuinely interest us, it is by no means clear that it prohibits such insight. Scholarly paradigms occlude various discoveries, no doubt, but they also enable many others. And however much their operation might depend upon the internal dynamics of some scholarly protocol, their orientation remains manifestly external—toward some set of concerns in the world, however limited their conception of that world might be. There is an obvious and perhaps telling irony here: the set of double relations I have just now been attributing to institutionalized academic life in general was once the defining condition of the novel in particular. The duality is precisely what the vaguely oxymoronic term *formal realism* was supposed to capture. But it is by no means clear that the late twentieth-century novel any longer operates in such a double field of endeavor. The criteria of a writer's workshop do not necessarily link up in any way to realism of this deeper or more normative kind. If we no longer think of most novelists in terms of their social significance or philosophical discoveries, we do not do so in large part because we have outsourced the significance of their work, at least as it is conceived in intellectual terms, to the form of the novel itself.[1]

The process puts an unusual and perhaps distortive pressure on the way we think of the idea of literary form. Consider, to take a single illustration of the situation, form's strikingly slippery status in the work of self-described new formalist work. In 2000 Susan Wolfson introduced a special issue of *MLQ* devoted to the new formalism in part by noting that "the readings for form that follow . . . show if not a consensus about what form means, covers, and implies, then a conviction of why it still has to matter" (9). "What, might we ask, is a shared commitment beyond articulated agreement about the object to which one commits?" (562), Marjorie Levenson tartly countered. But the shared commitment here is hardly opaque, even if it is more a matter

of loyalty or fealty (conviction) than agreement: form still has to matter. This compulsory relevance explains how a new formalism that demands a renewal of attention to the significance of formal considerations in literary works can be balanced by another new formalism that demands recognition of formal considerations as the defining preconditions of certain forms of literary activity. The first, labeled by Wolfson *activist* formalism, requires intense close reading of particular artifacts; the second, labeled by Levenson *normative* formalism, perpetually finds its interest in form as a mode of "cognitive or affective" constraint (559) pulling it to the study of forms abstracted from their concretization in any given particular work. The new slow reading thus joins forces with the new distant reading. Whether in the newly updated new critical seminar room or the newly developed formalist lab, we get to study literature by attending to its form.

Neither this seminar room nor this lab give us the sense of form as a mode of conceiving intellectual problems; in neither will form "achieve" "normative status," as Levenson puts it, in that "sense" (559). Indeed the two new formalisms are in many ways designed to preclude such a conception of form: making form the focus of our attention requires that we not too readily conceive of it as a way in which various literary projects might bring other things into focus. From this perspective we might be somewhat surprised at the relentlessly formal dimension of some of the more cultural and intellectual approaches to the novel I surveyed above. Miller's novel supersedes the police "*in the very form of novelistic representation*." The point is perhaps even more emphatic in Lukács's treatment of Balzac, where the power of Balzac's realism gives rise to "precise" descriptions of the social contradictions implied in capitalism "in spite of all of his [Balzac's] political and ideological prejudices" (38–39; emphasis in original). The point is less to stress the form's authority over any given author than its central role in intellectual achievement of a given body of work. Watt's authors produce the form that will eventually carry their insight. Philosophical realism emerges in *The Rise of the Novel* in terms of "various technical characteristics of the novel" (27), just as Richardson's immense social distillations proceed largely by way of his "solving many of the formal problems of the novel" (219). Topics such as "Private Experience and the Novel" receive their realization in readings of "Richardson as Novelist: *Clarissa*."

The novel form thereby emerges as a set of problems to solve and as a mode of intellectual problem-solving. Watt's formal realism is not normative

in Levenson's special sense of the term: whatever norms it may set are the product of the practice it governs as well as the precondition for it; nor is it activist in Wolfson's special sense of that term: his authors never take attention to formal considerations, as such, to be a precondition of literary achievement. Formal realism is rather instrumental and aspirational. If it drives novelistic work in the sense that the social and intellectual achievement of the novel can only be realized by elaborating the novel's formal limits, it is also ultimately subsumed within the social and intellectual energies that are activated in the elaboration. Watt's novels could not be read distantly; his emphasis lies too much on largely individual innovation and achievement. But neither could they be read slowly: to read them slowly would inevitably involve overlooking the intense centrifugal energy of their formal significance.

To a large extent, the governing notion of aesthetic form in late twentieth-century literary studies has been defined precisely by its opposition to such centrifugal energy, but it might be useful to consider what would happen were we to think of form less as a matter of a work's ontology than as a matter of its engagement with the world. The shift, I think, would allow us to conceive of a kind of literary study, or at least a way of engaging putatively literary form, that would be free from our longstanding dependence upon a very finite set of specific literary practices—novel, story, epic, tragic, lyric, dramatic. The very paucity of these categories, it seems to me, marks a dispiriting literality in our attention to form. Although I am by no means wedded to these particular terms, we might begin to think of form as independent of, and even potentially opposed to, something like genre. I take something like this enterprise to lie at the heart of Moretti's calling "laborious prose" the "protagonist" of *The Bourgeois* (18). But to make fully good on such an insight, I think, one would need to couple Moretti's careful excavations of the way Eliot's prose makes "details" themselves a form of obscurity (so that "precision" could be placed in opposition to "meaning") with equally intense considerations of the role of prose in less obviously literary locations—government reports, occasional essays, technical journals, and so forth (85).

And this imperative only becomes stronger in considerations of postwar culture, where literary practice cannot even pretend to exhaust the social or intellectual implications of any given formal framework. Might it not make sense to study late twentieth-century *fiction* rather than the late

twentieth-century novel? So that we would join our readings of novels to considerations, say, of the elaboration of modal accounts of reality in works such as Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1972) and David K. Lewis's *Counterfactuals* (1973), or of the rise and theorization of the "thought experiment" throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (i.e., Kuhn's essay "A Function for Thought Experiments" [1964]), or of the prominent role of hypothetical scenarios in postwar Anglo-American philosophy (Rawls's original position, Davidson's swamp man, Thomson's violinist).

It would be easy to hear in this suggestion another iteration of a now familiar historicist imperative. But I do not want to compel us to study history so much as to enable us to engage form in its full range of vitality, to approach it as an intellectually and historically vibrant process rather than a taxonomic designator. To be sure, our engagement with this invigorated notion of form will come at least in part at the expense of the study of literature itself. And it might also seem to bypass certain crucial specifically aesthetic questions about how various intellectual endeavors engage the forms through which they operate. But we might equally well say that the new approach actually allows these questions to emerge with renewed energy and interest. The relations between formal achievement and substantive insight vary across fields of endeavor: if the fulfillment of formal goals marks an explicit aspiration in some enterprises (say literature), it might only count as an implicit prerequisite for success in others (say the sociological essay). But the significance of this dimension of literary distinctiveness can only emerge once we place literature in relation to other intellectual forms. It might be time for us to interrogate the meaning of literature's distinctiveness rather than paying homage to it in the name of maintaining disciplinary norms.

NOTE

1. Literature frequently strains to sustain the weight we now ask it to carry. My guess is that we could best understand many of the episodes of the canon wars in terms of this strain. Watt's reading of the early British novel codes the novel's significance in terms that more or less displace any purely canonical anxiety—and this is true even though *The Rise of the Novel* can easily be read as an extended effort to provide the grounds for the novel's elevation to what Watt calls "the highest moral and literary standards" (219). It is worth noting in this context that the most successful upshot of the canon wars is the elevation of a variety of texts that can be defended more or less in the terms in which Watt champions Richardson. For while it is not totally clear that, say, Joyce Carol Oates can be placed at the vanguard

of any intellectual movement, it is quite a bit easier to make that case in regard to Toni Morrison. If we are interested in how we should understand the sociology of working-class Detroit, *them* might help us. But if we are interested in how we should understand the representation of African-American women in historical narratives, Morrison will be a pivotal figure. That is precisely her expertise *as a novelist*. It is in this sense that her work can never quite be reduced to the thematization of such issues in the way that Oates's almost seems to invite. Whatever problems may attend to thinking of African-American studies chiefly in terms of questions of representation, it is easy to see why fiction would assume a prominent position in such a field.

WORKS CITED

Carnochan, W. B. Afterword to *Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, by Ian Watt. 1957. Rev ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

Greenberg, Clement. *Collected Essays and Criticism*. 5 vols. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988–1995.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962.

Levenson, Marjorie. "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122:2 (March 2007): 558–69.

Lukács, Georg. *Essays on Realism*. Ed. Rodney Livingstone; trans. David Fernbach. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.

———. *Studies in European Realism*. 1950. New York: Howard Fertig, 2002.

McGurl, Mark. "Ordinary Doom: Literary Studies in the Wasteland of the Present." *New Literary History* 41:2 (Spring 2010): 329–49.

———. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

Mailer, Norman. *Advertisements for Myself*. 1959. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.

Miller, D. A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford UP, 1960.

Moretti, Franco. *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*. New York: Verso, 2013.

Piketty, Thomas. *Capital in the Twentieth-First Century*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014.

Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. 1950. New York: New York Review of Books, 2012.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. 1957. Rev. ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

Wolfson, Susan. "Reading for Form." *MLQ* 61:1 (March 2000): 1–16.

PAUL K. SAINT-AMOUR

PERPETUAL INTERWAR

When the Postmodern Studies Association convened for the first time in 2006, the title of its inaugural symposium bespoke an uncertainty about its object of study. "Mid-century to Postmodern: The Postwar Era Reconsidered" treated postmodernism not as a field-designating term but as the terminus of a postwar era that was itself both implicitly finished and in need of rethinking. After only two days, the thirteen scholars present decided to change the organization's name to Post45. Although there is no public record of their deliberations, conferee Amy Hungerford's essay "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary" provides some strong clues. The Postmodern Studies Association's initial banner word had likely come to seem too closely associated with the Jamesonian neo-Marxian approach, as well as burdened by a history of valuing experimental writing by white men over putatively realist works by women and people of color. In contrast to what Hungerford calls "the old postmodernism" (414), the period designation "post-1945" must have seemed unevaluative, open, and methodologically neutral, implying, in her words, "a minimal set of assumptions about the way the world and culture—especially American culture—have changed since the end of World War II" (418).[1] As a field parameter, the war's end offered the double virtues of inclusivity and punctuality.

The present volume asks us to consider what might come *after* the postmodern and the postwar, both as overlapping historical periods and as field-designating terms. Although informed by our current prospect (air and drone strikes, troop drawdowns, residual ground forces, war-powers fumbling), my reflections here suggest that the way *back* is one way forward for the study of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature and culture. I argue for a *longue-durée* approach—one rooted in war, law, and temporality rather than in the strictly economic terms typically associated with the *longue durée* (see Arrighi)—that works across the 1945 divide. As a way of exposing that brightline year to the oxidizing forces of law and durative temporalities, I begin with a question: do wars, in fact, punctually end? In the case of the Second World War, the answer to this question may seem obvious: hostilities concluded on September 2, 1945, with the signing of the Instrument of Surrender by Japanese officials on the deck of the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. But if you consult other indices, as the historian Mary Dudziak has done, you find that even so decisive a war can keep ending (and not ending) well after the fighting does. The US Armed Services, she observes, continued to give Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medals for service through March 2, 1946, and Army of Occupation Medals to those who served in Japan through April 27, 1952, the last day of the Allied occupation (151). By the reckoning of the Disabled American Veterans, which grants membership to veterans "disabled in line of duty during time of war," Dudziak reports, "The only non-war period after World War II, other than a period of seven months in 1990, was from October 15, 1976 to November 4, 1979" (30–31). She shows, too, how even when wars end formally, a state's legal war powers can persist long after the surrender documents have been signed. In several cases during the late 1940s, for example, the US Supreme Court found that "war does not cease with a cease-fire order, and power to be exercised by the President . . . is a process which begins when war is declared but is not exhausted when the shooting stops." The war power, said the Court, "includes the power 'to remedy the evils which have arisen from its rise and progress' and continues for the duration of that emergency" (38–39).[2]

For Dudziak and many other scholars of war and law, the fiction of war's punctuality is enormously consequential.[3] It props up two additional fictions: first, that wartime is the exception to the rule of peacetime; and second, that wartime states of emergency—the arrogation of powers to the

sovereign or the executive, suspensions of transparency and due process—are fully and rapidly superseded by the rule of law when peacetime resumes. Critics who would unmask these fictions insist that modern war and war powers have historically proven to be not punctual but durable, not exceptional but perpetual in their drift. These critics lately seem to include President Barrack Obama, who in a May 2013 speech at the National Defense University affirmed his intention "to refine, and ultimately repeal" Congress's twelve-year-old Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF), the legal basis for the war on terror that has kept America, as he put it, "on a perpetual wartime footing" since 9/11 (White House).

If you take the postwar era to have ended on November 9, 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, or on September 11, 2001, with the Al Qaeda attacks, then the notion of a post-9/11 perpetual wartime ushered in by the passage of the AUMF and the Patriot Act will inform the Cold War decades only as a reading of their aftermath. But there are also reasons not to adopt "perpetual war" as a field-defining rubric for the earlier period. For all that it insists on those years' continuous state of militarized violence production, a perpetual war analytic fails to capture the massive asymmetries in how that violence was distributed—the difference, say, between what civilians in superpowers versus those in neocolonial proxy-war sites experienced—or the fact that despite the conventional wisdom about emergency powers, some rights grew *more* robust during the most geopolitically tense years of the Cold War.[4] Admonitions against perpetual war can rebuke the standard binarism of wartime versus peacetime. But as a field or period designator, the rubric of perpetual war does less to evade the same binarism than to reinforce it, overconsecrating the category of "wartime" by making it coterminous with the time of the state and all those whom it governs.

In place of perpetual war, then, I offer here a way of characterizing late modernity that will sound initially like a contradiction in terms: "perpetual interwar." The expression appears to contradict itself because an interval between two discrete historical events would seem nonperpetual by definition. This is only true, however, if we apply the term "interwar" exclusively in retrospect, after the advent of a second war has notarized the foregoing period's in-betweenness. If, as I propose, we treat the term "interwar" phenomenologically—as the real-time experience of remembering a past war while awaiting a future one that may or may not arrive—we begin to see how a period could go on, even in near perpetuity, feeling like an interwar

era as long as another war appeared to loom. Phenomenological approaches to "the" interwar period, 1918–1939, have already advanced along these lines.[5] By treating expectation, anxiety, prophecy, and anticipatory mourning as serious objects of historical analysis, these accounts undo the portrait of the period rendered from the privileged vantage of its certain terminus in war, even as they show us historical actors in the interwar period who saw the next war as a certainty. Foreclosed futurity, in this approach, ceases to function as a historiographic masterplot by which to pity the naïveté of those who didn't see the war coming or to praise the canniness of those who did. It emerges instead as an experience that can be studied as a historical object through its evidentiary traces. Such a study gives us a contingent interwar in which the memory of one conflagration is shadowed by the suspicion or conviction that another, even worse one is in the offing. If this sounds in turn like a Cold War temporality, it should: unsealing the 1918–1939 period in the manner I have described restores our access to the Cold War's interwar phenomenology, its suspension between one war and its impending sequel. Such a shift enables us as literary scholars to read, for instance, post-1945 nuclear fictions—Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), say, or Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980)—as the descendants and genre-mates of twenties and thirties texts such as Cicely Hamilton's *Theodore Savage: A Story of the Past or the Future* (1922) and H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), and as no less "interwar" in their disposition.[6]

Yet the experience of being between past and future wars is not all that's indexed by the notion of a perpetual interwar. I mean *inter + war* to denote not only "between wars" but also "in the midst of war" (as in Cicero's famous utterance, *Silent leges inter arma*: "For law falls silent in the midst of war").[7] If this alloy of interwar and midwar looks like compounding the paradox, we need only turn again to the decades between the world wars to see that what one subject, community, or population experiences as an interval of peace another may experience as a time of intermittent or even continuous violence, whether in the shape of small wars, colonial occupation and policing, anticolonial uprising, civil war, or the psychic violence of war anticipation. Rooted in a Eurocentric historiography, "interwar" has typically connoted postwar gaiety and prosperity followed by financial crisis, political spasm, and rearmament.[8] But a generation of scholarship on colonial violence during the 1920s and '30s has made the term bear other news: that even between wars someone is *inter arma*, is in the midst of a time of arms.[9]

This sounds like perpetual war redux but in fact rejects that model's way of homogenizing all conflict, no matter its scale or symmetry or intensity or legality, as *war* full stop. The analytic of perpetual interwar seeks not to "promote" all armed violence to the status of war but to trace the uneven distribution of violence across races, classes, populations, spaces of empire, and temporalities. It matters for this analytic which conflicts are declared, what names they go by, whether those involved have chosen their involvement, and whether they are protected by laws of war. Embracing neither the wartime-versus-peacetime binarism nor the too simple rejoinder that now all time is wartime, a perpetual interwar analysis demands a specific accounting of whose conflicts underwrite whose tranquility, even as it offers a general portrait of late modernity as harboring, always, three simultaneous relations to the time of armed conflict. For at every moment in the world system of late-modern injury production, conflict is recollected, ongoing, and future conditional all at once. As scholars working in (I'd hazard) any period since at least the Napoleonic Wars can attest, this tripartite relation to the time of military violence contributes to a geopolitical suspense, one that should play a more prominent role in our theories of late modernity.

Enough scholarship works across the 1945 perforation that the general benefits of such an approach have begun to seem uncontroversial. Here I develop a more focused claim: that a range of post-1945 works, including but not limited to some of the historiographic metafictions that were cornerstones of "the old postmodernism," themselves engage in *theorizing* a transperiod approach to late modernity by means of something like a perpetual interwar. In part because it will appear so improbable a choice, I turn briefly now to Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). For decades a whetstone text for honing postmodern canons, theories, and field traits, the novel has seemed particularly suited to various periodizing enterprises within that field. This was true practically from the moment it was published: Edward Mendelson described it in 1976 as heralding the arrival of "a new international culture, created by the technologies of instant communication and the economy of world markets" (165). And it remains the case, with Brian McHale writing in the present volume that Pynchon's novel ushers in postmodernism's major phase, its appearance in 1973 "coincid[ing] with other indicators of the major phase's onset around the years 1972–74." The book's punctual arrival from the perspective of literary history may be partly an effect of the calendrical precision with which it unfolds, most of its diegetic

events being internally traceable to particular dates, even to specific hours. The novel's third part, "In the Zone," ends on the night of August 5, 1945 in London, where two minor characters are polishing their postwar plans while, in another time zone, the plane carrying the first atomic bomb approaches Hiroshima (Weisenburger 310, 354).[10] The dawn of the nuclear weapons age, the division of Germany and Austria at the Potsdam Conference, the US recruitment of German rocket scientists through Operation Paperclip: a novel moored to these events and undertakings beats periodizing critics at their own game, constructing 1945 as a radical discontinuity, a "Year Zero," as Ian Buruma has just dubbed it.[11] Like its protagonist Tyrone Slothrop—dispatched "to be present at his own assembly—perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, *his time's assembly*" (738; emphasis in original)—*Gravity's Rainbow* imagines witnessing the birth of its Cold War time. It should be the playbook of the post-1945.

Yet for all the force punctuality exerts in and through it, Pynchon's novel is also aswarm with untimely counterforces: for every chronologism an anachronism, for every teleology a bizarre analepsis, for every assembly a dispersal. Whether we understand it as his Orphic sparagmos or simply as the heat-death of his protagonism, Slothrop, we're both told and shown, is not assembled but "broken down instead, and scattered" (738). So too is the notion of a discrete, self-identical "time" of the sort that periodization implies. Despite continuing to be read as "*futurist* in its orientation," *Gravity's Rainbow* devotes much less energy to prolepsis than to analepsis, and the burden of its flashbacks, whether to seventeenth-century Mauritius or to South-West Africa in 1922, is to assert continuities between the past and the 1944–1945 diegetic present (McHale 338n4). These continuities flow in a few principal channels: the exploitation and mass killing, usually outside of formal wartime, of supposedly preterite races and species by a self-appointed elect; the elect's dependence on and desire for the preterite; and through numerous analepses to the twenties and thirties, the steady growth of cartelized transnational capital by way of intermittent nation-based wars. Those interwar decades are, as it turns out, the novel's favorite analeptic destination. We accompany Franz and Leni Pökler to a 1929 séance in Berlin, where the spirit of Walter Rathenau, the industrialist, cartelizer, and politician who was assassinated in 1922, is contacted. In later analepses we pay visits to the interwar German film industry and witness the prehistory of Hitler's rocket program in the hobbyist Society for Space Travel. And the

flashback to South-West Africa, the Herero Uprising of 1922, and its suppression by German soldiers insists that even as the tributaries to another world war are beginning to flow toward one another, colonial violence is ongoing. Rather than build to a "year zero" view of 1945 as sealing the preceding years in the crypt of the past, the novel engages in a séance of its own, inviting adjacent interwar periods to commune through the medium of the war.

Despite being moored to a specific historical interval, *Gravity's Rainbow* is in fact a veritable encyclopedia of means by which a time can fail or refuse to be contemporary with itself. The novel's penchant for anachronism, especially for the '60s drug lingo slung by its mid-century characters, vandalizes the claims to historical accuracy it elsewhere seems to certify through research and careful chronology. Similarly, the gleeful speed at which the narration switches generic codes, adopts period argots, and hotwires arcane lexicons ensures that the book's content never fuses with a historically settled form with which it might be said to be concurrent. But among *Gravity's Rainbow*'s untimely traits, the best known is surely its obsession with the hysteron proteron, the figure of reversal in which effect precedes cause, response anticipates stimulus, sequelae predate injury. There is no room here to catalog the many instances of hysteron proteron in the novel, but at least two rise to something like structural significance: the fact that the supersonic V-2 rocket arrives before its victims hear it coming; and Slothrop's pattern of having erections, and often sexual encounters, at the locations of *future* V-2 rocket strikes. The second of these phenomena is never fully explained and may, after all, be debunked in the novel's later pages. But the first reminds us that uncanny, apparently magical deformations of time may have nonmagical causes. The velocity at which modern weapons travel entails both a loss of warning and a scattering of the sensorium of violence across temporalities. By the time you've heard it coming, the disaster is in the past.

The figure of hysteron proteron binds Pynchon's novel tightly to the prevailing nuclear conditions of its writing. These had to do with *preemption*, a reversal of conventional sequence through speed: the threat of massive retaliation deters the first strike in advance; nuclear war must outstrip the laws of war that would interdict it; and griefwork, in its turn, must travel faster than war, must happen in advance of a war that might permit no survivable postwar.[12] But if these preemptive logics reach a kind of apogee during the Cold War, recent work on the 1920s indicates they were already

emergent in that decade's military theories, international legal debates, and "next war" speculative fictions.[13] All of these early interwar discourses registered the deranging effects of modern warfare's acceleration and its ratcheting up of geopolitical suspense. Together, they point to a large-scale historiographic hysteron proteron: the arrival, well before the Cold War, of many of the strategic, legal, and psychic effects we attribute to the nuclear condition—and the presence of a "peacetime" colonial proxy-war geometry we usually ascribe to the Cold War. In tacking back and forth between the interwar period and the transitional months of 1945, *Gravity's Rainbow* says that what looked like a radically new world order was in many ways an uncanny return, a quotation posing as a coinage.

Having aligned the interwar period and the Cold War as deep intertexts, Pynchon's novel rivets them to one another through a series of allusions to long modernist fictions of the 1920s and '30s. Its opening wartime dream of evacuation by rail ("Inside the carriage, which is built on several levels, he sits in velveteen darkness" [3]) evokes the first scene of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* tetralogy (1924–1928), in which two public officials ride, before the Great War upends everything, in a railway carriage running "as smoothly . . . as British gilt-edged securities" (3). The first waking scene of *Gravity's Rainbow* echoes, as many have noted, the opening scene of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). That scene also features a rooftop morning ritual, spiral stairs, sunlight filtering through mullioned windows, and a group of male co-vivants making breakfast after a rough night, although in Joyce's "Telemakhos" episode no V-2 rocket arcs toward Dublin, threatening to demolish the Martello tower. More diffusely, Pynchon's novel recalls Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1930–1943) in its entropic protagonism and its distension of a brief, eventful historical period to the extent of an epoch. My aim in mentioning these allusions is not to annex *Gravity's Rainbow*, "the old postmodernism," or post-1945 literature writ large to something like a "long modernism."[14] But I would describe *Gravity's Rainbow* as a reading of these modernist intertexts, one that identifies them as precursors in more than raw size or formal restlessness. It also defends them against any charge of naïveté or obsolescence for belonging to a world order superseded by 1939 or 1945. By reactivating *Ulysses* and *Parade's End*, in particular, in its dread-filled opening pages, it identifies them as undepleted resources in contending with war's deformations of time and totality. And insofar as

that suspenseful interval between launch and possible arrival is the interwar arc par excellence, it says that modernism, even in the twenties and thirties, was already under the vapor trail.

Gravity's Rainbow, I have argued, offers a more unsparing critique of microperiodizing historiographies than most of its critics have done. The novel masquerades as an epic of scrupulous chronologism only to disclose its radical commitments to untimeliness and durativity. *Gravity's Rainbow* is a transperiod work in period camouflage. And it is not unique in this. Even confining ourselves to novels that project interwar temporalities and violence distributions beyond the 1918–1939 period, we might point to Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), Nicholas Mosley's *Hopeful Monsters* (1990), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992)—and, more recently, to the transperiod séances of Tom McCarthy's *C* (2011) and the thick counterfactualism of Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life: A Novel* (2013). These examples alone indicate that transperiod thinking is not an exclusive property of what Linda Hutcheon called "that most didactic of postmodern forms: historiographic metafiction." Despite her accompanying claim that "postmodernism is less a period than a poetics or an ideology" (28), its putative use of modernist technique against modernist hermeticism emboxes it historically. We need to decouple any given works' historiographically oriented metafictive energies from postmodernism, not least because the skepticism such works register about historical punctuality is so often, and so effectively, leveled against the alleged start dates of the postmodern and the postwar.

And *after*? With the Cold War receding and "post-9/11" on the rise as a periodization of the present, does it make sense to speak of a perpetual interwar in referring to our own moment? To be sure, the prospect of a worldwide war that would both mobilize and target whole populations seems more remote than it once did. Other doomsday scenarios occupy us more urgently. Yet despite our not having plunged into global conflict since the Second World War, few populations have enjoyed an uncomplicated peacetime in recent years. In the global frame, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program reported forty "armed conflicts"—those in which at least one party is a state—as having occurred in 2014, alongside a much larger number of nonstate and one-sided conflicts. Irising in, US armed forces are deployed at present in over 150 countries, most of them in Middle Eastern combat

zones associated with the "war on terror" (US Department of Defense). In its domestic and foreign policies the US government continues to rely on extraordinary war powers conferred by the Patriot Act and the AUMF, both of which have been in place since 2001 despite the current president's apparent willingness to end this "perpetual wartime footing." Meanwhile that footing legally underwrites the use, across enormous distances, of technological asymmetries massive enough to put target and targeter not just in vastly different time zones but also in disparate temporalities vis-à-vis war and peace. Thus a drone pilot may, from a safe stateside workplace that looks for all the world like peacetime, take the lives of those in far-off zones torn by what looks for all the world like war. The one lives in a polity where aspects of the presumptive next war are debated by analogy with past wars: an interwar polity. The other is *inter arma*, amid a time of arms, in the zone where law falls silent. Yet it is predominantly the silence of law in the remote operator's state, the interwar polity where war powers outlive a war that was anyway never declared, that licenses the massive asymmetry of the drone strike. These antinomies of law and force, of space and time, are among the basic elements of our perpetual interwar. Violence for now is constant; only war is intermittent.

NOTES

1. On the 2006 symposium, see Hungerford 419n3.

2. Dudziak is quoting the decisions in *Ludecke v. Watkins*, 335 US 160, 169–70 (1948), citing *United States v. Anderson*, 9 Wall. 56, 70; and *Woods v. Cloyd W. Miller Co.*, 333 US 138, 141–44 (1948).

3. The scholarship on this subject is too extensive to list exhaustively here but see, for example, Scheppele; Butler; Gross and Ní Aoláin; Scarry.

4. See Dudziak (80–81), who notes that in 1962, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Kennedy administration enforced James Meredith's civil right to enroll in the University of Mississippi and the US Supreme Court handed down landmark civil liberties cases in *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 US 421 (barring states from requiring prayer in public schools) and *Baker v. Carr*, 269 US 186 (permitting the Court to intervene in state legislative redistricting).

5. See, for example, Saint-Amour (2005, 2014); Panchasi; Mellor, chapter 1; and Grayzel, chapter 5–6.

6. On "next war" fiction of the interwar period, see Ceadal; Clark; Lindqvist; Patterson, chapter 2; Grayzel, chapter 4.

7. The passage, from Cicero's *Pro Tito Annio Milone ad iudicem oratio*, is more

often cited in resequenced form as *Inter arma silent leges* and translated as "Among [times of] arms, the laws fall mute."

8. Eric Hayot's chapter/manifesto "Against Periodization" offers a strong critique of how periodizing scholarship in the West tends not only to reproduce Eurocentrism in space and culture but also "to narrate the history of the aesthetic in European time, emplotting beginnings, middles, and ends in a manner that is not . . . merely neutral" (156).

9. For a sample subset of this scholarship—on Britain's "colonial air control" experiment in Iraq during the 1920s and '30s—Omissi; Lindqvist; Satia; and Saint-Amour (2014).

10. Weisenburger uses (among other data) astrological allusions in the text to support his precision dating.

11. Buruma's argument is less invested than his title suggests in the discontinuous narrative of the reboot. The later months of 1945, he shows, saw the widespread resuscitation by the Allies of their interwar colonial projects, an undertaking that included significant levels of violence outside the aegis of declared war. The second half of 1945, by these lights, was in essence post-1945—even as it resumed certain pre-1939 distributions of law and violence.

12. On speed and the inverse temporalities of the nuclear condition, see Saint-Amour (2000); Cordle; and Grausam.

13. See note 5, above.

14. Hungerford (418) suggests it might be better to call the post-1945 period "long modernism."

WORKS CITED

Arrighi, Giovanni. *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times*. 2nd ed. London: Verso, 2010.

Buruma, Ian. *Year Zero: A History of 1945*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2006.

Ceadal, Martin. "Popular Fiction and the Next War, 1918–1939." *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*. Ed. Frank Gloversmith. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980. 161–84.

Clarke, I. F. *Voices Prophecying War: Future Wars 1763–3749*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Cordle, Daniel. *States of Suspense: The Nuclear Age, Postmodernism, and United States Fiction and Prose*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008.

Dudziak, Mary L. *War•Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Ford, Ford Madox. *Parade's End*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 2001.
Grausam, Daniel. *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War.* Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2011.
Grayzel, Susan R. *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.
Gross, Oren, and Fionuala Ní Aoláin. *Law in Times of Crisis: Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.
Hayot, Eric. *On Literary Worlds*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.
Hungerford, Amy. "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary." *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 410–19.
Hutcheon, Linda. "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History." *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*. Ed. Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. 3–32.
Lindqvist, Sven. *A History of Bombing*. Trans. Linda Haverty Rugg. New York: New P, 2001.
McHale, Brian. "Break, Period, Interregnum." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3–4 (Fall-Winter 2011): 328–40.
Mellor, Leo. *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.
Mendelson, Edward. "Gravity's Encyclopedia." *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*. Ed. George Levine and David Leverenz. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976. 161–95.
Omissi, David E. *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919–1939*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.
Panchasi, Roxanne. *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009.
Patterson, Ian. *Guernica and Total War.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007.
Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: Viking, 1973.
"Remarks by the President at the National Defense University." White House press release. 23 May 2013. http://www.whitehouse.gov.
Saint-Amour, Paul K. "Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism." *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.2 (Spring 2005): 130–61.
———. "Bombing and the Symptom: Traumatic Earliness and the Nuclear Uncanny." *Diacritics* 30.4 (Winter 2000): 59–82.
———. "On the Partiality of Total War." *Critical Inquiry* 40.2 (Winter 2014): 420–49.
Satia, Priya. *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.
Scarry, Elaine. *Rule of Law, Misrule of Men*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2010.

Scheppele, Kim Lane. "Law in a Time of Emergency: States of Exception and the Temptations of 9/11." *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 6 (2004): 1001–83.

United States Department of Defense. "Total Military Personnel and Dependent End Strength by Service, Regional Area, and Country." 31 March 2014.

Uppsala Conflict Data Program. <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp, n.p.>.

Weisenburger, Steven C. *A "Gravity's Rainbow" Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*. 2nd ed. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2006.

PART IV | WHAT COMES AFTER

RACHEL GREENWALD SMITH

SIX PROPOSITIONS ON COMPROMISE AESTHETICS

1. Compromise aesthetics underlie a range of critical approaches to contemporary fiction and poetry, but their emergence has yet to be adequately historicized.

In her introduction to the Norton anthology *American Hybrid* (2009), Cole Swensen celebrates the tendency for contemporary works of poetry to make fertile compromises between traditional and experimental forms. She argues that this tendency, a quality she sees as integral to what she calls "hybrid poetry," is defined by an interest in "placing less emphasis on external differences, those among poets and their relative stances" in such a way that "leaves us all in a better position to fight a much more important battle for the integrity of language in the face of commercial and political misuse" (xxvi). In scripting the "battle" in these terms—poetry, envisioned in utopian terms as a united progressive front, against the "misuse" of commerce—Swensen at once makes a powerful plea for the social advantages of aesthetic compromise and affirms poetry as an essentially politically useful (i.e., leftist) enterprise. This stance typifies a position that I

will call "compromise aesthetics," or the belief that contemporary art is at its most socially relevant when it forges compromises between strategies traditionally associated with the mainstream on the one hand and those associated with experimental departures from the mainstream on the other.

It was not so long ago that the very works that refused to compromise, those that placed clear emphasis on differences among writers' relative aesthetic and political stances, were seen as the primary means by which any battle against the "commercial and political misuse" of language could be fought. This is how the experimental movements of the twentieth century constituted themselves against the literary norms of their period and sought to expose such norms as implicitly in support of the social, as well as the aesthetic, status quo.[1] Yet the past few decades have seen a dramatic increase in critics and writers whose interest in formally innovative work once may have made them seek out oppositional positions arguing instead that such polarizations are no longer necessary. Observing this trend, Ron Silliman has recently asked, "Why is it that so many young writers are conflict averse in a world in which conflict itself is inherent? What is the attraction to not taking a stand?"

This essay is an effort to answer that question through an assessment of recent critical appraisals of the contemporary literary climate, including the defining statements on hybrid and elliptical poetry, postlanguage lyric, and post-postmodernist fiction. My interest here is not in the accuracy of these appraisals as they pertain to particular literary works. Instead, I focus on the tendency for critics to celebrate what they see as the end of the debates that emerged in the postwar period between those interested in the destabilizing potential of various experimentalisms and those interested in the expanded access, populism, and social immediacy associated with more accessible or mainstream forms.[2]

In developing an umbrella term for this affirmation of aesthetic compromise, my aim is to trace a surprising consistency among a range of seemingly discrete critical responses to the present and to argue that such efforts should be understood as symptomatic of the historical period in which they have appeared rather than as responses to an autonomous literary sphere. Invocations of compromise tend to have an end-historical valence, as compromises are generally figured as permanent solutions to specific historical battles. In turn, my aim in emphasizing the historical context for the rise in compromise aesthetics is to emphasize their contingency and challenge

the appeal to inevitability and permanence that is at the heart of the very concept of compromise.

In what follows, I will argue that the dominance of compromise aesthetics in evaluations of the contemporary literary climate should be read in the context of the rise of neoliberalism in the United States over the past three decades. Ultimately, my aim is not to argue for the continued relevance of polarized distinctions between mainstream and experimental aesthetics. Instead, I will suggest that the hybrid gestures many critics read as signaling compromise might better be read as pointing to the continued presence of tension and dissent in literary and political culture alike.

2. Compromise aesthetics are symptomatic of the cultural entrenchment of neoliberalism.

While the particularities of compromise aesthetics have varied from critic to critic, genre to genre, most share the foundational assumption that contemporary literature is formally interesting primarily in its efforts to produce a compromise between experimentalism and convention, difficulty and readability, and the underground and the mass market. Most also share a fundamental literary historical narrative that sees this aesthetic shift as initiated at the turn of the twenty-first century by a generation of writers who came up in an age dominated by a highly polarized field consisting of the experimentalists of the 1970s—Language Poets and postmodernists—on the one hand and, on the other, the counterrevolutionary commitment to mainstream accessibility epitomized by the influence of New Formalism and the perceived conservatizing influence of creative writing MFA programs of the 1980s. The new generation of writers are described by the proponents of this narrative as frustrated by the limitations of these two positions, and as a result rejecting en masse the notion that formally inventive literature requires intentional opposition to the norms of mainstream writing and the expectations of mainstream audiences. As Stephen Burt explains, by the late 1980s and early '90s, young writers "sought something new: something more open to personal emotion, to story and feeling, than language poetry, but more complicated intellectually than most of the creative writing programs' poets allowed" (2009 8).

It is easy enough to see why this and other similar narratives have been so compelling. Its institutional analysis is largely accurate, and it echoes

what many writers describe as their motivations for seeking out compromise modes. But the noteworthy elision in this way of understanding the evolution of compromise aesthetics is the contemporaneous advent of neoliberalism—that is, the enforced privatization, financial deregulation, and diminished social services (including arts funding) that emerged during the Reagan era and have continued to provide the backdrop for the political and economic policies of every subsequent administration. Neoliberalism has widely been acknowledged to have had a dramatic effect on cultural, as well as economic, formations. David Harvey and others have argued that core neoliberal assumptions have transcended the world of politics to "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (3). And as Wendy Brown explains, neoliberalism is fundamentally defined by the tendency for aspects of life previously imagined to be separate from the market to become established and evaluated according to market norms, "*extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*" (40; emphasis in original). By the 1990s, when the rise of compromise aesthetics began, neoliberalism had ushered in an entire structure of belief that put the pursuit of profit, the spirit of entrepreneurialism, and movements toward corporatization as essentially not in conflict with moral, social, or political values.

With this shift came a corresponding effect on the arts as well, as the notion of artistic "creativity" was appropriated as a key aspect of entrepreneurial behavior and economic success.[3] The result has been increased bleed between the spirit of economic activity on the one hand and the spirit of aesthetic activity on the other. Johannes Göransson makes a related point in his review of *American Hybrid*:

> One of my major problems with the rhetoric of the introduction is the liberal ideology as aesthetics: These poets are superior to more extremist poets, poets who stick to their agenda, because by reading across camplines these poets have more "tools" at their disposal. And more is better. More formal tools, fewer considerations for politics. Or as Cole [Swensen] writes: "hybrid poets access a wealth of tools." They're rich with poetic tools.

Neoliberal attitudes—in this case an entrepreneurial interest in using all the tools one has at one's disposal in whatever way is most effective in the moment—are here revealed to be expressed first in the formal choices of writers and second in selections and evaluations by anthologists and critics.[4]

And when these values are used to discount the necessity for collective oppositional positions toward the status quo, they suggest by extension that developing an entrepreneurial capacity to marshal resources effectively should outweigh social or political forms of alliance.

3. Compromise aesthetics claim universal relevance by emphasizing the personal.

The pressure to develop an entrepreneurial posture toward one's own art carries resonances of the neoliberal expansion of market values to all aspects of life. And as Göransson shows, those pressures contribute to the tendency for contemporary writers to work in hybrid modes. But compromise aesthetics are not merely affirmations of hybridity; they are arguments for the permanence and universal worth of aesthetic compromise as a general form. The primary argument that proponents of compromise aesthetics invoke to underpin this claim is the belief in the universal value of the personal.

It has become commonplace to define the literature that emerges after postmodernism as returning the personal to the forefront of literary experience. This argument is exemplified in Burt's definition of elliptical poetry. For Burt, the most compelling contemporary poets "try to manifest a person—who speaks the poem and reflects the poet—while using all the verbal gizmos developed over the last few decades to undermine the coherence of speaking selves. They are post-avant-gardist, or post-'postmodern': they have read (most of them) Stein's heirs, and the 'language writers,' and have chosen to do otherwise" (1998 n.p.). In this view, there is no fundamental incompatibility between "the verbal gizmos" of the language poets and the attempt "to manifest a person" in a posture consistent with the traditional lyric.[5] As a result, literature is imagined as gaining a more immediate sense of relevance to contemporary readers by its engagement with the personal and, by extension, the emotional. Paul Hoover's effort to define the "postlanguage lyric" as one of the prevalent modes of the post-1990s generation in his introduction to the new edition of the *Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Poetry* also relies upon the notion that the personal has a natural primacy in literature. According to Hoover, "Postlanguage lyric cannot be said to constitute a school but rather the natural inclination of poetry toward sweetness and depth of expression" (xlvii). This invocation of "sweetness," with its valences of Matthew Arnold, as well as the notion

that "depth of expression" is a "natural inclination" seems like it should be in tension both with Hoover's previous alliances with various avant-garde movements and with his argument elsewhere in the introduction to the anthology that "avant-garde poetry endures in its resistance to dominant and received modes of poetry" (xxxiii). The fact that both statements coexist as easily as they do is a function of how compelling most readers find appeals to the universality of personal expression.[6]

The postmodern novel has also come under fire by critics trying to come to terms with the perceived waning of social relevance of literary fiction. Post-postmodernist fiction is envisioned as a remedy to this problem, replacing what is widely perceived to be empty language play with a measure of the social immediacy associated with realism. Robert McLaughlin defines this turn in fiction in terms consonant with compromise aesthetics:

> Many of the fiction writers who have come on the scene since the late 1980s seem to be responding to the perceived dead end of postmodernism, a dead end that has been reached because of postmodernism's . . . tendency, as one writer once put it to me, to disappear up its own asshole. We can think of this aesthetic sea change, then, as being inspired by a desire . . . to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in which they live their lives. (55)

For McLaughlin and others, literary engagement with the social sphere requires a more direct engagement with "actual people." In practical terms, this often leads to the belief that the most important innovation in contemporary fiction is the coexistence of formal play—the incorporation of images, metafictional devices, exuberant and excessive plots—with characters who seem like real people. From "the New Sincerity" advocated by David Foster Wallace's critical essays to the "post-ironic" aesthetics of *McSweeney's*, the coexistence of what Wallace calls "untrendy human troubles and emotions" with self-consciously antirealist plots and other estranging literary devices is widely celebrated by contemporary fiction's most influential critics (192).[7] Think, for instance, of Sam Tanenhaus's celebration of Jonathan Franzen as the progenitor of a "new kind of novel," which, through its representation of psychologically dense characters, "cracked open the opaque shell of postmodernism, tweezed out its tangled circuitry and inserted in its place the warm, beating heart of an authentic humanism." Such hyperbole

suggests something beyond an assessment of Franzen's work and toward a global claim about the future of literary fiction, a future that is imagined to be vastly improved by a renewed focus on the personal.

4. The personal mode of compromise aesthetics, like the neoliberal model of the entrepreneur, sees the individual as both self-consciously constructed and immensely valuable.

Some of these arguments rely upon conservative rhetoric, appealing to the notion of tradition and promising to return literature to its concern with "real people," but today's critics have learned from the postmodern critique of the subject. Their claims therefore do not rest on any given literary work's capacity to represent the universal truth of any individual subject position. Rather, literature is said to affirm the fundamental existence and importance of individual subjective experience *in general* even if works demonstrate skepticism toward any individual subject's reality as universal. One of the most noteworthy compromises animating compromise aesthetics is thus the alignment of the postmodern emphasis on the social construction of the subject and the artificial construction of the literary personae with the neoliberal primacy of being an individual person (constructed or not).

For instance, Burt makes a distinction between poems that insist upon artifice for artifice's sake (envisioned as the domain of late twentieth-century experimental poetry) and the kind of contemporary works he celebrates, which often "demonstrate that selves, personalities, egos, are themselves artificial, effects of a social matrix." Yet for Burt these works "hold together if we can imagine a personality behind them" (2009 13–14). In this example, the personality that allows such works to "hold together" can be an overt product of literary falsification, but the personal is still envisioned as being at the root of contemporary poetry's readability and, by extension, its relevance.

This capacious concept of the personal that underlies compromise aesthetics resonates with the model of the entrepreneur. Just as compromise aesthetics allow that the personal might be self-consciously invented in a work of literature, envisioning the self as entrepreneur rests on the notion that the self is and should be buildable from scratch, able to be tactically molded according to different needs in different contexts. It is this model of

the flexible subject, as both Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze speculated at the end of their lives, that might be one of the most lucrative tools late capitalism borrowed from postmodernist and poststructuralist theory.

For instance, in a late essay, Deleuze notes with great bewilderment that "many young people strangely boast of being 'motivated'; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training" (7). He argues that this tendency stems from the fact that the rigid form or *mode* associated with the disciplinary society, which held sway for much of modernity, has begun to be replaced by "*modulation*… a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other" (4; emphasis in original). In this model, not only are contemporary individuals artificially shaped, they are perpetually and actively under construction so that the process of shaping is always on the surface. Whereas it may have come as a surprise for liberal subjects to encounter Althusser for the first time and find that what seemed like their integral sense of self had, in fact, been called into being within a particular matrix of power, neoliberal subjects are eager, active, and continual participants in the production, activation, and commodification of themselves.

This model of the entrepreneurial subject requires the same paradoxical compromise as the mode of the personal we see in compromise aesthetics. In both cases, there is a need for the personal to have deep and specific value and yet nevertheless be a self-conscious product of active construction. Postmodernist aesthetics saw an insistence upon the artificiality of the subject as a form of critique. Postmodernist works therefore tended to minimize the affective pull of the individual by emphasizing that artificiality. Compromise aesthetics, on the other hand, celebrate works in which the constructed nature of the individual is highlighted but where that constructed individual nevertheless remains the vessel of enormous emotional energy. As Stephen J. Burn explains of post-postmodernist fiction, such works are "informed by the postmodernist critique of the naïve belief that language can be a true mirror of reality, and yet they are suspicious of the logical climax to this critique: Derrida's famous statement that 'there is nothing outside the text'" (20; qtd. Derrida 158). This compromise between opaque textual construction and the appeal to actually existing personal and emotional value is in pronounced agreement with the neoliberal model of the entrepreneur, who is envisioned as both an artificial construct and intensely important, both mutable and unique, both the result of a process of production and a site of specific and undeniable value.

5. Compromise aesthetics posit an end of literary history that mirrors the end of history fantasies of neoliberal utopian positions.

The compromise narrative has a compelling teleology, inevitably leading to the conclusion that the disputes that led to the polarizations of the late twentieth century (and that have always underpinned self-consciously anti-mainstream aesthetic movements) have been satisfactorily and permanently resolved through an egalitarian form of compromise. In this sense, the fact that this position has been called "Third Way" aesthetics by some commentators has more than a nominal relationship to the rise of "Third Way" politics:[8] both positions are consistent with a neoliberal end-of-history perspective in which taking a major ideological stand is represented as unnecessary, hysterical, or thoughtlessly utopian, and that the need for such positions is rendered moot by the availability of tactical interventions that are essentially not challenging to the status quo.[9]

These tactical interventions may seem groundbreaking, or even radical. Think, for instance, of Third Way proponent Michael Bloomberg's controversial trans-fat ban during his tenure as mayor of New York City. Banning trans fats might, indeed, constitute a challenge to individual "liberty" and therefore anger proponents of a truly laissez-faire capitalism on the right, but when the action is aimed at increasing worker productivity, optimizing the health of the population, and decreasing health care costs overall, the move falls very much in line with the state-based management of the free market associated with neoliberalism.[10]

Similarly, critical statements associated with compromise aesthetics often see the works they praise as significant, even surprising, interventions in the status quo that nevertheless leave the basic expectations underlying mainstream literature unchanged. This is one way of understanding how James Wood, perhaps the most vocal defender of traditional psychological realism in fiction, was able to make his peace with compromise aesthetics in a recent review of Rachel Kushner's novel *The Flamethrowers*, despite his longstanding hatred of novels that, like Kushner's, perform types of esoteric knowledge and highlight the process of their own making. He writes:

> Put aside . . . the long postwar argument between the rival claims of realistic and anti-realistic fiction—the seasoned triumphs of the traditional American novel on one side, and the necessary innovations of postmodern fiction on the other. It was never very edifying anyway. . . . Some

> novelists, neither obviously traditional nor obviously experimental . . . blast through such phantom barricades. (n.p.)

Crucially, Wood's willingness to embrace a work like Kushner's, which he sees as miraculously both "scintillatingly alive, and also alive to artifice," is a function of its ability to touch on something universally meaningful: a "novelistic vivacity" that, while achieved through techniques that are more experimental than Wood would ordinarily tolerate, gives the reader a sense of a "living reality"—the ultimate aim of realism—simply through new means (n.p.). Kushner's work "blasts through"—it does not merely obey conventions—but its impact, in Wood's view, is the perpetuation of what we already know to be valuable: the representation of what we already recognize as "real life." (n.p.)

The very finality and reach of compromise aesthetics is therefore reminiscent of a range of neoliberal utopianisms, from the putatively conservative Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* to the avowedly center-left Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat,* that see the totality of global capitalism as a solution to global political unrest. Just as Fukuyama argues that while specific implementations of liberal democracy might show defects, "the *ideal* of liberal democracy could not be improved upon" (1992 xi; emphasis in original), proponents of compromise aesthetics allow that individual works might continue to demonstrate aesthetic evolution, but by seeing oppositional aesthetic positions as superseded by compromise, they implicitly suggest that the general form of aesthetic compromise achieved in contemporary literature need not undergo any significant transformation.

To be done with polarization, to see formal techniques—old, new, estranging, intimate, experimental, conventional—as a mere grab bag of neutral tactics waiting to be marshaled for the success of the individual work, to forge an indefinite truce with the demands of mainstream expectations, is, in this context, just another mode of capitulation to a form of domination that scripts itself as neutral, permissive, and permanent.

6. All hybrid aesthetics are not compromise aesthetics.

The tendency for compromise aesthetics to coincide with critical positions that ignore the historical conditions of literary production is, at least in part, a symptom of the fact that the very notion of compromise obscures historical contingencies. Compromise signals a satisfactory settlement, an

enduring resolution, a calculated truce that serves the interests of two previously polarized camps. In turn, the notion that our tendency to value the *form* of compromise, both in literature and in politics, might be historically specific undermines the sense of inevitability and permanent satisfaction that is at the core of the very concept.

Proponents of compromise aesthetics do have one thing right: if we are looking for a coherent avant-garde in contemporary literary culture, we are unlikely to find it. Today's literary production *is* largely characterized by the prevalence of hybrid forms that bring together a range of techniques from previously opposed aesthetic schools. But lining up the utopianism of compromise aesthetics with the utopianism of positions like Fukuyama's shows that the belief in the triumph of compromise aesthetics is just as inattentive to the continued presence of crises and conflict in the domain of literary aesthetics as the belief in a global capitalist utopia is to the political realities of the present.

It has become clear that the end of the formal polarizations that characterized the Cold War and the national alliances that preceded it did not mean the end of global conflict. Likewise, we now know that the end of state-sponsored segregation in the United States in the form of Jim Crow laws did not mean the end of racial unrest. It is equally true that the end of a clearly demarcated avant-garde in literature does not mean the end of substantive challenges to the very structure of mainstream literary production and consumption, but the persistence of compromise aesthetics suggests that we currently lack ways of reading to make us attentive to that fact.

If we look closely at contemporary literary works, we can see that aesthetic challenges continue to exist in works that at first glance look like they conform to the qualities championed by compromise aesthetics. Many of these works are hybrid in form: they bring together formal strategies from a range of aesthetic inheritances. Yet this hybridity does not resolve into an easy state of compromise.

Returning to Kushner's novel, for instance, it isn't entirely clear that the overall effect of *The Flamethrowers* is to "blast through" unnecessary distinctions between the mainstream and the avant-garde. Even Wood, later in his review, allows that this might be the case, when he argues that the book's engagement with the relationship between political radicalism and art "seems like an overloading of the novel's thematic circuits, a wrongheaded desire to make everything signify." Ultimately, Wood passes these aspects

of Kushner's novel off as small oversights in an otherwise perfect compromise form. But this misses a glaring irony: the very theme that Wood finds suspicious and therefore pushes aside as marginal—the novel's insistence upon the connection between political violence and aesthetics—could also be understood to constitute the book's argument against the possibility for compromise between the kind of aesthetic novelty that Wood praises and the political status quo. Indeed, one of the novel's major achievements is the conflict it highlights between the feelings of pleasure produced by its formal features and the political volatility it associates with the aesthetic impulse.

The novel accentuates this tension first and foremost through the passivity of Reno, the narrator, a young artist who sees herself as not so much actively living as quietly "shopping for experience" (313). Reno's tendency to sit back and let experiences happen to her is what allows the novel to achieve its blend between realism and the insistence on artifice that it maintains through its metafictional reflections on art, its incorporation of documentary photographs, and its fictionalization of historical events. Despite the fact that the novel is about experimental art and is narrated by an experimental artist, it offers the illusion of direct, unmediated experience because of Reno's passive posture. As a result, the novel can be read without much concern with the questions of mediation and artificiality that it might otherwise highlight, because Reno seems like a reliable and neutral vehicle for the registration of a larger social landscape.

But the apparent neutrality of the novel's narrative form is exposed as potentially volatile, when, at the end of the novel, we learn that Reno may have unknowingly contributed to the execution of her ex-boyfriend's brother by the Red Brigades. She has done this, crucially, through a passive activity: by waiting. In the novel's final pages, when a member of the Italian left fails to meet her where he is supposed to, she paces, seemingly indefinitely, at the foot of Mont Blanc, while the future assassin is likely to be stealing off into the mountains and preparing his attack. Inaction, observation, and, neutrality are here figured as paradoxically contributing to an act of revolutionary political violence, while elsewhere in the book the same attempts to withdraw from politics on the part of members of the elite are figured as contributing to various forms of state-sanctioned violence, from the horrors of fascism to the brutality of labor exploitation. Art, in this vision, cannot withdraw from polarization, even in its most seemingly conciliatory modes. The belief that it can do so is, *The Flamethrowers* suggests, a dangerous

source of potential complicity with whatever political force insinuates itself in the moment.

The Flamethrowers is just one example of how works of contemporary literature accentuate the formal and conceptual frictions that result from the very attempt to put conflict to rest. This, in turn, underscores the degree to which compromises will always remain unstable and incomplete. What appears to be a logic of formal compromise, in many of these works, is often the precise opposite: an incorporation of recognizable experimental and mainstream modes that demonstrates the inherent instability of both.

There is no end of literary history, just as there is no end of political history. Even in times characterized by the most seemingly complete forms, tension, contradiction, and transformation nevertheless abide. At least in that small fact, we might take comfort.

NOTES

Many thanks to Davis Smith-Brecheisen for his rigorous engagement with this essay. This essay originally appeared in *The Account: A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Thought* (Fall 2014).

1. See, for instance, Silliman's resurrection of Edgar Allan Poe's term "The School of Quietude" to draw attention to the specificity of conventional poetry, poetry that he argues possesses "something of a death grip on financial resources for writing in America while denying its own existence as a literary movement" (Silliman, 2009 n.p.).

2. Compromise aesthetics are not defined merely as attempts to run skew of aesthetic debates; such a notion would be nothing new. If the works typical of compromise aesthetics resemble any single, unadulterated individual literary mode that predates the contemporary period, they most closely resemble middlebrow works, which like compromise works, are "very good at co-opting and commercializing the highbrow" (D'Hoker 261). Yet most historians of middlebrow culture agree that "the middlebrow is all about class" insofar as middlebrow works are defined primarily by their middle-class, nonacademic readers (260). The very designation "middlebrow" is dependent upon a class-based identification of a specific readership; it is not a stable aesthetic designation. In this sense, no matter how much individual compromise works might seem to echo the middlebrow mode formally, their celebration in high literary culture is specific to the contemporary moment.

3. For a thorough account of the appropriation and instrumentalization of the notion of "creativity" toward neoliberal social goals, see Brouillette.

4. Debates about contemporary poetics tend to skirt pragmatic market consider-

ations, in part because the market for poetry is so small as to be financially inconsequential for all but the very most famous poets. This is less true in assessments of fiction, which tend to be more aware of the complex interplay between aesthetic decision-making and changes in the publishing industry that themselves stem from larger economic currents. Yet these changes affect poetry too—if not by a direct financial incentive to authors then by the slow creep of a wider literary culture that asserts the value of aesthetic trends that themselves are based on market logics.

5. Jennifer Ashton offers a compelling account of the compatibility between Language Poetry and other seemingly "antilyric" positions and a thoroughgoing emphasis on the personal consistent with more traditional expressions of lyric form. Indeed, Ashton's capacious definition of the lyric tradition suggests that some of the features that I am attributing to compromise aesthetics could be conceived as accompanying a range of works within the lyric tradition, including works of the antilyric movements of high modernism and Language Poetry. It does nevertheless seem significant that both the way in which writers self-describe and the most prevalent critical accounts of those writers have shifted over the past few decades, so that writers and critics whose interest in formal novelty once may have made them committed to experimentalism are now vocally embracing features of the lyric that once were contested by antilyric positions.

6. Oren Izenberg's contention in *Being Numerous* that the various binary oppositions that have been applied to poetics obscure poetry's fundamental social grounding falls very much in line with compromise aesthetics. Yet his interest in how some works of poetry offer up a minimal definition of personhood provides a crucial corrective to the tendency for a focus on the person to mean a focus on individual experience and expression. The study therefore manages to recuperate a properly liberal theory of poetry in a moment when many attempts to imagine a relationship between aesthetics and a liberal social agenda, particularly those grounded in an interest in the articulation of personal experience, risk bleeding over into the neoliberal prioritization of the individual over the social and experience over structural critique.

7. On postironic literature, see Konstantinou. On "The New Sincerity," see Kelly.

8. On the rise of "Third Way" poetics, see Richie.

9. In Walter Benn Michaels's account, prevailing theoretical approaches to literature "[turn] disagreement about the meaning of texts into the registration of their different effects." Consequently, "readers at the end of history . . . differ, but they don't disagree. And they don't disagree because they have nothing to disagree about" (80). Beyond the effects of literary theory, my argument here is that this end-historical quality of today's literary culture is a broad symptom of a basic aesthetic judgment that sees the major formal disputes of the twentieth century as

reducible to a plurality of styles. These styles are figured, often by writers themselves, as value-neutral options among endless other equally interesting options. In other words, today's formal innovations, when they occur, might be understood in Fukuyama's terms as a practice of "the endless solving of technical problems" in the aesthetic sphere (1989 25).

10. As Brown puts it, "Neoliberalism does not conceive of either the market itself or rational economic behavior as purely natural. Both are constructed—organized by law and political institutions, and requiring political intervention and orchestration. Far from flourishing when left alone, the economy must be directed, buttressed, and protected by law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms designed to facilitate competition, free trade, and rational economic action on the part of every member and institution of society" (41).

WORKS CITED

Ashton, Jennifer. "Labor and the Lyric: The Politics of Self-Expression in Contemporary American Poetry." *American Literary History* 25:1 (Spring 2013): 217–30.

Brouillette, Sara. *Literature and the Creative Economy*. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2014.

Brown, Wendy. *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2009.

Burn, Stephen J. *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*. London: Continuum, 2011.

Burt, Stephen. *Close Calls With Nonsense: Reading New Poetry*. Saint Paul, MN: Greywolf P, 2009.

———. "Review of *Smokes* by Susan Wheeler." *Boston Review* (Summer 1998). <http://new.bostonreview.net/BR23.3/burt.html>.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

D'Hoker, Elke. "Theorizing the Middlebrow: An Interview with Nicola Humble." *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* 7 (November 2011): 259–65.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1: *An Introduction*. Ed. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.

Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

———. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free P, 1992.

Göransson, Johannes. "American Hybrids." *Exoskeleton* (6 February 2009). <http://exoskeleton-johannes.blogspot.com/2009/08/american-hybrid-review.html>.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.
Izenberg, Oren. *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2011.
Kelly, Adam. "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction." *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Ed. David Hering. Los Angeles: Sideshow Media Group P, 2010. 131–46.
Konstantinou, Lee. "Wipe That Smirk Off Your Face: Postironic Literature and the Politics of Character." PhD diss., Stanford University, 2010.
McLaughlin, Robert L. "Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World." *Symploke* 12:1–2 (2004): 53–68.
Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004.
Richie, James A. "Third Way Poetics: Navigating the Streams of Modern and Postmodern Poetic Uncertainty." PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2013.
Silliman, Ron. "Monday, January 05, 2004." *Sillman's Blog* (5 January 2004). <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2004/01/on-new-years-eve-philadelphia-inquirer.html>.
———. "Wednesday, June 24, 2009." *Silliman's Blog* (24 June 2009). <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2009/06/american-hybrid-is-important-book-but.html>.
Swensen, Cole. "Introduction." *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*. Ed. Cole Swensen and David St. John. New York: Norton, 2009. xvii–xxvi.
Tanenhaus, Sam. "Peace and War." *New York Times*. 19 August 2010.
Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13.2 (1993): 151–94.
Wood, James. "Youth in Revolt: Rachel Kushner's 'The Flamethrowers.'" *New Yorker* (8 April 2013).

ADAM KELLY

THE NEW SINCERITY

The generation of American novelists born in and around the 1960s came to intellectual maturity during the last two decades of the twentieth century, a period that today goes under several names: postmodern, posthistorical, neoliberal, age of fracture.[1] This was a time when the radical emancipatory politics, egalitarian social hope, and experimental artistic impulses that marked the 1960s had begun, in the eyes of many, to resemble relics from an increasingly distant past. As this generation of Americans began writing and publishing, the economic and political landscape was steeped in Reaganomics, the neoconservative "end of history" consensus, and the upsurge of globalization with the rise (and rise) of multinational capitalism. The US literary academy, where virtually all budding authors now spent several years and many their entire careers, witnessed a number of significant developments: new paradigms for literary study were generated through the influence of European, particularly French, thinkers; the mainstream American canon fragmented and diversified under pressure from social change and the rise of identity politics; and the creative writing program continued its ascent from one authorship route among others to a near-obligatory professional rite of passage.[2] In the media sphere, "the late age of print" (Striphas) was heralded by the coming of the World Wide Web, a radically new

technological form that supplemented the challenges to the printed word mounted by cinema and television earlier in the century. And in the cultural sphere, something called postmodern irony came increasingly to define the spirit of the age, tying together everything from consumerism and identity to politics and art.

It has become common over recent years to describe a significant wave of cultural production that emerged from and responded to this period in American life as characterized by a "New Sincerity." The phrase has been used in discussions of film, poetry, visual art, and pop music.[3] In extending it to describe the fiction of a number of the most prominent novelists born in the generation after the US baby boom—including Michael Chabon, Junot Díaz, Jennifer Egan, Dave Eggers, Dana Spiotta, Colson Whitehead, and David Foster Wallace—I mean both to connect their work to broader cultural trends and to highlight the special characteristics that enable literary fiction to engage those trends in an urgent, complex, and dialectical manner. In popular usage, the contemporary turn to sincerity tends to be regarded as a sturdy affirmation of nonironic values, as a renewed taking of responsibility for the meaning of one's words, as a post-postmodern embrace of the "single-entendre principles" invoked by Wallace in an essay now regularly cited as an early manifesto for the New Sincerity movement. But while "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993) might end with a clarion call for a new generation of sincere "*anti*-rebels" emerging to critique the tyranny of irony in American culture (1997 81), Wallace's fiction, and the fiction of his peers, engages questions of irony and sincerity in more complicated ways. Responding to the range of historical, institutional, technological, and aesthetic contexts to which my opening paragraph alludes, contemporary American fiction foregrounds a theory and practice of sincerity that is forward rather than backward looking, new rather than old.

This newness is best approached, however, by turning first to a description of what the old sincerity looked like and how it was imagined as inhering in literary texts. The classic account is offered in Lionel Trilling's 1972 study *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Trilling defines sincerity as "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" and traces the concept's emergence in "the moral life of Europe" to the early modern period (2). He cites *Hamlet* as a central text, placing particular emphasis on Polonius's famous advice to Laertes as the latter prepares to depart for Paris:

> This above all—to thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day
> Thou canst not then be false to any man. (Shakespeare 1.3.78–80)

For Trilling, the otherwise corrupt Polonius here has "a moment of self-transcendence, of grace, of truth" (3). His words are to be taken seriously, and crucial to their import is that truth to one's own self should be conceived of not as an *end*, but as a *means* of ensuring truth to others. Trilling goes on to claim—via readings of Rousseau, Diderot, Wordsworth, and Jane Austen, among others—that this consequentialist conception of sincerity would become "a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years" (6). But by the twentieth century it had gone into sharp decline, superseded by the ideal of authenticity, which conceives truth to the self as an end and not simply as a means. Whereas sincerity places emphasis on intersubjective truth and communication with others, and on what Trilling calls the "public end in view" (9), authenticity conceives truth as inward, personal, and hidden, the goal primarily of self-examination rather than other-directed communication. The role playing associated with the theatrical origins of sincerity in writers like Shakespeare is repudiated in favor of a plunge into the Conradian heart of darkness; and, indeed, Trilling closely associates the cultural trumping of sincerity by authenticity with the intense but nonconfessional exploration of the self found in literary modernism.

Modernism is, on Trilling's account, the culmination of "two centuries of aesthetic theory and artistic practice which have been less and less willing to take account of the habitual preferences of the audience" (97). A new conception of the artist as aloof genius, as persona rather than person, shattered the older, traditional view, best articulated in Wordsworth's understanding of the poet as "a man speaking to men." The modernist paradigm—located in Eliot's aesthetic of impersonality, or in Joyce's artist standing above his work paring his fingernails—was then further enshrined when the New Critics denigrated intention, so inescapably central to any conception of sincerity, as a fallacy in the study of literature. And the early artistic reactions to modernism—the existentialist and absurdist literature of mid-century Europe, as well as American Beat writing and confessional poetry—only added to the privilege afforded to authenticity, in that any demonstrable

privileging of a public self, another key characteristic of sincerity, became associated with bad faith or an artificial dishonesty. This state of affairs leads Trilling to write of the "anachronism" and "quaintness" now involved in the notion of sincerity, how when we speak the word, "we are likely to do so with either discomfort or irony" (6). Yet what Trilling could not anticipate in 1972 was that irony was in the process of taking over, and with the rise of poststructuralism in the academy, and postmodernism in the arts, the surface/depth model of the self—a model assumed by both sincerity and authenticity as Trilling defines them—would soon be superseded by the privilege afforded to capital, technology, culture, and language, which now claimed the causal power and priority previously afforded to inner life.

In a 1996 essay favorably comparing the fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky to "our own lit's thematic poverty," David Foster Wallace typifies the New Sincerity reaction to this modernist legacy: "The good old modernists, among their other accomplishments, elevated aesthetics to the level of ethics—maybe even metaphysics—and Serious Novels after Joyce tend to be valued and studied mainly for their formal ingenuity" (2005 272). In an interview of the same year, Wallace went further, contending that a century-long alteration in the shared understanding of literature, the self, and communication had heralded an "intellectualization and aestheticizing of principles and values in this country," one of the things, he argued, "that's gutted our generation" (2012 60). Wallace proposed that literature, by respecting rather than disregarding the preferences of its audience, could return to a situation in which "the reader feels like someone is talking to him rather than striking a number of poses" (61). In this way, fiction would become a conversation, the primary aim of which would be to make the reader and writer feel less lonely in the face of the contemporary world. Wallace's position, enshrined in the Alcoholics Anonymous scenes that provide the core of his magnum opus *Infinite Jest* (1996), has become paradigmatic for his generation. A renewed concern with sincerity is conceived by these writers as an answer to problems raised by the legacy of a modernist insistence on an aesthetic view of the world, and on the priority of authentic expression, or artistic autonomy, over sincere communication.

Critics have acknowledged this antimodernist streak in contemporary fiction by identifying it with a return to the novel of the nineteenth century and earlier, "to the form of the novel in place before even the rules of realism were fully formulated," as Andrew Hoberek has put it (220).[4] Hoberek

allies this return to premodernist forms with a revival of what he calls "intentional bad form" in writers like Wallace and Eggers, remarking that "bad form in the aesthetic sense merges with bad form in the social sense to connote sincerity: in the process of speaking from one's deepest self, one cannot bother with, or is indeed actively hindered by the artificiality of, the canons of good form" (217). Yet it is equally true that the legacy of *post*-modernism—which is the context in which New Sincerity writers are most often read—substantially complicates any revival of the expression of "one's deepest self" in literary form.[5] Notions of character, selfhood, and expression came under serious pressure in the fiction of major American writers including Barth, Pynchon, and DeLillo, not to mention their postmodern compatriots elsewhere such as Borges, Beckett, Carter, and Calvino. These traditional tropes were also radically questioned in the literary theory that New Sincerity writers absorbed in college and, in filtered forms, through the culture around them. Indeed, it is the necessity of accounting for the ongoing influence of theory, and the alterations it has wrought in how linguistic communication should now be conceived, that encourages Ernst Van Alphen and Mieke Bal, editors of the essay collection *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, to call for "a new theorization of the concept" of sincerity (17). Among the things theory has taught contemporary writers is that sincerity, expressed through language, can never be pure, and must instead be conceived in inextricable conjunction with ostensibly opposing terms, including irony and manipulation. As Jacques Derrida, among other contemporary philosophers, has demonstrated, the promise of truth to the other that marks sincerity is always contaminated internally by the threat of manipulating the other, and this threat cannot be eliminated through appeal to intention, morality, or context. Yet this threat should not be understood as the privation of sincerity, but as its very possibility. That sincerity can always be taken for manipulation shows us that sincerity depends not on purity but on trust and faith: if I or the other could be certain that I am being sincere, the notion of sincerity would lose its normative charge.

One evident place where this theoretical inheritance shows up in New Sincerity writing is in the prominence given to the discourse of advertising, a sphere in which language is used to preempt and manipulate the desires of the other. "Pure Language" is the ironic title given, for instance, to the concluding chapter of Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010): the chapter depicts a future present in which all bloggers are paid to "parrot" for products,

formerly expressive words have been "shucked of their meanings and reduced to husks" (320), and characters are reduced to employing baby talk in failed efforts to communicate without ambiguity. Impurity and deception are endemic not only to language but to the corporate landscape of the present, epitomized by what Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006) calls "that contemporary brand of establishment, the kind that dressed itself in rustic sincerity but adhered to the rapacious philosophy of the multinational" (39). Language and the corporate environment combine in this fiction to challenge the traditional understanding of sincerity as the expression of an underlying, inner self, characterized by what Trilling calls "actual feeling." The requirement to sell his words makes Egan's Alex wonder whether his actual feelings and tastes have always already been bought, while the unnamed African-American branding consultant at the center of Whitehead's novel can only conceive his interiority through the outward names he gives to products and cannot finally contradict his boss's claim that "you *are* the product" (146; emphasis in original).

While raising these concerns about language, environment, interiority, and selfhood, the prose of Egan and Whitehead nonetheless retains the kind of lyrical dazzle associated with a high literary style, thereby reaffirming (however self-consciously) the contemporary novelist as an agent of naming who can compete with the branding consultant. Yet other writers go even further, saturating their stories with technocratic jargon, as in Wallace's "Mister Squishy" in *Oblivion* (2004), or with degraded neoliberal corporate-speak, as in many of the best-known stories of George Saunders. The writer's distance from this corrupted language is no longer assumed: the old modernist recourse to a heightened lyricism, rather than offer a way out, often points in this fiction to an irresponsible aestheticism, embodied for instance by the cowardly poet character in "The Falls," the concluding story in Saunders's *Pastoralia* (2000).[6] Saunders, Egan, Whitehead, and Wallace consistently remind the reader how various forms of marketing and advertising have served to render as generic cliché the most lyrical and potentially meaningful moments of human lives. If authenticity can be defined as that which cannot be commodified, then it appears that nothing even remotely public can by now remain authentic. And language is inescapably public, as the contemporary writer knows well, a fact that presents nagging problems for a literature that wants to be original, affective, humanly and politically vital.

Allied to these issues of content and style are the ways that New Sincerity texts engage formally and structurally with their own implication in the ambit of the market. Suffusing the novels and stories of this generation is a constant awareness and regular admission that, as one reviewer of Eggers's work puts it, "all literature is a form of commodified persuasion, a sophisticated kind of advertising pitch" (Siegel n.p.). Indeed, Eggers's own oeuvre offers perhaps the clearest example. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) provocatively combines a claim to urgent truth-telling on the one hand with a canny awareness of generic convention, reader response, and market conditions on the other; in its title alone, it both parodies the language of sensationalized promotion and at the same time accepts the necessity of producing a work that actually lives up to the title. The form of the book, with its lengthy anticipatory preface and regular self-reflexive interruptions of the traumatic narrative, constantly impels the question of the author's sincerity to the center of the reading experience. A less celebrated but in some ways more striking example is Eggers's *What Is the What* (2006), a hybrid novel-memoir that offers a first-person account, based on true events, of the brutal life of a Sudanese Lost Boy who eventually winds up in America telling his story. As Eggers has admitted, the decision to publish the autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng as fiction rather than nonfiction was partly made on the basis that it would improve sales for a charitable cause, a point emphasized by the fact that the paperback edition contains no mention of Achak Deng on the cover, simply stating that the book is a novel by Dave Eggers. Some reviewers have asked the inevitable questions regarding ethical appropriation that arise due to these writing and publishing decisions; nonetheless, all seem agreed on the benevolence of Eggers's intentions. In fact Lee Siegel, while accusing Eggers of "postcolonial arrogance" and "socially acceptable Orientalism," remarks that the problem with Eggers and his followers generally is that they confuse good intentions with good art (n.p.).

Yet if an acute preemptive awareness of the prevailing norms of public reception marks Eggers's writing and publishing decisions, as it clearly has from the beginning, then the question of good intentions cannot be so easily resolved. In writing the book, and appropriating and fictionalizing the traumatic story of another in his own language and in his own name (thereby enhancing his own good reputation and sales), Eggers in fact invites difficult questions concerning his intentions. At the same time, he can never offer

a full justification of the purity of those intentions, because—as *A Heartbreaking Work* demonstrates in the most overt manner possible—acute self-awareness includes the awareness of how one will be seen by others, resulting in an infinite regress that makes full self-knowledge an endlessly deferred impossibility. In the case of *What Is the What*, this realization is made palpable in the way the question of what constitutes sincere and honest storytelling becomes a significant theme of the novel. Writing as Achak Deng, Eggers remarks on how the Lost Boys' stories have often become altered "in the interest of drama and expediency" (56), with the horrific elements reduced to a formulaic narrative as each boy becomes aware of what the Western world wants to hear and what it will reward. The struggle to tell the truth cannot therefore be separated from the ends that truth will be put to, and a foreknowledge of those ends necessarily contaminates the telling with manipulative overtones from the very beginning. In a gesture typical of writers of his generation, Eggers refuses to ignore this insight, instead making it into a prevailing structure and condition of possibility for the texts he writes.

For many American writers who deal, like Eggers, with trauma and extremity in their work, this structural conjoining of sincerity and manipulation has become a key concern, embodied in their attitude toward genre and in many of the generic forms they adopt. For instance, in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the traumatic history of the Dominican Republic, which would be weaved into the background of a conventional historical novel, is here relegated to footnotes, where it is constantly read through paradigms drawn from fantasy and science fiction. In aiming for affect, Díaz therefore risks the accusation of trivialization, as does Chabon in a book like *The Final Solution* (2004), in which a comic plot involving a colorful parrot and an aging Sherlock Holmes is employed to provide a fresh perspective on the Holocaust. For all their respect for the conventions of genre, texts such as these read like ethical experiments, in which affective power cannot fully be separated from, and is in fact in large part constituted by, the appropriation of affect for manipulative ends. This aesthetically generative undecidability is crucial for what it means to be a New Sincerity writer. The critic Steven Connor has quipped that being a modernist writer "always meant not quite realizing that you were so," whereas being a postmodernist "always involved the awareness that you were so" (10). Put in these terms, being a post-postmodernist or New Sincerity writer means never being certain

whether you are so, and whether your struggle to transcend narcissism, solipsism, irony, and insincerity is even undertaken in good faith. When one cannot help but take one's interpellation into various structures (whether economic, institutional, or linguistic) as causal to both inner feeling and outward avowal, then sincerity of intention—what Wallace once called "the art's heart's purpose, the agenda of the consciousness behind the text" (2012 50)—becomes the very thing most radically in question. As Jonathan Safran Foer's narrator puts it at the conclusion of another experimental trauma text, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002): "It was impossible to remember what one meant, what, after all of the words, was intended" (261).

In summary, then, it can be said that in twenty-first-century American fiction, the guarantee of the writer's own sincerity cannot finally lie in representation. Zadie Smith pinpoints this feature in an introduction to a collection devoted to the work of this generation: their stories, she suggests, "seem to be attempting to make something happen *off* the page, *outside* words, a curious thing for a piece of writing to want to do" (xx). What happens off the page, outside representation, depends upon the invocation and response of another; this other to whom I respond, and whose response I await, is, for many New Sincerity writers, the actual reader of their text. It is striking how many contemporary novels offer direct appeals to the reader, often at the conclusion, asking for companionship and conversation. Spiotta's *Eat the Document* (2006), a novel that queries what it means to hold political beliefs sincerely in a culture where corporations and media have turned radical protest itself into a form of advertising, ends with Jason, the novel's representative of futurity, asking the reader to affirm his closing reflections on the passage of time: "And that will be something, don't you think?" (290). Similarly, Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End* (2007), which opens with the repeated and symptomatic mantra "You Don't Know What's In My Heart," reverses direction only in its revelatory final two lines: "We were the only two left. Just the two of us, you and me" (385). The writer-reader relationship is being invoked and isolated in these examples, and the reader is being asked to judge the sincerity of the character's, and the writer's, words. This link between reader, character, and writer is crystallized in one of Wallace's key short stories, "Octet," from *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), which features a narrator-writer demolishing the conventional fourth wall of his story in order to convince the reader of his pure aims and intentions, but which ends with the ambiguous command,

or plea, "So decide" (136). Through the mediation of literary language, the reader is called upon in these examples to acknowledge and address the writer, and vice versa. This structural co-implication is summed up by the final lines of *What Is the What*: "All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist" (535).

If we take seriously the outward-facing pleas and gestures that conclude these texts, then we should recognize that in New Sincerity writing, the author and reader really do exist, which is to say they are not simply *implied*, not primarily to be understood as rhetorical constructions or immortalized placeholders. The text's existence depends not only on a writer but also on a particular reader at a particular place and time. Stated in such a manner, this might seem no more than a bland truism, a bromide, as Wallace would put it. Yet it is an insight that literary criticism has found surprisingly difficult to take fully on board. New Sincerity writing demands that we take this insight on board as an urgent matter, that we understand literature as a contingent rather than ideal process that recapitulates the struggle for communication differently and anew in each reading. Thus, if the modernist artist, as Trilling contended, "seeks his personal authenticity in his entire autonomousness—his goal is to be as self-defining as the art object he creates" (100), then neither contemporary authors nor the texts they write aim to be ideally self-defining in this manner. Rather, these texts are ultimately defined by their undecidability and the affective response they invite and provoke in their readers, with questions of sincerity embedded, on a number of levels, into the reader's contingent experience of the text.

NOTES

1. On these terms see, respectively, Fredric Jameson, Michaels, Harvey, and Rodgers.

2. On these three developments see Cusset, Guillory, and McGurl.

3. On these four genres, see Collins, Morris, Magill (187–207), and Fitzgerald; for a loose historical outline of the "movement," see A. D. Jameson. Although my focus here is solely on the American context, there is a significant international dimension to the employment of the phrase "new sincerity"; for a discussion of the Russian context, and a useful bibliography of other international sources, see Rutten.

4. New Sincerity writing should not be seen, therefore, as a branch of metamodernism, the term David James and Urmila Seshagiri use to categorize contemporary fiction that aims "to move the novel forward by looking back to the

aspirational energies of modernism" (93). While metamodernist writers privilege "rupture, irony and fragmentation [. . .] dissent and defamiliarization" (93), New Sincerity writers are far less convinced by the continued value of "modernism as revolution" (87) for the contemporary moment.

5. For varying accounts of the influence of postmodernist fiction and theory on twenty-first-century American novelists, see Boswell, Burn, Dames, Kelly, and Konstantinou.

6. Just as New Sincerity fiction is not a branch of metamodernism, then, neither is it a form of what Jesse Matz dubs "pseudo-impressionism," a contemporary literary mode that mobilizes the painterly style of Conrad, James, and Woolf in the service of what Matz dismisses as "trivially subjective fantasies" (111).

WORKS CITED

Boswell, Marshall. *Understanding David Foster Wallace*. Columbia: UP of South Carolina, 2003.

Burn, Stephen J. *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*. New York: Continuum, 2008.

Collins, Jim. "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity." *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. Ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins. London: Routledge, 1993. 242–63.

Connor, Steven. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Steven Connor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 1–19.

Cusset, François. *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Trans. Jeff Fort. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

Dames, Nicholas. "The Theory Generation." *n+1* 14 (2012): 157–69.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. London: Corsair, 2011.

Eggers, Dave. *What Is the What*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Ferris, Joshua. *Then We Came to the End*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Fitzgerald, John D. *Not Your Mother's Morals: How the New Sincerity Is Changing Pop Culture for the Better*. New York: Bondfire Books, 2013.

Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Everything Is Illuminated*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

James, David, and Urmila Seshagiri. "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution." *PMLA* 129 (2014): 87–100.

Jameson, A. D. "What we talk about when we talk about the New Sincerity, part 1." *HtmlGiant* (4 June 2012). <http://htmlgiant.com/haut-or-not/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-the-new-sincerity>.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
Kelly, Adam. "Beginning with Postmodernism." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57 (2011): 391–422.
Konstantinou, Lee. "No Bull: David Foster Wallace and Postironic Belief." *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Samuel Cohen and Lee Konstantinou. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2012. 83–112.
Magill, R. Jay, Jr. *Sincerity*. New York: Norton, 2012.
Matz, Jesse. "Pseudo-Impressionism?" *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicizing Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. David James. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 114–32.
McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004.
Morris, Jason. "The Time Between Time: Messianism and the Promise of a 'New Sincerity.'" *Jacket* 35 (2008). <jacketmagazine.com>.
Rodgers, Daniel T. *Age of Fracture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.
Rutten, Ellen. "Reviving Sincerity in the Post-Soviet World." *Reconsidering the Postmodern: European Literature Beyond Relativism*. Ed. Thomas Vaessens and Yra van Dijk. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2011. 27–40.
Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, 1997. 1659–1759.
Siegel, Lee. "The Niceness Racket." *New Republic* (19 April 2007). <http://www.powells.com/review/2007_04_19.html>.
Smith, Zadie. Introduction. *The Burned Children of America*. Ed. Marco Cassini and Martina Testa. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003. xi–xxii.
Spiotta, Dana. *Eat the Document*. New York: Scribner's, 2006.
Striphas, Ted. *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009.
Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. London: Oxford UP, 1972.
Van Alphen, Ernst, and Mieke Bal. Introduction. *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*. Ed. Ernst Van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel Smith. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009. 1–17.
Wallace, David Foster. *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. London: Abacus, 2001.
———. *Consider the Lobster*. London: Abacus, 2005.
———. *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*. Ed. Stephen J. Burn. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2012.
———. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. London: Abacus, 1997.
Whitehead, Colson. *Apex Hides the Hurt*. New York: Anchor Books, 2007.

N. KATHERINE HAYLES

INFLUENCES OF THE DIGITAL

To think about contemporary literature is inevitably to encounter digital media. At every stage of the production and consumption of contemporary literature, digital media are transforming the functions of writers, readers, publishers, printers, distributors, and booksellers. So massive are these cumulative changes that they outweigh all the other influences on contemporary literature—*combined*. In fact, the enormous changes now underway are seldom considered en masse, simply because their breadth and weight tend to overwhelm analysis. In this short position paper, I will not have space to do more than glance at how these transformations are proceeding. Nevertheless, even this brief survey may serve to indicate that the shift from postmodernism to whatever we are in now is far more than a conceptual break (although it is that too). The materiality of digital media are completely enmeshed with the conceptual, and the present landscape cannot be grasped without considering the effects of both together.

The aspect likely to be of most immediate interest to literary studies is how the content of literature is reflecting and engaging with digital media. An example is Mark Danielewski's elaborately patterned poem-novel, *Only Revolutions*. The narrative is a long poem recounting the adventures of two forever-sixteen lovers, Sam and Hailey. The book announces its experimental character immediately by having the narrative of each protagonist be

back-to-front and upside-down relative to the other, so that the book has two beginnings, one for Sam and another for Hailey. In addition, the inner margins of each page spread are devoted to "Chronomasics" data entries, headlined by a specific date corresponding roughly to the progress of the narratives and selectively reporting events that happened on the date interval indicated. This structure is further complicated by having the protagonists use slang specific to the period indicated, which for Sam goes from 1863 to 1963, and for Hailey from 1963 to 2063. Not only does the form interpolate database with narrative, so does the content. It would be virtually impossible to write such a work without the search capabilities that the Web enables, both to find appropriate events for the Chronomosaics and to research the kind of language specific to a given period. Moreover, the elaborate symmetries create eight different reading paths for each page spread, thus simulating in print form the kind of hypertext linking typical of Web reading. At the same time, the work emphasizes its instantiation as a print book, for example by having old-fashioned placeholder ribbons attached to the top and bottom respectively, color coded for Sam (green) and Hailey (gold). Manuel Portela's study of the work's symmetries (*Scripting Reading Motions* 2013) leads him to suggest that, in inverse symmetry to computational works that figure themselves as books, this is a book fashioned to perform in some aspects like a computer.

The interpenetration of the digital into print books also has dramatically influenced the material form of books. Virtually all books published in the last three decades have been computer coded at some point (or several points) in their existence, and for many contemporary works code leaves a visible mark on the work's surface. A case in point is the section of telephone code in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011), which is a one-way encryption difficult or impossible to decode because of the proliferating possibilities as the code continues for several pages. An even more dramatic example is his *Tree of Codes* (2010), with die-cut holes so extensive that the pages resemble lace. The online video "The Making of *Tree of Codes*: Three Months in Three Minutes" beautifully shows how intrinsic computational design was to the production of this work (Canvas 2011). The elaborate design highlights what is true for all contemporary books: the computer code created during composition is seamlessly integrated with digital printing machines to create the final product. Consequently, it would be more accurate to think of print books as a particular

output form of digital code than it would be to consider print as an entirely separate medium.

In addition to influencing the form of print books, digital media also offer the possibility for transmedia fictions that play across multiple media forms. An example is Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*, which exists primarily as a print novel but with significant online components. Henry Jenkins has written about transmedia literature as works that migrate from one media form to another, transforming as they exploit the media-specific qualities of each kind of instantiation. While film adaptations represent a relatively early and well-known form of transmediality, the proliferation of digital devices has now greatly expanded the range and significance of transmedial literatures. An example is the adaptation of Marc Saporta's *Composition No. 1* for the iPad. Originally published in French in 1962 as a boxed set of 150 separate sheets, *Composition No. 1* has recently been republished in an English edition, which inspired the iPad adaptation. The iPad work takes advantage of digital type's mobility to instrumentalize Saporta's vision of type that could drift across the page, indicated in the new print edition by having the obverse of the pages imaged as if they were sand paintings. Very close examination reveals, however, that the "drifts" are actually tiny letters forming sandlike patterns across the page. The iPad work uses touch response to allow the viewer to rearrange the letters, which follow one's finger as it wanders across the screen. Here the writer's vision seems to have anticipated the functionalities of digital media, waiting half a century until the work could realize its full potential, which could only be hinted at in the print version.

Another way in which the digital is influencing contemporary fiction is through network fiction, which David Ciccoricco defines as writing that "makes use of hypertext technology in order to create emergent and recombinatory narrative," distinguishing it from other hypertext documents that operate in axial or arborescent formats (4). The advent of digital literature, works created by and meant to be read on the computer, has opened up a host of new possibilities for literary art, of which network fiction is perhaps the dominant (but by no means the only) strain. Works such as Judd Morrissey's *The Jew's Daughter* and Michael Joyce's *Twelve Blue* use links to create enigmatic narratives in which metaphoric chains function as structural devices, from which meaning emerges much as it does in poetry, less explicitly stated than hinted at by the way images conjoin, collide, and interact with one another (Hayles 2008).

Given the flexibility, power, and affordances of digital media, it is perhaps inevitable that writers well-established in print should try their hand at creating digital works. Steve Tomasula's digital work *TOC*, distributed as a DVD, shows both the potential and limitations of such enterprises. Unless the writer is a proficient programmer himself (I gather that Tomasula is not), he must rely on a host of collaborators to realize the work, which in *TOC*'s case involves animation, graphics, voiceovers, video, design, and music. While *TOC* has powerful sections and exquisite writing, it also shows the seams created by having multiple collaborators at different times. The extensive list of credits more resembles that of an independent film than a single-authored print work.

Another area of digital media's influences is its ability to bypass the traditional gatekeepers for print publication, allowing emerging authors to make their works available to readers without the official imprimatur of a publisher. Such was the case for Daniel Suarez's first novel *Daemon*, a narrative whose content predicts a social revolution as a result of artificial intelligence and Web-enabled technologies. After publishing the first few chapters online, the work gathered enough of an audience to reassure a publisher it would succeed, and it allowed Suarez, a previously unpublished author, to establish a career as a writer of techno-thriller fictions.

I turn now to consider the ways in which the present digital-influenced regime both continues and breaks with postmodernism. Fredric Jameson's enormously influential book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, linked postmodernism with a huge influx of information, as well as with the globalization of international markets. His famous reading of the interior space of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles saw it as an attempt to be a total space that, rather than fitting into its local neighborhood, sought to replace it altogether. In Jameson's view, the space functioned as an allegory of the hyperspace of global markets dominated by corporate capitalism, unfathomable in their totality and lack of spatial reference points. He accordingly called upon readers to perform "cognitive mapping" that would, as a strategy of resistance, seek to understand and analyze the strategies by which global markets worked. In his rhetoric, one can sense the shock of the new, the formations of transnational capital that were quickly converting the relation of markets to everything from international currencies to time and space. John Johnston sought to work out the literary implications of these changes in *Information Multiplicity*, where

he argued for new kinds of narratives emerging from enormous amounts of information flooding through partially connected media assemblages. "In the novel of information multiplicity . . . information proliferates in excess of consciousness, and attention shifts to a new space of networks and connections in which uncertainties are structural rather than thematic" (13).

In this successor period, the flood of information is greater than ever, but new are the multiple technologies of data management that have been developed in the intervening period. Reliable search engines, improved translation techniques, coordinated databases, data- and text-mining, text analytic algorithms, scanning and OCR technologies, and a host of other technologies have in a sense domesticated data, turning it from an unthinkable complexity into a manageable ocean into which we can throw a line of inquiry and pull out a fish or two (or several hundred if we probe past the first screen of hits). This domestication is both utilized and spoofed in such literary forms as flarf poetry, composed from search engine responses, and novels such as *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoise* (Home), composed entirely of texts from spam e-mails. Also in this vein are generative text programs such as the digital literary work *Regime Change* (Wardrip-Fruin), which samples Internet text and creates pastiches from it, and installation works such as *Listening Post*, which draws from chat rooms and other Internet sources to create complexly textured samples juxtaposed with one another.

As we grow accustomed to having immense data repositories available at a touch or keystroke, the temptation to flit from one to another grows, and Web surfing threatens to displace more sustained and linear forms of reading. I sought to characterize this change by contrasting the different cognitive forms of hyper- and deep attention (Hayles 2012). Whereas deep attention is associated with a capacity for sustained attention to a single cultural object such as, say, a novel by Dickens, a preference for a single information stream, and a high threshold for boredom, hyper-attention is associated with a desire for increased stimulation from multiple information streams, quick alternations between them, and a low threshold for boredom. I argued that cultures in developed countries are undergoing a shift from deep to hyper-attention, with the shift most noticeable the younger the cohort. The topic has since drawn considerable attention, including in the professional field of attention studies and in such popular books as Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows*. The deeper implication is that Web surfing is causing long-lasting epigenetic neurological changes in the brain, which make us

less prone to deep attention and more inclined to hyper-attention. If so, the situation offers a serious pedagogical challenge for teachers to devise strategies for cultivating deep attention. It is a capability that we cannot afford to lose, for without it one cannot grasp a difficult poem, follow a complex mathematical theorem, or appreciate a great symphony.

The shift toward hyper-attention has a literary corollary in the increased interest in very short forms, such as "hint fiction" (25 words or less), flash fiction (100 words or less), twittiture (144 characters), and other short short forms. Even the august *Scientific American* joined the trend by recently sponsoring a contest for stories of 100 words or less on the theme of quantum mechanics. Meanwhile, very long works such as Gaddis's *The Recognitions*, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* are undergoing a renaissance as literary equivalents to the Boston Marathon, tests of readerly fortitude that earn one bragging rights if one successfully completes a gargantuan novel.

A similar counterlogic is at work with some print novels openly celebrating their status as fetish objects, even as others move into e-books, iPads, and other digital affordances. This is the case with Mark Danielewski's *The Fifty-Year Sword*, lavishly republished in a collector's edition complete with wooden box decorated with five steel locks (alluding to the text's five narrators), an abstract form of a sword, a handsewn binding, and multiple paper covers, with each copy signed (of course) by the author.

These countertendencies demonstrate that the influences of the digital do not all point in the same direction; nor can they be simply accounted for by mentioning e-books or novels with themes on digital technologies. On the contrary, they are pervasive, subtle, and complex, ranging from neurological changes in the brain to changed narrative structures and new forms of authorship and readership. At present there seems to be little consensus on what the successor period to postmodernism should be called. "Post-postmodernism" has (rightfully) won few adherents, and "posthumanism" may not be literary enough. I want to make a modest proposal for designating it as "digitalism." Like postmodernism, digitalism cuts across media, genres, and aesthetic traditions such as art history and literature, affecting a wide range of forms and practices across a spectrum of creative productions. Almost nothing is left unchanged by its inauguration, including, of course, contemporary literature.

WORKS CITED

Canvas and Visual Editions. *The Making of* Tree of Codes*: Three Months in Three Minutes*. <www.vimeo.com/20869635>.

Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton, 2010.

Ciccoricco, David. *Reading Network Fiction*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007.

Danielewski, Mark Z. *The Fifty-Year Sword*. Collectors ed. New York: Pantheon, 2012.

———. *Only Revolutions*. New York: Pantheon, 2006.

Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close: A Novel*. New York*:* Mariner Books, 2011.

———. *Tree of Codes*. London: Visual Editions, 2010.

Hall, Steven. *The Raw Shark Texts*. New York: Canongate, 2008.

Hansen, Mark, and Ben Rubin. *Listening Post* art installation. 2010. <www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD36IajCz6A>.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 2008.

———. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012.

Home, Stewart. *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoise*. New York: Book Works, 2010.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP, 2008.

Johnston, John. *Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.

Portela, Manuel. *Scripting Reading Motions: The Codex and the Computer as Self-Reflexive Machines*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2013.

Saporta, Marc. *Composition No. 1*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Visual Editions, 2011.

Suarez, Daniel. *Daemon*. New York: Signet, 2009.

Tomasula, Steve. *TOC: A New-Media Novel*. DAD. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2009.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, David Durand, Brion Moss, and Elaine Froehlich. *Regime Change*. Electronic Literature Collection 1. 2003. <collection.eliterature.org/1/works/wardrip-fruin_durand_moss_froelich-regime_change.html>.

CAREN IRR

THE RESURGENCE OF THE POLITICAL NOVEL

The flip side of a supposedly apolitical literary postmodernism has long been the national allegory. In 1986 Fredric Jameson asserted in his controversial landmark essay, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," that a preoccupation with collective (especially national) identity characterized much postcolonial writing; he differentiated this work from the way "American intellectuals have been discussing 'America'" (65). The latter's postmodernism typically sought to dissolve collective identities in favor of individualist and libidinal themes. Jameson famously called for a practice of cognitive mapping that would correct for the purportedly antipolitical tendencies of postmodernism, and in this essay he identifies national allegory as "clearly a form of just such a mapping of the totality" (88). For Jameson, national allegory as a genre offers an antithesis and perhaps an antidote to postmodern resistance to politics.

While for decades scholars have located postmodern elements in postcolonial literature, the complementary move has only recently become possible. In the twenty-first century, American writers have begun to revive the political novel—or, more properly, the geopolitical novel—often by drawing directly on the tradition of the national allegory and transforming it in the

process. This new genre hints at the initiation of a new stage in our global cultural logic, as the opposition between first-world postmodernism and third-world political narrative dissipates in favor of new and still undefined axes of contradiction. Though the faultlines of the global economy have, if anything, rigidified with neoliberalism, the rise of the geopolitical novel suggests a new wave of social and cultural struggles may characterize the new millennium.

Some of these new national allegories are the work of authors in exile pondering the migration patterns of diasporic populations. Others retool the classic American immigrant novel, especially its focus on assimilation or exclusion. Still others revive the preoccupations of historical fiction, asking how crisis events remake national life, while a fourth set examines the place of affect and subjective experience in national narratives.

All of these globalizing variations on the national allegory meet Jameson's definition of the genre; they all describe collisions of representatives of different collective identities within an international frame that recalls the post-1945 system of nation-states. All bring the fundamentally political questions of collective action and responsibility to bear on individual psychic life. Even when the psyche is understood—as in the last subset—as dissociated, this condition is directly connected to social and historical factors such as the fall of the Berlin wall, the explosion of atomic bombs at Hiroshima, the Armenian genocide, protracted civil war, and so on. Twenty-first-century national allegories situate postmodern motifs within the political imperatives of a genre that itself is inflected by tastes informed by postmodernism.

The same is true of national allegories focused exclusively on the American domestic scene. Even fiction written within the American context by US citizens about American topics and for American readers updates the genre. This revival and renovation of the national allegory in a territory so long claimed for postmodernism marks the emergence of a new cultural logic responsive to developments in the underlying structures of global capitalism.

Many of these works absorb postmodern elements into a national scene anchored in a realist aesthetic. Hyperspatial anxiety, blank affect, the internalization of consumer desire, resistance to historical narrative—all of these famous attributes of postmodern narrative regularly appear, but they are routinely framed by narratorial commentary or introduced as local color. The new national allegories typically employ realism to craft a world whose rules and norms are readily apparent to the reader, if not always the charac-

ters. They rely on an ironic distance that notes the implosion and containment of the postmodern environment being observed.

Several exemplary works also turn this neorealist gaze directly toward economic questions. Philipp Meyer's *American Rust* (2009), for example, explores the prospects of unemployed young men in the former steel towns of western Pennsylvania. Similarly, Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) examines the conflicting political, cultural, and psychic motives in the Volvo-driving professional-managerial class from Minnesota to DC, while Adam Haslett's *Union Atlantic* (2009) plunges into the world of the old and new elites controlling the financial markets in Boston and New York. As their titles indicate, each of these novels takes a national touchstone as its subject—from the rusting of the American dream and conflicting interpretations of liberty to the nature of union. None of these novels aspires to the multivoiced panoramic sweep of John Dos Passos's *USA*, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, or even Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Although not necessarily brief, these are all intentionally "small" novels in terms of their casts of characters and variety of settings; they return obsessively to the same scenes and relationships, scrubbing them away to reveal additional layers rather than accumulating more material. These twenty-first-century novels move inescapably toward allegory, then, in their ambition to speak to national themes by means of a restricted set of characters and scenes.

Each of these allegories carefully inspects class dynamics. Race appears only in subplots, and the passages narrated by female characters refrain from making gender a central theme. Women's voices matter most in this fiction when they reflect on economic activities of the family, neighborhood, or town. The central preoccupation of this fiction, in short, is not sub- or transnational identity politics; these authors are instead quite pointedly interested in reviving the national conventions of the mid-century political novel. Like Ralph Ellison or John Steinbeck, Meyer, Franzen, and Haslett make self-understanding an occasion for illuminating social conditions. They move from conditions of immersion in the social to comprehension of its dynamics. These are not "conversion" narratives culminating in commitment to a new ideology,[1] nor are they deconversion stories in the Cold War mode (though certain illusions or false hopes do regularly dissolve within their pages). Instead, these narratives are political because they depict problems of public life at the national level, not because they provide specific sympathetic characters the tools needed to organize in the face of crisis.

In this latter respect, their debt to DeLillo is clear—although they have perhaps learned more from the expatriate DeLillo of *The Names* than the domestic DeLillo of *White Noise*. These are works focused on intensely descriptive irony. However, DeLillo's satires tend to extend their "postmodern" skepticism to the social conditions that lie beyond the observer's range—paranoically upsetting any possible stability in point of view. In DeLillo's fiction, late capitalist irreality emanates from the United States outward, dispersing postmodern anxiety across a global stage.

In Meyer's, Franzen's, and Haslett's fiction, however, the opposite occurs. "Postmodern" effects—including irony—turn out to be local, because they are anchored in a solidly national scene by means of literary naturalism. This unlikely combination of postmodern tone with a naturalist and determinist landscape is a hallmark of the new national allegories with economic themes.

American Rust, for example, begins in a transparently postmodern, postapocalyptic scene. The opening passage describes a decaying steel factory, "an ancient ruin, its buildings grown over with bittersweet vine, devil's tear thumb, and tree of heaven" (3). This Romantic lushness gives way first to older biblical motifs and then to a wild, weedy primeval nature that demotes the human to the position of a transient. These layered allusions reinforce the novel's classically postmodern sense that "nature" pure and simple has vanished;[2] repeatedly, *American Rust* displaces a holistic nature with a decayed and failed culture. This observation itself is recognized as overly familiar: "She was probably about the ten millionth person to think" that "rust . . . defined this place," the hero's sister tiredly observes (Meyer 132). Meyer's novel knows itself to be describing the vacant mills, broken-down cars, and creaking bridges of its environment through the screens of a number of well-worn existing narratives—most notably those of the naturalist novel.

Meyer's naturalism draws especially heavily on Steinbeck. A crime of passion reminiscent of *Of Mice and Men* anchors the plot before it swerves into a surreal Jack London story outlining the survivalist tactics his smaller hero, Isaac, must take on the interstate corridors of the Upper Midwest. Meanwhile, the story of the bigger man, Poe, tracks his equally life-or-death decisions as an inmate in a Darwinian state prison. These two find themselves embroiled in an "ancient relationship": "Wolf or sheep, if you didn't choose it was chosen for you. Hunter or hunted, predator or prey" (271). Reverting

to primary kin and blood loyalties, the two protagonists and those they influence strip social life down to a nearly animal basis.

At its core, then, *American Rust* is a naturalist-influenced allegory of sacrifice.[3] Isaac is of course marked as the intended sacrificial victim. In a series of complicated exchanges, he fulfills commitments made by his Abrahamic father as well as those initiated by Poe, his friend and fellow murderer. This cycle of imagined sacrificial exchanges of one life for another soon becomes elaborate and excessive. In this cycle, not the individual exchange but rather the logic and calculus of sacrifice in general finally turn out to be the object of Meyer's most devoted attention. A moral order based on sacrifice offers an intense clarity at odds with the irrational paradoxes of financial decision-making, a mode of thought modeled in the novel by Isaac's Yale-educated sister. In *American Rust* the latter leads directly to small-town corruption, misappropriated funds, methamphetamine labs, prison gangs, outsourced labor, and ultimately global capitalism. The novel sets these and other effects of capitalist reason against spontaneous popular altruism and solidarity, because Meyer ultimately aims to extract from Isaac and Poe's story a national mythology of a working-class ethic that survives the social degradation resulting from its abandonment by capital. His initially postmodern appreciation for the already-narrated qualities of *American Rust*'s scene and story finally coalesce into a rock-solid core narrative premised on a human need for the dignity that accompanies labor.

Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, by contrast, tackles gentrification. This novel's status-conscious St. Paul social milieu is preoccupied with settlement, and the novel offers an ironic pioneer story, ably reproducing the collective voice of its liberal middle-class subjects while also remarking archly on their affectations. From the opening passages on home decor and ever afterward, Franzen is especially interested in dissecting a postmodern consumer economy of the image.

Taste becomes an increasingly complex subject as the novel proceeds, however, and a number of the plot's revelations turn on shifting relations to tastemakers in the media. At the core of this skeptical plot are several multilayered scams and cons that shame the major protagonists. This vortex of unsettling falsehoods is summarized by a would-be bad-boy rock musician who tells an interviewer, "Like: be a man, suck it up, admit that you like being part of the ruling class, and that you believe in the ruling class, and

that you'll do whatever it takes to consolidate your position in it" (202–3). The purported shock value of this rant is itself orchestrated and produced on demand for erotic reasons. This passage emblematizes the way that Franzen arranges for every potentially critical action to be compromised by the circumstances of its articulation so that no securely ethical standpoint rises out of this sinkhole of media-circulated lies and manipulations. Here and elsewhere, the syntax of the novel's argument reproduces the double negative of the novel's first sentence: "The urban gentry of Ramsey Hill were not so loyal to their city as not to read the *New York Times*" (3).

This commitment to undermining political ideals—most strongly marked in a plotline concerned with the naïveté of environmentalist politics—makes it clear that "nature" and naturalism are also taste communities in *Freedom*; the novel satirizes claims to a pristine wilderness outside the image.[4] Nonetheless, it resolves by returning the hero to his own compromised patch of real estate. A lakeside house in rural Minnesota offers a restorative retreat. A long-separated upper-middle-class couple reunites and begins a more companionable relationship with the middle-middle-class inhabitants of neighboring tract homes. The pioneers of urban gentrification become old homesteaders in the exurb. Franzen's novel places these ebbs and flows of class factions at the ground level of his story. The media economy animates conflict and provides entertaining period detail, but finally the motors of change in Franzen's novel are of a different order. As in *American Rust*, social (here, mainly understood as class) reproduction shapes the narrative as a whole.

Franzen's novel also resembles Meyer's in its treatment of allegory. Both surround their title concepts (rust and freedom) with a cluster of associations, rather than definitely asserting a single central idea. However, while Meyer relies primarily on visual images such as the disassembled machines, Franzen turns to more abstract linking concepts. He explores political discourses of freedom, both liberal and neoconservative, in order to establish a counterpoint to the personal freedoms that characters enjoy affectively—such as "the freedom of being on the road" (259). In several exhilarating and dangerous driving scenes, he explores the adolescent sense of liberation from the confines of parental supervision, even though these paeans to personal liberty are also satirized as the stuff of banal pop songs and the psychobabble of slackers. These accumulating treatments of his central theme suggest freedom as a discourse is ethically ambivalent for Franzen. When

libidinal and political versions of freedom finally meet in a single passage inserted late in the novel, they serve mainly to underscore the destructive patterns underlying the hero's family history. At its most allegorical register, then, Franzen's novel is interested in illustrating how political and personal freedoms convert all too easily into their apparent opposites: misanthropic rage, militaristic excess, and tragic death. *Freedom*'s political destination turns out to be a Melvillean allegory of liberal despair.

In Adam Haslett's *Union Atlantic*, this ethical register evaporates in a direct encounter with economic neoliberalism. Haslett's narrative brings old and new forms of wealth in New England into conflict. An unsympathetic financier with humble origins wrestles his way into upper-class legitimacy. He does this by identifying completely with the processes of the market. Even his mind flows "frictionless as money down a fiber-optic line" (48). This neoliberal sublime has echoes in his domestic aesthetic, sexual sadism, and drug use.

These markedly "postmodern" motifs are framed in Haslett's novel by the perspective of the hero's WASPy neighbor, a historian and a bookish, delusional spinster. This figure's world ultimately crashes down around her in an intentional house fire, but the novel is no more dedicated to telling a Jamesian story of the fall of the old aristocratic elite at the hands of the new financial class than it is to Dickensian empathy with the poor. Instead, its main theme is the mutually assured destruction of these two factions of the ruling class. Neither the spinster nor the financier completely survives the blaze, and in the final pages the latter has become a private mercenary in Kuwait. His trust in a rogue trader named (in an obvious homage to Frank Norris) McTeague leads to his expulsion from the golden circle. His postmodern, neoliberal sublime turns out to be no more secure than the Federal Reserve—an institution subject in the novel to political brinksmanship. In both storylines, in short, Haslett extracts readers from the potentially affectless extremes of the postmodern subject and foregrounds his political allegory.

As we can see, several features unite the new national allegories of Meyer, Franzen, and Haslett. They all describe the downward trajectory of a specific class, whether it be Meyer's free-falling industrial laborers, Franzen's downsizing professionals, or Haslett's anxious national elites. Each of these classes is also made representative of a nation in decline through a series

of associations with major institutions (manufacturing, DC lobbyists, the banking industry). Each narrative speaks on behalf of "America," its vulnerable people, fragile ideals, and uncertain destiny.

Although all three of these novels deflate fantasies about American upward mobility, none of them considers classes in relation to each other. Class conflict is notably absent from these new American allegories, even though the situation of a single class within the economy is crucial to each. The international reach of the capitalist economy is similarly ignored. Each of these novels provides a figure for the global scene, but one that remains marginal and static. They tend to imagine the world beyond American borders as a depopulated chessboard where national interests are tested. This vision is not necessarily approved by these national allegories, but it nonetheless remains their default universe.

These limits suggest that American national allegory has yet to become a fully dialectical international economic novel, even though such a development is not difficult to imagine.[5] After all, as some consensus about the conditions of cultural, political, and economic interdependence associated with global neoliberalism grows, more new narratives become possible. As they accumulate in force and number, American national allegories may well soon be ready to join those repurposed revivals of the form appearing in Nigeria, India, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere. In all of these situations, writers are grappling with the literary tools available to them and extracting the raw materials of a politically charged but not narrowly national version of the economic novel. In the domestically focused American national allegory, in short, as in versions of the same project devoted to conditions elsewhere, we can witness the resurgence of an important form of the political novel, a form arising—or so this essay has argued—when the detritus of discredited or simply tired existing material (here: the type of postmodernism set in opposition to the national novel) confronts the raw social logic of a new environment. A new genre of this sort absorbs aspects of its predecessors and stretches to accommodate contemporary social conditions until it finally reaches the threshold at which something unprecedented arrives.

NOTES

1. On conversion narratives, see Rideout 58.

2. In the introduction to *Postmodernism*, Jameson rather infamously (in some circles) asserts, "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (ix).

3. For a thorough investigation of the significance of sacrificial motifs in realist and naturalist fiction at the turn of the last century, see Mizruchi. See Feldman for a description of the transformation of the sacrifice of Isaac in particular from a figure of persecution to militant nationalism.

4. But less so for Franzen personally, perhaps; he has published several essays on his love for birding. See, for example, Franzen, "My Bird Problem."

5. I anatomize several forms of the new literary internationalism in Irr.

WORKS CITED

Feldman, Yael. *Glory and Agony: Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010.

Franzen, Jonathan. *Freedom*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

———. "My Bird Problem." *New Yorker* (8 August 2005): 52–67.

Haslett, Adam. *Union Atlantic*. New York: Doubleday, 2009.

Irr, Caren. *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the 21st Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 2013.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

———. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 65–88.

Meyer, Phillipp. *American Rust*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2009.

Mizruchi, Susan. *The Science of Sacrifice: American Literature and Modern Social Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998.

Rideout, Walter. *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900–1954*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956.

THEODORE MARTIN

THE CURRENCY OF THE CONTEMPORARY

What exactly is contemporary about contemporary literature? Beneath the various strands of recent history that scholars of contemporary culture are currently working to unravel, a different sort of problem shadows the field. However we define the contemporary period, we must acknowledge that it is unlike any other kind of historical period—for the simple reason that, as something that is current, immediate, or ongoing, it is not yet historical. The contemporary is contemporary *to us*, meaning close to us in time, meaning always possibly too close. This ineluctable proximity makes historicism—that miracle of hindsight—a more delicate affair. At least since Hegel, for whom historical knowledge "always comes too late," the lack of critical distance that distinguishes the present has been taken as an obstacle to historical understanding (xxx). The *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel was particularly attuned to the present's limited self-perception. "What would the explorer of the present-day not give," he mused, "to have this [historical] perspective (or this sort of ability to go forward in time) making it possible to unmask and simplify our present life, in all its confusion—hardly comprehensible now because so overburdened with trivial acts and portents?" (36). What is meaningful about the present, according to Braudel, cannot be expected to be "comprehensible" to those *in* the present, burdened as we are by so many trivial occurrences and portentous

nonevents. This is why, Braudel concludes, our "conscious" understanding of our own moment is just as likely to be "delusory" (39). To prove the point, Braudel invokes Marx: " 'Men make their own history, but they do not know they are making it' " (39). The present, in other words, is a product of those who know not what they do. The moment that's right in front of our noses turns out to be too close to see so well after all.[1]

This widely accepted critique of the present's limited capacity for self-comprehension implicates all of us who study the literature and culture of the contemporary moment. And it demands a response. Yet we intrepid "explorers of the present-day" have spent precious little of our present time reflecting on the methodological challenges of the present. This short essay is an attempt to correct that: to think about what it is we do when we study the present, and what it means to do so under the increasingly ubiquitous sign of "the contemporary." In light of the assumptions we tend to make about immediacy and history, the notion of the contemporary may seem nothing but a temporary placeholder: a recognition of our inability to properly name or recognize the present. I propose we see it as something else. The aim of this essay is to read the historical concept of the contemporary within the historical context of its emergence—a context in which the problem of what Braudel calls "conscious history" becomes an increasingly conscious and reflexive part of the larger culture. This heightened mode of historical self-reflection constitutes both the historical backdrop and, I'll suggest, the literary form of the field we call, with ostensibly resigned vagueness, "contemporary literature."

The emergence of contemporary literature would seem to be the warp and woof of a cultural logic that encourages constant self-assessment and self-reflection. This is the culture of what Mark McGurl, following Ulrich Beck, calls "reflexive modernity"—the " 'compulsion for the manufacture, self-design, and self-staging' of a biography and indeed, for the obsessive 'reading' of that biography even as it is being written" (12). Reading a history that is still in the process of being written: this is also a pretty good definition of what we do when we study the contemporary. Yet the concept of the contemporary is as hedgy as it is historical, as opaque as it is self-aware. As such, it offers an unexpectedly complex response to its own reflexive cultural context. The contemporary, we will find, is less an injunction to study ourselves than a way of tracking what happens when we do so: what it means to think of ourselves as historical under particular historical

conditions. Well, what *does* it mean? The following pages seek to answer that question by reading the contemporary as a term that concatenates the discipline of literary studies, the context of late capitalism, and the imaginative work performed by fiction itself. Ultimately, I'll argue, the contemporary proves to be an especially vital way of both situating and unsettling the special brands of presentness and presentism through which late capitalism has, of late, made its presence felt.

A Condensed History of Contemporary History

The temporal phenomenon of "contemporaneity"—the relational fact of being "together in time"—is surely as old as time. The historical category of the contemporary, on the other hand, is a more recent invention. It is not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that "contemporary" acquires the meaning of "characteristic of the present period."[2] This shift in the word's meaning, which doesn't become commonplace until the middle of the twentieth century, has much to do with its relation to another indexical-turned-historical marker: "modern." After 1945, Raymond Williams observes, " 'modern' shifts its reference from 'now' to 'just now' or even 'then' "; "modern" becomes a thing of the past—specifically, the period of modernism —while " 'contemporary' may be contrasted for its presentness" (qtd. in Osborne, 2013 12).[3] The periodization of the modern goes hand in hand with the institutionalization of the contemporary. As Peter Osborne points out, the first center for contemporary art—the ICA in London—was opened in 1946, with other contemporary art museums following in the 1960s and flourishing in the '80s (2013 16, 219n2). At almost exactly the same time, the contemporary became a codified framework for literary studies, most explicitly with the founding of the journal *Contemporary Literature* in 1960—and more broadly, from the 1960s to the '80s, with the unprecedented attention given to the categories of "contemporary literature" and the "contemporary novel."[4]

The development of contemporary literature as an official field of study dovetails both historically and thematically with what McGurl has called the "Program Era" of American fiction. With the postwar development of the creative writing program, McGurl argues, American literature began to conceive of itself as something produced both in and for the university. The teaching of creative writing led to fiction that saw itself as written to be taught. For McGurl, "the metafictional reflexivity of so much postwar

fiction" is partly a result of "its production in and around a programmatically analytical and pedagogical environment" (47–48). But both the writing program and the writing it produced were part of a larger set of cultural transformations surrounding consumption, commodification, and social organization. This is the culture of reflexive modernity, a moment when the completed processes of capitalist modernity become "a matter of reflection across broad swaths of social life, indeed a matter of constant *worry* . . . structuring the life of 'free' persons as an endless process of self-monitoring —am I healthy? do people like me? have I found my voice?—and offering them a continuous stream of expert advice and consumer products designed to help them be who they want to be" (365). If what you teach under reflexive modernity is how to turn your personal experience into writing (how to find your voice), then what you study ought to be the very writing that you and others like you have produced. Thus does the very *field* of contemporary literature seem continuous with the program era, making it possible not just to write our experiences but to read that writing as expressive of the broader experience of a shared present.

Yet the category of "contemporary literature" works as much to complicate as to fulfill this reflexive imperative. Through it, individual self-consciousness and "metafictional reflexivity" shade into something slightly different: historical reflection. What period are we in? What defines our immediate present? These supplementary forms of self-reflection—rooted less in individual experience than in the abstract realms of the collective and the historical—are questions whose source and solution are, strangely, one and the same thing. The contemporary is both the question and the answer. It codifies our historical moment in order to authorize its study; yet to study it is inevitably to be returned to the question of what history the contemporary names, what its boundaries really are, whose moment we're actually talking about.

In this way, the contemporary carries us from McGurl back to Braudel—from the postwar desire for self-reflection to the conceptual limits of reflexive history.[5] For it is impossible not to notice that, as an official form of historical self-reflection, the idea of the contemporary is markedly deficient. The term is historically imprecise and temporally indeterminate. The contemporary doesn't so much delimit history as drift across it. The frustrations of this drift are what the art historian Richard Meyer has discovered in his

attempt to teach older conjunctures of contemporary art: "The students in the class understood the designation 'contemporary' differently than I had expected. Rather than referring to art since 1945, art since 1960, or even art since 1970, 'contemporary' meant to them the work of artists exhibiting today and in the immediate past" (12). The same disagreements shape literary studies, as Gordon Hutner observes: "For 40 years or more, the postwar period was still going on, and until the fall of the Berlin Wall, one could not say for sure whether the postwar era was even over, leading various anthologies to describe the contemporary as post-1950, -1960, -1970, or even post-1980" (420). As a drifting deictic rather than a fixed measure, the contemporary—product of a concrete historical context—is not necessarily a reliable way of historicizing.[6]

So the contemporary has its problems. It is a periodizing term that doesn't exactly periodize; a measure of history that fails to designate a specific literary or historical period. In this sense, the contemporary may merely be the best of a bad situation. Perhaps, as Amy Hungerford concludes, there is nothing to call ourselves *except* contemporary (418). Yet the term has a more positive, if paradoxical, set of implications. The contemporary is not merely a problem. It is better to think of it as a problematic: one that directs our attention to the abiding tensions between immediacy and history, between experience and explanation—and between the seemingly timeless category of the present and its particular fate, and particular urgency, in the more drastic circumstances of the present day.

Perpetuating the Present

The history of the late capitalist present can be understood, in part, as a history of changes to how we think about the present. Everyone knows that capitalism means that time is money. The time that is most like money is the time that is immediate, accessible, and manipulable: it is, in other words, present time. One of capitalism's central paradoxes is that it seeks both to extend the present (through constant production) and shrink it (through faster circulation). Starting in the second half of the twentieth century, this paradox has found itself realized in increasingly tangible ways: the rise in productivity that has occurred since the 1970s means that more is being produced faster, while the stagnation of wages in the same period means that many workers must work more, and more intensely, for less (while others

cannot work at all).[7] Such changes to the fabric and the framework of the present—in the experience of consumption, in the system of production, and in the organization of labor—are at the heart of the era we consider contemporary.

The effects of late capitalism have been leveled on the category of the present itself, turning it into something at once perpetual and precarious—sped up, overworked, underpaid, highly leveraged. The basic historical conditions of the present thus begin to alter our sense of what counts as present. This is what Fredric Jameson noticed when he diagnosed postmodern culture as a present that was at once harder to escape and harder to describe. "Our entire contemporary social system," he wrote, "has begun to live in a perpetual present," while at the same time, we become "incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience" (1984 143–44, 135). This extended yet obfuscated present was, for Jameson, a concrete consequence of the peculiar dynamics of late capitalism, which made the accelerating rhythms of production, consumption, and flexible accumulation feel like exactly the opposite: stasis and endlessness.

Attention to the accelerations and perpetuations of present time has remained a central feature of more recent histories of the present. Take Jonathan Crary's account of what he calls the "expanding, non-stop life-world" of "24/7" capitalism (8). In Crary's telling, the "uninterrupted operation of markets, information networks, and other systems" turn the present into "a principle of continuous functioning" (9, 8). Apparently, we'll sleep when we're dead. In the meantime, "since no moment, place, or situation now exists in which one can *not* shop, consume, or exploit networked resources, there is a relentless incursion of the non-time of 24/7 into every aspect of social or personal life" (30).

For Crary and Jameson, the consequences of late capitalism are visible in "an ever more congealed and futureless present" (Crary 35). This cultural symptom, however, doubles as a methodological dilemma. How does one historicize such a present? In the parallel diagnoses offered by Jameson and Crary, we find divergent ways of dealing with the methodological problem of the present's history. One word for that problem is, of course, "postmodernism"—which, in the complaints and frustrations that have marked the concept from its inception, offers one illustrative example of how unsatisfying it can be to periodize your own present. Indeed, post-

modernism even has a surprisingly tenuous place in *Postmodernism*. In the introduction to his seminal study, Jameson defends his use of the term in rather tepid terms: "I will argue that, for good or ill, we cannot *not* use it" (xxii). The double negative (an early version of the more famous first maxim of *A Singular Modernity*) suggests that postmodernism recognizes the limits of reflexive history even as it attempts to get beyond them; that it exemplifies the unavoidably inadequate, necessarily incomplete work of historicizing our immediate historical moment. Yet the inadequacies of a pseudo-periodizing term like "postmodernism" (which we can at best "not not use") may still be better than the alternative: abandoning the problem altogether and surrendering to the isolated experiences of everyday life. Crary at times appears to have chosen the latter option. The "pseudo-historical formulation of the present as a digital age," Crary argues, "perpetuates the illusion of a unifying and durable coherence to the many incommensurable constituents of contemporary experience" (36). Is the historical coherence of a period only an illusion? For Crary, the speed of twenty-first-century life guarantees that we will misread it: "In retrospect, what were most often identified as essential were temporary elements of larger constellations whose rates of change were variable and unpredictable" (38). Echoes of Braudel echoing Marx: the present—with its "transient flux of compulsory and disposable products" (39)—is ultimately too fleeting to get any historical perspective on. As it turns out, such perspective is sometimes lacking from the very examples that make up Crary's book. On a single page, for instance, Crary laments the dangers of "biometric and surveillance intrusion," of "toxic food and water," and of "the many bestselling guides that tell us . . . the 1,000 movies to see before we die" (60). Lost among so many transient, disposable trees, Crary appears to conclude that the forest no longer exists.[8] In the sleepless world of 24/7, the history or totality of the present becomes, if not an outright illusion, at least something of a dream.

Era Prone

Can we, then, dream ourselves a different way of grasping the history of the present? The question is one that echoes not only in the corridors of cultural criticism but in the forms of contemporary literature. Here, for instance, is how one of our foremost chroniclers of the debasements of self-consciousness pivots to confront a different sort of self-reflection. David

Foster Wallace begins his collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* with an extremely short short story titled "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life." Here is the whole thing:

> When they were introduced, he made a witticism, hoping to be liked. She laughed extremely hard, hoping to be liked. Then each drove home alone, staring straight ahead, with the very same twist to their faces.
>
> The man who'd introduced them didn't much like either of them, though he acted as if he did, anxious as he was to preserve good relations at all times. One never knew, after all, now did one now did one now did one. (0)

Here, in miniature, are many of Wallace's hallmark concerns: the inauthentic performances that underlie social relations; the self-defeating self-consciousness about those performances; and the alienation that ensues from self-consciousness. But the story frames these concerns in a surprising way: as the question of how the experience of social life described in the story relates to the economic history referred to by its title. In asking us to contemplate the mysterious relation between the title and the story, Wallace draws our attention to the apparent gap between observation and periodization, or what we can now recognize as the defining dilemma of contemporary history: the tension between the onslaught of everyday experience ("hoping to be liked," "driving home alone") and the systemic logic of the historical era.

But if the contemporary does open a gap between the individual and the historical, Wallace's story may appear simply to have fallen into it. There is, after all, no evidence of the postindustrial in "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life." The story seems almost perverse in its refusal to be about anything economic at all, in its suggestion that postindustrial life is a description not of the economy but of the personal exchanges we have at parties. Yet this perversity is simply a quality of the ideology of postindustrialism itself: the fantasy of having left behind—in the ostensible wake of financialized value and immaterialized labor—the crude concerns of the productive economy, if not the explanatory logic of capitalism as such. The defining characteristic of "postindustrial life," in other words, is precisely the disappearance of the economic and the systemic, and their replacement by the autonomous individual floating freely through a free market—where all one can do is *hope to be liked*, and exercise the freedom

to like or dislike other things. In Wallace's story, then, the absence of systemic understanding turns out to be the defining symptom of the system itself. The tension between Wallace's text and its title is a tension endemic to the ideology of postindustrialism. It is the dilemma of how to theorize the systemic logic of an age in an age when shared history—or the very idea of capitalism as a system—is what our postindustrial lives strive to convince us does not exist.

Wallace's story responds by insisting on the illusion of something else: the comforts of individuality. Up to its final lines, the story relies on the anonymity of generic nouns and pronouns, which produce pseudo-characters without specificity, empty shells of individuality ("they," "he," "she," "the man"). Yet the haunting last sentence switches from individualizing anonymity to a more paradoxical generalization: "One never knew . . . now did one." What does one never know? The obvious answer is: other people. But the statement collapses under its own irony: if everyone experiences the exact same sort of alienation—if the social anxiety of "preserving good relations at all times" produces "the very same twist" to everyone's "faces"—then one absolutely *does* know, doesn't one, what others are experiencing. The ironic revelation that comes at the end of "A Radically Condensed History" is that this story about individual isolation has ended up showing us that there is nothing individual about it. In Wallace's story, what one never knows is how the logic of individuality blinds us to the shared historical conditions that are, from a different perspective—that, say, of fiction itself—not at all impossible for us to know.

If the idea of postindustrialism does not directly appear in Wallace's story, that is because it does not directly appear in lived experience either; because it is not an experience at all, but *an idea* (one that can only flicker at the edges, or in the title, of an age otherwise ruled by experience and immediacy). "A Radically Condensed History of Postindustrial Life" is finally not so much about the particular features of deindustrialization as it is about the methodological problem of summing up the present itself. This is the problem that the story dubs "condensed history." The phrase cuts two ways. Condensation sounds like a contraction. But it is also a coming together. While Wallace's title seems to suggest an alarmingly abbreviated version of contemporary history, we may also hear it as a call for something else: for the need—as urgent as ever—to condense individuality into collectivity, to fuse our numberless, atomized personal experiences into the singular, abridged

form of the period marker. Responding to the antinomies of totality in the age of postindustrial individualism, Wallace's story makes condensation or periodization a fundamentally political act: one that contracts immediacy into abridgment in order to organize individuals into a shared era.[9]

Wallace's condensed history is thus not merely a description of the contemporary moment. It is also an explanation of what is at stake in the category of the contemporary itself. No meaningless placeholder, "contemporary" is the most common form of the condensation that allows us to imagine social life as a shared structure—in an age that would otherwise have us believe there are no longer such things as structures or societies. As the vanishing mediator between the individual and the economic (between "good relations" and "postindustrial life"), the contemporary is a crucial strategy for bringing the two together. It is an indispensable mode for conjuring collective history in a time of isolated self-reflection. If the contemporary continues to seem a sort of misrecognition, that is only because it does not necessarily rely on empirical observation; because it may not match up with the perceived evidence of everyday life. As in Wallace's story, the gap between present experience and historical perspective persists. To close it, finally, depends not on the positivism of lived experience but on a measure of imaginative or conceptual work. For Wallace, this is work that is not represented *in* the story precisely because it is performed *by* the story. Here we see, in short, how the conceptual task of the contemporary becomes bound up in the formal workings of contemporary fiction. In its permanently skewed, always distanced relation to what is more immediately visible in a text, literary form offers an indispensable starting point for thinking differently about the contemporary—for seeing it not as the life we are unknowingly immersed in, but as the form, the framework, or the *conception* of that life that stands to be collectively formulated.

Wallace's version of condensed history thus gives us one example of how the more familiar forms of postmodern fiction might be repurposed to confront the formal dilemma of contemporary history. Reflecting on the ways that we simultaneously *can* and *can't* know the late capitalist present, Wallace's story returns us to the question of historical error—of misperception or "delusion"—that Braudel so pointedly posed for us at the start. For Braudel, the thing to know about the contemporary is how little we can know about it. This is the "problem," Braudel suggests, that "Marx's formula pinpoints . . . but does not explain" (39): *they do not know that they are making*

history. Yet there is one last thing to know about Braudel's version of Marx's formula: it is itself a mistake. Few readers probably need reminding of those famous lines from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in which Marx says not that people do not know they are making history but that they do not make it "under circumstances chosen by themselves" (595).[10] I do not point out this stray adventure in misquoting simply to shore up the conventional wisdom that one should always double-check one's sources[11] (nor even to suggest that everyone ought to read their Marx). I mention it, instead, in order to show how Braudel's unwitting error helpfully complicates the idea of the present's unwitting history. It is possible to be mistaken even in the belief that we are bound to be mistaken about our present. The self-canceling error recalls not only Jameson's dialectical double-negative but also the paradox of Wallace's "Condensed History": what "one never knows" individually is the imaginatively shared perspective that makes the present known. This paradox of reflexive history—the unexplained, unexpected leap from individual mistakes to collective and conceptual understanding—is, today, the formation we tend to call "the contemporary."

All periodizing terms are fictions. The contemporary is no different.[12] But as a fiction that allows us to grasp the paradoxical dynamics of reflexive history—and one that remains intimately tied to the imaginative work of fiction itself—the contemporary emerges as a creative corrective to the mistakes that haunt the history of the present. The contemporary may be the coin of our current realm. Yet its value, I have been arguing, lies precisely in the questions it raises about currency and immediacy: about the lures of the ephemeral and the experiential under a regime of late capitalism. Describing the well-nigh literary process by which time becomes "the times"—by which a flood of fleeting moments is turned into a shared historical moment—the contemporary arrests that familiar sense of "the present as a swift-running stream" (Jameson, "Afterword" 281) or, you could say, resists the ideological pull of the current.

NOTES

1. On some of the particular "misrecognitions" that "pose a radical limit to a history of the present," see Clover 109. On the need to return to the recent history of postmodernism "to consider what might have been taking place under our noses for some time," see Hoberek 240.

2. The *OED* dates the first example of this meaning to 1866; its second example is from 1924. See "Contemporary," A4.

3. For more on the relation between "modern" and "contemporary," see Rabinow 1–5.

4. According to a Google Ngrams analysis.

5. These limits are an inescapable part of contemporary literary studies. As Hungerford points out, some scholars of post-1945 literature continue to "evince[e] discomfort at writing about the literature of the late century" (418).

6. That's not the only problem. On the contemporary as a "geopolitical" problem, see Osborne, *Anywhere* 25. On the "multeity, adventitiousness, and inequity" of the contemporary, see Smith 9. For a more wide-ranging and often whimsical account of the "untimeliness" of the contemporary, see Agamben. And for a much-needed critique of Agamben's "messianic" understanding of the contemporary, see Erber.

7. For a meticulous account of how late capitalism values and devalues people's time, see Boltanski and Chiapello.

8. This corresponds with Terry Smith's claim that "there is no longer any overarching explanatory totality that accurately accumulates and convincingly accounts for" the features of the contemporary (9).

9. Not coincidentally, *condensation* is also the term that Althusser uses to describe the process by which we become politically aware of the social contradictions that dominate and shape a given moment. See Althusser 87–128 and 161–218.

10. My sincere thanks to Jami Eaton for helping me compare the *Reader* translation with the original German.

11. Braudel's source in this case was not actually Marx but Levi-Strauss, who cites this apocryphal version in *Structural Anthropology*.

12. According to Peter Osborne, "the contemporary is an *operative* fiction" (*Anywhere* 23; emphasis in original).

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. "What Is the Contemporary?" *What Is an Apparatus?* Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009. 39–54.

Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Bewster. London: Verso, 1996.

Bewes, Timothy. "Introduction: Temporalizing the Present." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45.2 (Summer 2012): 159–64.

Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso, 2005.

Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. Trans. Sarah Matthews. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Clover, Joshua. "Value | Theory | Crisis." *PMLA* 127.1 (January 2012): 107–13.

"Contemporary, *adj.* and *n.*" *OED Online*. March 2014. Oxford UP.

Crary, Jonathan. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso, 2013.
Erber, Pedro. "Contemporaneity and Its Discontents." *diacritics* 41.1 (2013): 28–48.
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Philosophy of Right*. Trans. S. W. Dyde. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896.
Hoberek, Andrew. "Introduction: After Postmodernism." *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Andrew Hoberek. Spec. iss. of *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 233–47.
Hungerford, Amy. "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary." *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 410–19.
Hutner, Gordon. "Historicizing the Contemporary: A Response to Amy Hungerford." *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (Spring-Summer 2008): 420–24.
Jameson, Fredric. "Afterword: A Note on Literary Realism." *A Concise Companion to Realism*. Ed. Matthew Beaumont. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 279–89.
———. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. New York: New P, 1998. 111–25.
———. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.
Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton, 1978. 594–617.
McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
Meyer, Richard. *What Was Contemporary Art?* Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2013.
Osborne, Peter. *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London: Verso, 2013.
———. *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*. London: Verso, 1995.
Rabinow, Paul. *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2008.
Smith, Terry. "The Contemporaneity Question." *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*. Eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008. 1–19.
Wallace, David Foster. *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999.

MICHAEL W. CLUNE

MAKE IT VANISH

How can you tell when we've entered a new period? The past starts to look different. We know this from T. S. Eliot: "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (1093).

The past has started to look different lately. For example, a surprising affinity between Hannah Arendt and Andy Warhol has emerged. A brief rehearsal of their positions will reveal the new obviousness of their intellectual kinship.

Arendt advocated an object-centered aesthetics. "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (52). Arendt's understanding of the process by which subjects are inserted into the social world by way of objects recapitulates and extends the fundamental dynamic of recognition. Philosophers from Hegel to Charles Taylor have shown how I become a *social individual* by identifying with the object you see me as.

Arendt believed this object-oriented public world is threatened by the "forces of intimate life," modes of intensely subjective experience erosive of the things of the common world (50). She feared the dissolution of the

liberal individual into "the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer recognizable" (51). To counter this dissolution, the wild, visibility-sapping forces of experience must be "transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance" (50).

Andy Warhol did just this. His artistic practice generated "icons of publicity"—exactly the kind of publicity Arendt thinks we need: objects that found public spaces. Every trace of subjectivity has been scrubbed from the immaculate surfaces of Warhol's Marilyns and Maos. Fredric Jameson calls them affectless, deathly (8–10). But why? Surely Jameson wouldn't insult a carpenter by calling his table affectless? Warhol canvases are not intended to be expressions of feeling; they are things. They exist between us, like tables.

After Warhol, the artifacts of popular culture are occasions not for private desires but for public recognition. "That's a Brillo Box." "That's Michael Jackson." And once Warhol retooled it, the culture industry became a factory for producing weapons against subjectivity, sandbags for shoring up the public world, the objective world, against the tidal waves of "radical subjectivity."

Warhol's works accomplish the two primary tasks Arendt set out for art. First, his practice endows the fugitive images of popular culture with *permanence*. "Because of their outstanding permanence," Arendt writes, "works of art are the most intensely worldly of all tangible things" (51). Who today would know what a Brillo Box looks like without Warhol?

Second, Warhol removed popular culture's implicit threat to a social world founded on objecthood. It is important to remember that Warhol's way was not, after all, the inevitable path for art working with the materials of popular culture. Frank O'Hara outlined an alternative path in his paean to Larry Rivers's art, celebrating paintings and drawings that drag the icons of the public world through the most intense, idiosyncratic subjectivity, producing barely recognizable George Washingtons or packs of Camels. "This is the opposite of pop art," O'Hara intoned, thinking of Warhol (514). O'Hara and Rivers were almost alone. As Michael Fried has argued, instead of pursuing an absorption that makes objects disappear in experience, the dominant artists of the 1960s through the '90s crafted objects that reduced experience to the registration of objecthood.

Leslie Fiedler, applying the term "Post Modern" to literature in a 1970 essay, equated this new style with writers' new interest in the genres of

popular fiction. "The forms of the novel which they prefer are . . . at the furthest possible remove from art and avant-garde, the greatest distance from inwardness, analysis, and pretention; and, therefore, immune to lyricism" (qtd. in Hoberek 342). The apotheosis of postmodern literary object-mongering might be Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, where that venerable organ of subjectivity—first-person narration—becomes so clogged with brand names, body parts, and pop song titles it actually begins to resemble the ultimate citizen of the society of recognition—a *talking thing*.

Continental philosophy is usually a couple decades behind fiction, and so we are only now getting the apotheosis of postmodern object-mongering theory, in "object-oriented ontology."[1] The Ellis/object-oriented ontology dyad repeats in farce the tragic Beckett/deconstruction dyad of a previous generation. De Man emphasized the materiality of language, the fact that every utterance is an object between writer and reader, immune to the subjectivity of each, and lying between them like a table. Beckett's trilogy anticipates this point, by showing the narrator losing control of the alien sentences chugging out of his pen according to unaccountable mechanical principles. Beckett's prose is thoroughly thingly, a pudding that works, a cherished object lesson in the objectivity of art . . .

. . . or is it? Perhaps Beckett's prose has begun to change. Reading *Molloy* now, it seems to operate according to principles *exactly opposite* to those De Man identified. Maybe we might find symptoms of our new period in this change. Consider one of Molloy's more peculiar fantasies. He tells us that he imagines blackening the sheet of paper on which he is writing. He imagines "fill[ing] in the holes of words till all is blank and flat" (16).

This desire for writing to become an object makes vividly clear the fact that writing here is *not* an object. Writing—first person writing, writing that says "I"—operates in this novel as the medium of a total, object-devouring subjectivity.[2] The writer—Molloy—cannot tell if he is perceiving, remembering, or imagining. He cannot tell if a given object is inside or outside him. The writing makes the identification of a boundary or limit to his experience impossible.

Molloy also teaches us something else about subjectivity. Professors and critics of literature have *worked toward* Arendt and Warhol by disseminating slanderous lies about subjectivity. Consider the ubiquitous critical lies which equate subjectivity with individualism, with the Cartesian subject, with *homo economicus*, with the sovereign self. Through these lies, several

generations of critics have tried to convince us that art that attempts to project or express or represent experience—art that like Beckett's makes experience present by showing how it dissolves the world—is reactionary, capitalist, retrograde.

And yet as Arendt herself knew and wrote, not only is "radical subjectivity" utterly inassimilable to liberal individuality, it destroys individuality. Individuality depends on binding experience to a place in the social world. Social life depends upon the binding of experience to a recognizable object—one's face in a mirror, oneself as another sees it. And strong measures are needed to prevent experience from collapsing in from the outside. Individuals must be arranged around a table or a Warhol; individuals must be subject to objectifying surveillance. Subjectivity loosed from objecthood is the constant threat to liberal individualism. Arendt saw this more clearly than her followers.

As for the claim that intense, private, antisocial subjectivity is an artifact of capitalism. . . . That's more complicated, more *dialectical* even. But recall that Arendt described Karl Marx as the prophet of radical subjectivity (153). We need always to remind ourselves of the falseness of the intuition that equates subjectivity with the individual, and that assumes that the only route to the collective is through the objective. Just as recognition is a perceptual event as well as a social one, to make things unrecognizable can serve an aesthetic program as well as a social program. In fact, it is in my view the *fusion* of these programs in recent art that constitutes the historical novelty of our emerging period. To create forms that evade perceptual and conceptual categories is a central aim of much post-Romantic art. But a number of recent artists and writers understand this aesthetic effort as the means of eroding a recognition-based social order and intuiting the dynamics of a postrecognition collective. *This* is the kind of art Arendt feared, the kind she saw coming, the kind she and Andy Warhol, in their different ways, worked against.

Today's most vital art, today's most *revolutionary* art, attacks objects. "Make it vanish" is the motto. Its means are those of the transmission of private vision: absorption, authenticity, intensity. Its utopia is a community not founded on recognition, a world where subjectivity encounters no border, no seam. The immortality it desires is not Arendt's permanence, not the survival of an object across chronological time. The new artistic

immortality pits the survival of subjective intensities against the operation of habit, which turns time into space, lived experience into objects.

Beckett makes it vanish. Nabokov makes it vanish. O'Hara makes it vanish. Plath makes it vanish. Thomas Bernhard makes it vanish. Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* pulls the world after it into unrecognizability. Kathy Acker's pirate utopia crucifies the eyes of the watchers. Follow the predecessors of the present into our new period. Rap makes it vanish, with the ubiquitous refrain "you can't see me" vibrating from a million tinted windows. The black box at the center of Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* is perhaps as close as we can get to an icon of invisibility. Academic criticism attuned to the aesthetics of antirecognition includes Daniel Tiffany's explorations of lyric obscurity, and Rachel Greenwald Smith's description of the unrecognizable emotions created by a new avant-garde.

Perhaps inevitably, radical subjectivity's dominant form is the narrative of private experience. Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, Ben Lerner's *10:04*, Karl Knausgaard's *My Struggle*, and Bennett Sims's *A Questionable Shape* are all powerful recent examples. These narratives of private experience should be distinguished from the type of narrative Walter Benn Michaels has recently described as "ethical kitsch" (923). The latter traffics in *recognizable emotions*—often elicited by the reliable triggers of Holocaust or slavery imagery. Such emotions are *introjected objects*. Writers like Knausgaard and Sims, on the other hand, fashion unrecognizable modes of feeling and experience. Their works enclose the antimatter of radical subjectivity. I will conclude with a brief description of some periodizing features of one of this genre's most accomplished texts, Tao Lin's fictionalized memoir, *Taipei*.

In the following passage Paul, a Taiwanese-American writer living in New York, reflects on Taipei, a city he's visited periodically throughout his life.

> Because his Mandarin wasn't fluent enough for conversations with strangers—and he wasn't close to his relatives, with whom attempts at conversation were brief and non-advancing and often koan-like, ending usually with one person looking away, ostensibly for assistance, then leaving—he'd be preemptively estranged, secretly unfriendable. The unindividualized, shifting mass of everyone else would be a screen, distributed throughout the city, onto which he'd project the movie of his uninterrupted

> imagination. Because he'd appear to, and be able to pretend he was, but never actually be a part of the mass, maybe he'd gradually begin to feel a kind of needless intimacy, not unlike being in the same room as a significant other and feeling affection without touching or speaking. An earnest assembling of the backup life he's sketched and constructed the blueprints and substructures for (during the average of six weeks per year, spread throughout his life, that he'd been in Taiwan) would begin, at some point, after which, months or years later, one morning, he would sense the independent organization of a second, itinerant consciousness—lured here by the new, unoccupied structures—toward which he'd begin sending the data of his sensory perception. The antlered, splashing, water-treading land animal of his first consciousness would sink to some lower region, in the lake of himself, where he would sometimes descend in sleep and experience its disintegrating particles—and furred pieces, brushing past—in dreams, as it disappeared into the pattern of the nearest functioning system (15–16).

This extraordinary passage presents, through ekphrasis, the image of an ideal artform. Aligned with ekphrastic practice from Keats through Proust, Lin, in creating a picture of an ideal artform—here, a phantasmatic movie/blueprint/consciousness receptacle—presents an image that concentrates and projects the ambition driving his actual artform: the novel *Taipei*. Moments of ekphrasis are always useful occasions for reflecting on art's desire—on what art wants to be and to do. Attending to the dynamics of Lin's movie/blueprint/consciousness receptacle gives us the opportunity to discern the direction of our new period's art.

1. Art begins with the failure of intersubjective communication, and the collapse of Arendt's public world. "Attempts at conversation were brief and non-advancing and often koan-like, ending usually with one person looking away . . ."

2. With the failure of intersubjective contact, individuality leaches out of the social world, which becomes an "unindividualized, shifting mass."[3]

3. With the breakdown of individuality, experience—consciousness—becomes separable from any given material structure, and attachable to any given material structure: "a second, itinerant consciousness." This is precisely what Arendt feared. Consciousness is disembedded from individuality, and therefore from subject position, and therefore from social

stratification, and therefore . . . This consciousness is the phantasmal prototype of new modes of community and experience. Today we witness its emergence as a space of political possibility; its postobjective, postindividualist politics remain to be developed.

4. The first person narrative novel becomes a technique of liberating consciousness. A fantastic, anti-Arendtian artwork transfers consciousness from Lin to the "new, unoccupied structures" of the city. He begins "sending the data of his sensory perception" into this structure. This artwork is not an object, but a means of transferring consciousness, a wire through which experience moves. This novel, notable among reviewers for the ubiquity of representations of social media technology within its pages, in fact imagines itself as a technology of asociality.

5. Lin's actual novel approximates this ideal artwork. He attempts the project Proust describes when he writes that artists enable us "to see the universe through the eyes of another" (732). The novel consists of the careful, painstaking description of the narrator's every perception, sensation, thought; each movement is rendered in detail, along with any stray fancy or fantasy that attaches to it. Readers have noted—and sometimes resisted—the way that the narrator's consciousness seems to enter and colonize their own. (See, for example, Lydia Kiesling's review.)

This *transfer of subjectivity* is not like conversation; it takes no note of the objective boundary between individual subjects. *Taipei* is, in J. S. Mill's terms, a lyric novel, where the narrator's speech is not heard but "overheard" (226). Lin's novel is not a depiction of intersubjectivity, it is a form of *radical subjectivity*.

Through this new art, experience nibbles away at institutions, objects, individuals, old politics, modernism, postmodernism. . . . The world goes inside.

For many of those who have been taught to associate consciousness with individuality, to equate subjectivity with identity, and to understand experience as a product of the self, this new literary period will be hard to grasp. Why, such readers ask, are we now witnessing the takeover of ambitious literature by first-person memoiristic writing? Many can only see this development as a step backward. A final example from *Taipei*, concerning literature's most basic topic, will illustrate the novelty of the consciousness that opens here.

Death in postmodernism, as Jameson implied in his periodizing study, signals the fusing of the categories of person and object. Warhol's massive gleaming objects, as we noted, are for Jameson the artistic emblems of postmodern death. Modern death, by contrast, and in the massively influential formulation of Martin Heidegger, is the event that guarantees the authenticity of the individual. The prospect of my own death, for Heidegger, peels my consciousness away from the comforting intersubjective zone of my culture and society, and provides me with the terrifying/exhilarating chance to realize my individual freedom.

The representation of death tends to clarify the trajectory of a period's relation to experience. Which direction is experience headed? Postmodern death is the transformation of experience into an object. Modern death is the experience of the self. Death in *Taipei* is experience liberated from the self.[4]

At a moment early in the novel, the protagonist, Paul, hails a cab to take him home. Once deposited on the pavement, however, he "didn't recognize anything," even though he notes that "the address is correct" (34). His experience minutely registers the sensible particulars of the scene. He even knows that this scene is the exterior of his apartment building; he even understands that the address he sees is the address of his apartment building. But he doesn't recognize it. And he realizes that he hasn't been recognizing things for some time. Paul compares this separation of recognition from experience to death.

"His conscious, helpless, ongoing lack of recognition—his shrinking, increasingly vague context—seemed exactly and boringly like how it would feel to die, or to have died" (34).

Death is not the cessation of experience; it is the cessation of recognition. Recognition, as the tradition stretching from Hegel through Arendt shows us, is the dynamic by which experience becomes anchored to a self. I recognize myself in the mirror. I recognize the experience of my looking in the mirror's eye-shaped objects. I recognize myself as the person you greet me as. I recognize this apartment building as mine. Recognition binds experience to a social place in the world. Recognition is the compromise between experience and objects.

Today's literature severs that bond; today's writing breaks that compromise.

On *Taipei*'s back cover, Bret Easton Ellis, ultimate postmodern object-monger, writes: "With *Taipei* Tao Lin becomes the most interesting prose stylist of his generation."

Ellis's blurb is unusual in the genre. He's not recognizing himself.

Taipei works.

NOTES

1. For two different assessments of the weakness of Object-Oriented Ontology, see Brown and Heise.

2. See my "Bernhard's Way" for a fuller reading of Beckett's novel along these lines.

3. In a surprising move, Lin describes the ethnic Chinese inhabitants of the city by using the resources of a racist, orientalist discourse, which since De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* has presented Chinese populations in exactly these terms. But where De Quincey and his descendants opposed the mass of Chinese to the properly individualized socius of the European, the constitution of this mass is in Lin the condition for the emergence of a collective subjectivity. While Lin, like De Quincey, notes his separation from the mass—he could "never actually be part of the mass"—this separation is soon erased by artistic means.

4. The trajectory this sequence traces—Postmodern, Modern, Make It Vanish—acknowledges that modernism is in some mysterious sense closer historically to us than postmodernism. The logic remains to be articulated, but its symptoms are everywhere. See, for example, Benjamin Lytal's comparison of *Taipei* to a "modernist masterpiece" or Adam Wilson's comparison of my *White Out* to "a lost modernist novel."

WORKS CITED

Acker, Kathy. *Empire of the Senseless*. New York: Grove, 1989.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 1958. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. New York: Grove, 1956.

Brown, Nathan. "The Nadir of OOO." *Parrhesia* 17 (2013): 67–71.

Clune, Michael W. "Bernhard's Way." *Nonsite* 9 (Spring 2009).

De Quincey, Thomas. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater.* 1821. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001.

Ellis, Brett Easton. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Fried, Michael. Introduction. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. Trans. by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY P, 2010.

Heise, Ursula. "Review of Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*." *Critical Inquiry* (Fall 2014).

Hoberek, Andrew. "Posmodernism and Modernization." *Twentieth Century Literature* 57.3–4 (Fall-Winter 2011): 341–58.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.

Kiesling, Lydia. "Modern Life Is Rubbish." *The Millions* (5 June 2013). Web.

Knausgaard, Karl Ove. *My Struggle*. Vol. 1. New York: FSG, 2013.

Lerner, Ben. *10:04*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2014.

Lin, Tao. *Taipei*. New York: Vintage, 2013.

Lytal, Benjamin. "G-Chat Is a Noble Pursuit." *New York Observer* (4 June 2013). Web.

Michaels, Walter Benn. "Forgetting Auschwitz: Jonathan Littell and the Death of a Beautiful Woman." *American Literary History* 25.4 (Winter 2013): 915–930.

Mill, J. S. "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." *Autobiography and Literary Essays*. Vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981.

O'Hara, Frank. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Donald Allen. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time*. 1913–1927. Vol. 1. Trans. D. J. Enright, Terrance Kilmartin, and C. K. Scott Moncrieff. New York: Everyman's Library, 2001.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. 1980. New York: Picador, 2004.

Sims, Bennett. *A Questionable Shape*. Columbus: Two Dollar Radio, 2013.

Smith, Rachel Greenwald. "Organic Shrapnel: Affect and Aesthetics in September 11 Fiction." *American Literature* 83.1 (Winter 2011): 153–74.

Tiffany, Daniel. *Infidel Poetics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Intuitionist*. New York: Anchor, 1999.

Wilson, Adam. "A Year in Reading." *The Millions* (14 December 2013). <http://www.themillions.com/2013/12/a-year-in-reading-adam-wilson.html>.

URSULA K. HEISE

SLOW-FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

Slow is good. Fast is bad. Or so it would seem when you listen to environmentalists, or more generally to contemporary writers and thinkers on the political left. Over the last two decades, slowness has become a master trope for the resistance to capitalism, globalization, standardization, mass production, new media, and other new technologies. Against speed, convenience, instant availability, consumption, disposability, planned obsolescence, fashion turnover, and twitteresque brevity, advocates of slow movements hold out deceleration, deliberateness, sustainability, reuse, reappropriation, recycling, and deep engagement as cultural alternatives with political consequences. Most prominent among these is Carlo Petrini, who initiated the Slow Food Movement in 1986 to resist the spread of MacDonald-type fast food restaurants in Italy and beyond. Over the last ten years, it has been joined by initiatives to promote Slow Gardening, Slow Parenting, Cittaslow (Slow Cities), Slow Fashion, Slow Design, Slow Art, Slow Photography, Slow Media, and Slow Reading. Carl Honoré's *In Praise of Slow* (2004; renamed *In Praise of Slowness* in later editions) first coined the term "Slow Movement" to characterize this heterogeneous set of endeavors: "The Slow philosophy is not about doing everything at a snail's pace. It's about seeking to do everything at the right speed. . . . Doing everything as well as possible, instead of

as fast as possible. It's about quality over quantity in everything from work to food to parenting" (15).

As this statement shows, "slowness" functions as a trope for initiatives that may or may not have to do with the experience of time itself: an emphasis on local production and political engagement, sustainable manufacture and consumption, reflective rather than excessively active lifestyles, the return to predigital methods of artistic creation, deep engagement rather than superficial consumption of art and information. But of course, the focus on slowness as a central metaphor is hardly arbitrary, given the persistent association of modernization with speed. F. T. Marinetti's "Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909) dismissed the past and proclaimed that "Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the realms of the Absolute, for we have already created infinite, omnipresent speed" (14). The planned obsolescence of industrial production in the 1950s, Alvin Toffler's description of the "future shock" that leaves entire generations alienated from their own social and cultural context due to rapid technological innovation (1970), and the contemporary emphasis on the fast processing of large numbers of short texted messages, tweets, and news blips have all foregrounded the link between acceleration and economic, technological, and cultural modernization.

But the emphasis on slowness as a countertrope is more recent. Richard Gregg popularized the notion of "voluntary simplicity," derived from several traditions of spiritual and secular thought, as a counterpoint to modernization in the 1930s (*The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*, 1936), an idea that was echoed throughout the 1970s, up to and including the publication of Duane Elgin's *Voluntary Simplicity* (1981). German-British economist E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1973) anticipated some of the core arguments of the Slow Movement by means of a different metaphor when he championed small "appropriate technologies" against the idea that "bigger is better." Against the complexity, the largeness, the speed of modernization, the simple, the small, the slow—different metaphors underwriting similar modes of cultural and political resistance.

Environmentalist discourse has helped to generate and propagate such metaphors, sometimes appropriating them for ecological arguments. Ecoactivists have often complained over the last fifty years that the electoral, economic, and news cycles of contemporary democracies are too fast-paced to relate meaningfully to long-term ecological processes that involve re-

source exhaustion, pollution, species extinction, and, most recently, climate change. We are fast, but nature is slow. Our activities outpace or speed up natural processes: we consume in two centuries fossil fuels that it took millions of years to generate; we increase extinction rates orders of magnitude beyond the rate at which evolutionary processes can replenish the diversity of species; we heat up the atmosphere far more rapidly than in earlier periods of planetary warming and cooling. Phenomena like these prompted the atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen and the ecologist Eugene Stoermer to declare a new geological age, the Anthropocene, that putatively started around two hundred years ago—an age in which human impact itself has become the dominant shaping force on the planet (Crutzen and Stoermer, "The Anthropocene"; Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind").

But humans' pervasive transformations of nature introduce an odd ambiguity into the cultural meanings of fast and slow. We are fast, but nature is slow—or is it the reverse? Are our institutions and political processes too slow-paced to keep up with the rapid ecological transformations our own activities have triggered? Populations and species of plants and animals are disappearing fast in global processes that might in the end undercut our own bases for survival, leading some environmentalists to warn of human extinction as the end-point of such developments (Leakey and Lewin). The atmosphere might warm and the oceans acidify too fast for us to either mitigate the changes or adapt without large-scale human suffering and casualties. Toxins spread too far, too fast, and in too many unprecedented combinations for us to foresee, let alone prevent the human health consequences. Putting it this way reverses the temporal perspective: nature in the Anthropocene evolves dynamically, changing at geologically and evolutionarily unprecedented speed, whereas our social institutions and political processes lumber along at their usual glacial pace.

Apocalyptic storytelling templates that have commonly framed environmentalist discourse from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the Meadows et al. *Limits to Growth* (1972) to the climate change documentary *The 11th Hour* (2007) derive their urgency from this temporal lens. All of them foreground limited time intervals that are still available to mitigate the catastrophic changes occurring in nature before an apocalyptic event will change the status quo irreversibly. The three versions of the Meadowses' report make this particularly clear: *The Limits to Growth, Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future* (1992), and

Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update (2004) all reiterate the same temporal formula: global society has a time window of one to two decades available before irreversible collapse. This assessment remains unchanged even though the last forecast followed thirty-two years after the first one. Climate change debates over the last decade have followed a similar pattern, usually pinpointing an interval of approximately thirty years to reform the global energy regime before atmospheric changes might take on catastrophic proportions.

So fast is good, and slow is not just bad but catastrophic where the reaction to current ecological crises is concerned. In a further twist, some prominent portrayals of such crises represent the progress of disaster itself as slow—with that slowness itself an obstacle to effective political action. From Paul and Anne Ehrlich's famous metaphorization of species extinction as rivets that are popped from a plane one after the other until the plane becomes incapable of flight, to Rob Nixon's recent emphasis on the "slow violence" that environmental degradation inflicts on the world's poor, environmental writers have emphasized the unfolding of crises that are hard to perceive and understand by the public at large. "Slowness" in these accounts by and large means "invisibility" rather than gradualness, since the same authors also take great pains to emphasize that the response to such environmental depredation and degradation can brook no delay.

Given these ambiguities, the newbie environmentalist may be forgiven for wondering what the appropriate response is to the slowness of natural processes and the accelerated rhythms of global modernity—or is it the rapidity of ecological transformations and the foot-dragging response of political actors? If the high-modernist cultural imaginary in Western societies has tended to associate modernization with measurable velocity and acceleration, modernism's countertropes use speed and slowness in self-contradictory ways that reflect a broader postmodernist uncertainty about the temporality which we inhabit.

The introduction of the Anthropocene concept has deepened this temporal conundrum. This new epoch would only take up two hundred years to date—far too short an interval for a respectable geological era. For Crutzen and Stoermer, the change of nomenclature shines a light on humanity's rapidly progressing impact on the planetary environment: another variation on the theme of human collectives acting too fast for a natural world where

change normally takes hundreds of millions of years to unfold. But if this geological perspective invites us to put human activities into the context of prehuman deep history, the Anthropocene has often been taken up as a way of thinking optimistically about the future rather than the past of the environment. As the biologists Peter Kareiva and Joseph Mascaro, the geographer Erle Ellis, and the science writer Emma Marris argue in a *New York Times* op-ed piece: "The Anthropocene . . . is the stage on which a new, more positive and forward-looking environmentalism can be built. This is the Earth we have created, and we have a duty, as a species, to protect it and manage it with love and intelligence. It is not ruined. It is beautiful still, and can be even more beautiful, if we work together and care for it" (Marris). The environmental blogger Andy Revkin has echoed this sentiment in a blog entry entitled "Embracing the Anthropocene":

> One clear reality is that for a long time to come, Earth is what we choose to make of it, for better or worse.
>
> Taking full ownership of the Anthropocene won't be easy. The necessary feeling is a queasy mix of excitement and unease. . . .
>
> That's a very different sensation than, say, mourning the end of nature.
>
> It's more a celebration, in a way—a deeper acceptance of our place on the planet.

In approaches such as these, a term that was meant as a new take on the historical relationship between nature and humanity becomes a trope for a future that has already started. Small wonder, given this context, that environmental writers have begun to use tropes derived from science fiction, as journalist and activist Bill McKibben does in his book *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2010). We no longer live on Earth as we once knew it, he argues, because climate change has already transformed the planet from the ground up. To get ourselves used to the idea that "business as usual" will no longer ensure our well-being or even our survival, he invites his readers to imagine themselves inhabiting a different planet, Eaarth rather than Earth—a planet that shares a good deal with their home world but is also different from it in crucial ways.[1]

Science fiction properly speaking, the literary genre that most system-

atically concerns itself with human futures, has also registered this shift in our imagination of the future from things to come to things that have already happened, though we may not have fully realized it yet. Fredric Jameson, one of the most prominent theorists of the genre, points out that the function of science-fictional futures is to create a critical distance from the present:

> The most characteristic SF does not seriously attempt to imagine the "real" future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come. It is this present moment—unavailable to us for contemplation in its own right because the sheer quantitative immensity of objects and individual lives it comprises is untotalizable and hence unimaginable, and also because it is occluded by the density of our private fantasies as well as of the proliferating stereotypes of a media culture that penetrates every remote zone of our existence—that upon our return from the imaginary constructs of SF is offered to us in the form of some future world's remote past, as if posthumous and as though collectively remembered. . . . SF thus enacts and enables a structurally unique "method" for apprehending the present as history. (288)

Science fiction novels set in far futures, from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) to Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985), George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* (1987), and Sheri S. Tepper's *The Family Tree* (1997) all demonstrate the perspicacity of Jameson's observation, in that all of them feature future characters who explicitly reflect on the histories from which their societies emerged.

But from the cyberpunk of the 1980s onward, science fiction novelists have been less keen to venture into far futures and have focused more on portraying worlds "twenty minutes into the future," as the subtitle of the television series *Max Headroom* put it in 1987. The most recent trilogy of novels by erstwhile cyberpunker William Gibson—*Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007), and *Zero History* (2010)—exemplifies this presentification of the future even more explicitly than his earlier works from the 1980s and 1990s. Living in a society that is barely distinguishable from the present day, some of the trilogy's characters comment explicitly on the way in which the future has invaded the present:

> Of course . . . we have no idea, now, of who or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that our grandparents had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which "now" was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our grandparents' have insufficient "now" to stand on. We have no future because our present is too volatile. . . . We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment's scenarios. Pattern recognition. (Gibson, 2003 57)

Gibson himself put it even more succinctly by claiming that "the future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed yet" (Kennedy). Gibson no doubt meant technological advances currently available in the global north that are not yet accessible to the majority of the world population, from sanitary installations and new forms of therapy and medication to refrigeration and computers. But one could also take his statement the other way around: some of the consequences of the North's march toward the future—pollution, toxic waste, economic exploitation—are not distributed evenly either. However one takes it, Gibson's statement points to the contemporary sense of a future that has taken over the present, which therefore can no longer develop any clear vision of a future different from itself. It is this characteristic uncertainty about what the future means that structures the ambiguities of fast and slow in contemporary environmentalist discourse and beyond. Modernity sped toward the future; antimodernism sought to hit the brakes; postmodernism watches itself riding toward the future, not knowing whether it is moving in time lapse or slow motion.

NOTE

1. For a different appropriation of science fiction strategies by environmentalists, see Alan Weisman's bestseller *The World Without Us* (2007), which explores how natural and built environments would change if humans were to disappear from the Earth for an unspecified reason.

WORKS CITED

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*. Ed. Alex MacDonald. Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 2003.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Crutzen, Paul J. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature* 415 (3 January 2002): 23.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. "The 'Anthropocene.'" *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18.

Ehrlich, Paul, and Anne Ehrlich. *Extinction: The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of Species*. New York: Ballantine, 1981.

Elgin, Duane. *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. Rev. ed. New York: Quill, 1998.

Gibson, William. *Pattern Recognition*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

———. *Spook Country*. New York: Putnam, 2007.

———. *Zero History*. New York: Putnam, 2010.

Gregg, Richard B. *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1936.

Honoré, Carl. *In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement Is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.

Kennedy, Pagan. "William Gibson's Future Is Now." *New York Times* (15 January 2012).

Leakey, Richard, and Roger Lewin. *The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind*. New York: Anchor, 1995.

Marinetti, F. T. "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism." Trans. Doug Thompson. *Critical Writings*. Ed. Günter Berghaus. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. 11–17.

Marris, Emma, Peter Kareiva, Joseph Mascaro, and Erle C. Ellis. "Hope in the Age of Man." *New York Times* (7 December 2011).

McKibben, Bill. *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. New York: Holt, 2010.

Meadows, Donella, Dennis L. Meadows, and Jørgen Randers. *Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future*. Post Mills, VT: Chelsea Green, 1992.

Meadows, Donnella, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New York: Universe, 1972.

Meadows, Donella, Jørgen Randers, and Dennis L. Meadows. *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2004.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.

Petrini, Carlo. *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Revkin, Andy. "Embracing the Anthropocene." *Dot Earth. New York Times* (20 May 2011). <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/>.

Schumacher, Ernst Friedrich. *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Blond and Briggs, 1973.

Tepper, Sheri S. *The Family Tree*. New York: Avon, 1997.

Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Random House, 1970.

Turner, George. *The Sea and Summer*. London: Faber, 1987.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

MICHAEL W. CLUNE

Michael W. Clune's books of criticism include *American Literature and the Free Market* (2010) and *Writing Against Time* (2013). His first work of creative nonfiction, *White Out*, was named a Best Book of 2013 by the *New Yorker*, NPR, and other venues; his latest book, *Gamelife*, appeared in 2015 from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He is a professor of English at Case Western Reserve University.

SAMUEL COHEN

Samuel Cohen teaches courses in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature and culture at the University of Missouri. He is series editor of the New American Canon: The Iowa Series in Contemporary Literature and Culture and coeditor of *JMMLA*. He is the author of *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* and coeditor (with Lee Konstantinou) of *The Legacy of David Foster Wallace*.

AMY J. ELIAS

Amy J. Elias is professor of English at the University of Tennessee. Her publications include S*ublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (2001), which won the George and Barbara Perkins Book Prize from the International Society for the Study of Narrative; *The Planetary Turn: Relationality, and Geoaesthetics in the 21st Century* (coedited with Christian Moraru, 2015); and *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* (coedited with Joel Burges, 2016). She chaired the founding board of ASAP, the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present (artsofthepresent.org); hosted the association's launch conference; and serves as founding coeditor of *ASAP/Journal*. She is finishing a book titled "Dialogue at the End of the World."

MARY ESTEVE

Mary Esteve is associate professor of English at Concordia University in Montreal and a founding member of Post•45. Author of *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (2003) and numerous essays, her current book project addresses the idea and representation of happiness in the postwar era.

JASON GLADSTONE

Jason Gladstone is instructor of English at the University of Colorado Boulder. His work has appeared in *Contemporary Literature*, *Criticism*, and *Twentieth-Century Literature*. He is currently completing a book titled "Lines in the Dirt: Postmodernism and the Failure of Technology."

DANIEL GRAUSAM

Daniel Grausam teaches in the Department of English Studies at Durham University (UK). He is the author of *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War* (2011) and coeditor (with Steven Belletto) of *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment* (2012). His current project is an interdisciplinary study of the nuclear legacies of the Cold War.

MATTHEW HART

Matthew Hart teaches English at Columbia University. He specializes in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, with a particular focus on British writing. He is the author of *Nations of Nothing But Poetry* (2010); founding coeditor of the Literature Now book series at Columbia University Press; former associate editor of *Contemporary Literature*; and former president of ASAP, the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present. His current book project has the provisional title "Extraterritorial: A Political Geography of Contemporary Literature."

N. KATHERINE HAYLES

N. Katherine Hayles is professor of literature at Duke University. She teaches and writes on the relations of science, technology, and literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her most recent book is *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (2012). She is presently at work on a book project entitled "Cognition Everywhere: The Rise of Nonconscious Cognition."

URSULA K. HEISE

Ursula K. Heise is the Marcia H. Howard professor in the department of English and at the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her books include *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and*

Postmodernism (1997), *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), and *Nach der Natur: Das Artensterben und die moderne Kultur* (*After Nature: Species Extinction and Modern Culture*, 2010). She is editor of the book series Literatures, Cultures, and the Environment with Palgrave Macmillan and coeditor of the book series Literature and Contemporary Thought with Routledge. Her most recent book, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*, is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press in 2016.

ANDREW HOBEREK

Andrew Hoberek, professor of English at the University of Missouri, Columbia, is the author most recently of *Considering Watchmen: Poetics, Property, Politics* (2014).

CAREN IRR

Caren Irr is professor of English at Brandeis University. She is the author, most recently, of *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the 21st Century* (2014). Previous books include *The Suburb of Dissent: Cultural Politics in the United States and Canada During the 1930s* (1998) and *Pink Pirates: Contemporary American Women Writers and Copyright* (2010). Her current research examines orphan narratives and the difficulties involved in representing global economic inequality.

DAVID JAMES

David James is reader in modern and contemporary literature at Queen Mary, University of London. Author of *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (2008) and *Modernist Futures* (2012), he has edited several books, including *The Legacies of Modernism* (2012) and *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (2015), as well as a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* on "Postmillennial Commitments" (Winter 2012). For Columbia University Press he coedits the book series Literature Now. His new book, *Discrepant Solace: Contemporary Writing and the Work of Consolation*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

ADAM KELLY

Adam Kelly is lecturer in American literature at the University of York. He is the author of *American Fiction in Transition: Observer-Hero Narrative, the 1990s, and Postmodernism* (2013), as well as articles in journals including *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *Studies in the Novel*, *Post45*, *Critique*, and *Philip Roth Studies*. The provisional title of his current book project is "American Fiction at the Millennium: Neoliberalism and the New Sincerity."

THEODORE MARTIN

Theodore Martin is assistant professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. His essays have appeared in *Modern Language Quarterly* and *Novel*. His book, *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present,* is forthcoming from Columbia University Press in 2017.

BRIAN MCHALE

Brian McHale is Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of English at the Ohio State University. A cofounder of Ohio State's Project Narrative, which he directed from 2012–14, he is also a founding member and former president of the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present (ASAP). The author of three monographs on postmodernist fiction and poetry, and coeditor of four "companions" to twentieth-century literature, narrative theory, experimental literature, and Thomas Pynchon, he is currently completing one book, "The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism," and co-editing a second, "The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature."

LEEROM MEDOVOI

Leerom Medovoi is a professor and head of the Department of English at the University of Arizona. He was the founding director of the Portland Center for Public Humanities and is currently the principal investigator for a CHCI-Mellon international research project, "Religion, Secularism, and Political Belonging." He is the author of *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (2005) and has published widely on the geopolitics of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American culture, war and globalization, critical race studies, and biopolitical theory.

DEAK NABERS

Deak Nabers is an associate professor of English at Brown University and author of *Victory of Law: The Fourteenth Amendment, the Civil War, and American Literature, 1852–1865*. His next book, "The Martial Imagination," examines the impact of nuclear military strategy on aesthetic and political theory in the United States after World War II.

PAUL K. SAINT-AMOUR

Paul K. Saint-Amour teaches in the Department of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *The Copywrights: Intellectual Property and the Literary Imagination* (2003), the editor of *Modernism and Copyright* (2011), and the coeditor, with Jessica Berman, of the Modernist Latitudes series at Columbia University

Press. Saint-Amour served as president of the Modernist Studies Association in 2012–2013. His latest book, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*, was published in 2015.

EMILIO SAURI

Emilio Sauri is assistant professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. His research focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature and visual art from the United States and Latin America, and he reads these in relation to the development of the world system. The coeditor of *Literary Materialisms* (2013), he is currently at work on a book project on literature and the ends of autonomy in the Americas.

RACHEL GREENWALD SMITH

Rachel Greenwald Smith is the author of *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (2015) and editor of the forthcoming *American Literature in Transition: 2000–2010*. Her essays have appeared in journals that include *American Literature*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Mediations*, and *Twentieth-Century Literature*. She is currently assistant professor of English at Saint Louis University, where she teaches courses in contemporary literature, environmental literature, and critical theory.

HARILAOS STECOPOULOS

Harilaos Stecopoulos is associate professor of English at the University of Iowa and the editor of *The Iowa Review*. He is currently completing a new monograph, *Telling America's Story to the World: The Literature of U.S. Diplomacy*.

DANIEL WORDEN

Daniel Worden is associate professor of English at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of the award-winning book *Masculine Style: The American West and Literary Modernism* (2011), the editor of *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* (2015), and the coeditor of *Oil Culture* (2014). He is currently completing a book on literary nonfiction and neoliberalism.

INDEX

9/11, 1, 95, 97–99, 100–102, 104–105, 111, 144

Adams, Rachel, 94, 97, 101, 112–113, 115–116, 146–147
Adichie, Chimamanda, 46
affect theory, 132–135, 138
African American literary studies, 8
Agamben, Giorgio, 40
Ahmed, Sara, 128, 132–136, 138
Albee, Edward, 75, 77
Alighieri, Dante, 44
Amis, Martin, 44
Anthropocene, 253, 254
architecture, 61, 62–63
Arendt, Hannah, 241–242, 243–244
Aristotle, 48
Arrighi, Giovanni, 98–99
Arrow, Kenneth, 136–137
Ashbery, John, 62, 75, 77
Ashton, Jennifer, 194
Asian American literary studies, 147–148
Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present (ASAP), 2, 27, 34, 40, 48, 51, 54
Attridge, Derek, 48
Austen, Jane, 155
Auster, Paul, 64, 143
avant garde, 60, 73–76, 84, 87–88

Badiou, Alain, 32, 48, 100
Ballard, J. G., 38, 43–44, 62
Balzac, Honoré de, 155–156, 160
Bangs, Lester, 42
Barth, John, 14, 46, 62, 64, 74, 83, 84, 85, 89, 143
Beatles, 61
Bechdel, Alison, 45
Beckett, Samuel, 39, 86, 243
Belletto, Steven, 147
Bellow, Saul, 32, 38
Berlant, Lauren, 11–12, 40
Berners-Lee, Tim, 39
Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus, 11, 12–13
Bishop, Claire, 48
Black Panther Party, 60

Bordowitz, Gregg, 48
Borges, Jorge Luis, 119–120
boundary 2, 32
Braudel, Fernand, 227–228, 230–231, 236–237
Brooker, Joe, 31
Brown, Bill, 3–4
Brown, Wendy, 184
Buell, Lawrence, 6
Burn, Stephen J., 188
Burroughs, William S., 62
Burt, Stephen, 183, 185–186, 187
Bush, Christopher, 51
Butler, Judith, 48

Capote, Truman, 62
Carnochan, W. B., 153
Carr, Nicholas, 213–214
Caryl, Christian, 40
Cazdyn, Eric and Imre Szeman, 114
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 73–74, 77
Chabon, Michael, 1
Chile, 63
China, 61, 63, 65, 69–70, 75, 100
Clover, Joshua, 63, 65–67
Coetzee, J. M., 39
cognitive mapping, 93–94, 104, 113–118, 121, 132
Cohen, Leonard, 62
Cohen, Sam, 31
Cold War, 33–34, 37, 65–66, 69, 73–79, 93–98, 101–102, 111, 141–148, 168, 171–172, 191
Colebrook, Claire, 128
Columbia Studies in Contemporary American History, 36
comics studies, 8–9
Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), 73, 74
contemporary: and fine art, 228, 231; and literature, 228, 229–230, 231; and periodization, 227–229, 231, 237, 241, 246–247, 248–249
Contemporary Literature, 32, 239
Coover, Robert, 64, 74, 78
Crary, Jonathan, 232–233
Crowe, Cameron, 42
culture wars, 74
Czechoslovakia, 74–75, 77, 78

Danielewski, Mark Z., 45, 209–210, 214
Danticat, Edwidge, 148
Davidson, Donald, 162
DeKoven, Marianne, 34
Delany, Samuel, 64
Deleuze, Gilles, 188
DeLillo, Don, 1, 28, 64, 89, 127, 143, 144, 145–146, 148, 220
Department of Defense, 104
Derrida, Jacques, 188
Descartes, René, 156
Díaz, Junot, 148, 204
Dick, Philip K., 62, 69
Dickens, Charles, 44, 156
Diener, Ed, 130–132
digital literature, 8–9, 47, 211, 212
digital media, 209, 212, 213; and print, 210
Dimock, Wai Chee, 13
distant reading, 160, 161
Doctorow, E. L., 74, 76
Dubey, Madhu, 8
Duvall, John, 30
Dylan, Bob, 61–62

Eco, Umberto, 64
Edelman, Lee, 134
Egan, Jennifer, 201–202

Eggers, Dave, 87–89, 203–204
Electronic Literature Organization, 47
Eliot, George, 156, 161
Eliot, T. S., 241
Ellis, Bret Easton, 243, 249
ELMCIP Electronic Literature Knowledge Base, 47
Emerson, Lori, 9
environmentalist discourse, 252–254, 257
ethnic studies, 28
Everett, Percival, 45
experimentalism, 181–183

Faulkner, William, 32
Felski, Rita, 53
feminist theory, 34
Ferris, Joshua, 205
Fiedler, Leslie, 74, 242–243
film, 61, 63, 68, 143, 147
Financial Crisis of 2008, 99
fine art, 5, 64–65, 68
Fish, Stanley, 44–45
Fisk, Gloria, 51
Fitzgerald, Jonathan, 87
Flint, James, 144
Foer, Jonathan Safran, 205, 210–211
Ford, Ford Madox, 39
formalism, 13–15, 159–162
Foster, Hal, 5
Franklin, Benjamin, 37
Franzen, Jonathan, 1, 219, 220, 221–223, 223–24
Fried, Michael, 242
Fuentes, Carlos, 64
Fuguet, Alberto and Sergio Gómez, 99–100
Fukuyama, Francis, 65, 66–67, 114, 146, 190

Gaddis, William, 75
Gao Xingjian, 46
Garciá Márquez, Gabriel, 97, 99
Gass, William, 46, 86
Gibson, William, 69, 144, 255–257
Giles, Paul, 142–143
Ginsberg, Allen, 62
globalization, 50–51, 65–67, 93–101, 105, 112–117
Göransson, Johannes, 184, 185
Gray, Alasdair, 64
Greenberg, Clement, 156, 158
Gregg, Richard, 252
Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, 48

Habermas, Jurgen, 45
Hall, Steven, 211
Hamid, Mohsin, 100
Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, 98, 128, 132–133, 135–136, 138
Harper, Phillip Brian, 8
Harvey, David, 3, 6, 63, 74, 184
Haslett, Adam, 219, 223–224
Hassan, Ihab, 33
Havel, Vaclac, 77
Hayles, N. Katherine, 9, 11
Hayot, Eric, 38–39
Heise, Ursula K., 4, 6
Higgins, Dick, 60
Hirst, Damien, 68
historicism, 29, 41–42, 162
Hoberek, Andrew, 3, 200–201
Hungerford, Amy, 7–8, 13, 29–30, 165, 231
Hutner, Gordon, 29, 231
Huxley, Aldous, 129, 133
Huyssen, Andreas, 33

intermedial arts, 47–50
Internet, 8–9, 67, 87

interwar, 167–169, 172–174
Iraq War, 104
irony, 1, 81–82, 87, 96, 99, 219
Ishiguro, Kazuo, 41
Iyer, Pico, 88–89
Izenberg, Oren, 194

Jackson, Shelley, 46, 145
Jameson, Fredric, 9–11, 30, 40, 46, 48, 59, 69, 68–69, 70, 93–97, 99–100, 112–116, 118, 121, 130–132, 212, 217–218, 232–233, 237, 242, 248, 255–256
Japan, 69
Jencks, Charles, 62–63
Johnson, B. S., 83–87, 89
Johnston, John, 212
Jordan, Julia, 86

Kenner, Hugh, 43
Kentridge, William, 67
Kenyon Review, 73
Kern, Stephen, 33
Keywords for American Cultural Studies, 4–5
Killen, Andreas, 60, 63
Kincaid, Jamaica, 45
Korean War, 147
Krauss, Nicole, 145
Kripke, Saul, 162
Kuhn, Thomas S., 158, 162
Kundera, Milan, 68
Kunkel, Benjamin, 2, 100, 111–113, 115–121
Kushner, Rachel, 2, 189–190, 191–193
Kushner, Tony, 68

LaHaye, Tim and Jerry B. Jenkins, 68
Lahiri, Jhumpa, 45–46
Latin American literature, 64, 99–100, 113
Lawrence, D. H., 43
Lee, Ang, 68
Lee, Chang-rae, 147
Lennon, J. Robert, 88
Lessing, Doris, 43
Lessing, Gotthold, 43
Lethem, Jonathan, 42–43, 90
Levander, Caroline and Robert Levine, 115–116
Levenson, Marjorie, 159–161
Lewis, David K., 162
Leyner, Mark, 1
Lin, Tao, 245–249
Literature Now (Columbia University Press Series), 2, 27
Locke, John, 156
Los Angeles Review of Books, 28
Love, Heather, 128
Lowe, Lisa, 4
Lukács, Georg, 156, 160

Mack, John E., 69
magic realism, 64, 96, 99–100, 113
Mailer, Norman, 32, 75, 157
Mandel, Ernest, 95
Manning, Eric, 48
Mao, Douglas, 37
Marcus, David, 89
Marinetti, F. T., 252
Marx, Karl, 117, 237
Masco, Joseph, 145
McCann, Sean, 6, 13, 37
McCarthy, Tom, 41, 43
McGurl, Mark, 7–8, 13, 37, 145, 153, 157–158, 228–230
McHale, Brian, 3, 31–34, 40
McKibben, Bill, 255

McLaughlin, Robert, 186
McSweeney's Quarterly Concern, 1
Menand, Louis, 52
metafiction, 14, 48, 62, 64, 83, 169, 173
Meyer, Phillip, 219, 220–221, 222, 223–224
Meyer, Richard, 230–231
Mezzadra, Sandro and Brett Neilson, 50
Michaels, Walter Benn, 7–8, 13, 43, 48, 119, 194, 245; and Stephen Knapp, 45
Miéville, China, 46
Miller, D. A., 155, 160
Millet, Lydia, 145
Mills, C. Wright, 157
Mishra, Pankaj, 78
modernism, 4–5, 10–11, 28, 30–31, 33–34, 36–38, 48, 59, 62, 73–75, 95–96, 158, 198–200, 249, 254, 257
modernist studies, 4–5, 10–11, 29–30, 34, 37
Moody, Rick, 144–145
Moraru, Christian, 40, 65
Moretti, Franco, 13, 155–156, 161
Morrison, Toni, 28, 39, 46, 74
Morton, Timothy, 145
Mountford, Peter, 100
Muholi, Zanele, 48
multiculturalism, 1, 103–104, 118–119, 146–147
multimodal arts, 47
Murray, Paul, 46
music, 61–62, 63, 64, 67, 81–82

n + 1, 1
Nadel, Alan, 74, 142
National Organization for Women (NOW), 60
neoliberalism, 13, 63, 96, 100, 105, 118, 146, 183–185, 223
neuroscience, 127–128
New American Canon (University of Iowa Press Series), 2, 27
New Literary History of America, 4–5
New Materialism, 12, 145
New Sincerity, 1, 87–88, 198, 200–206
New York Review of Books, 75
New York Times, 75, 76
New Yorker, 81–82
Ngai, Sianne, 6, 13
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 46, 97
nuclear weapons, 144–146

Oates, Joyce Carol, 77–78
OuLiPo, 64
Owens, Craig, 5, 33

Paris Review, 73
Park, Henry, 147
Partisan Review, 73
PEN Conference, 75
Perelman, Bob, 132
Petrini, Carlo, 251
Phelps, Edmund, 137
philosophy, 162, 243
Piketty, Thomas, 155–157
Poland, 76, 78
Post•45, 2, 27, 34, 52; *Peer Reviewed*, 49
postcolonial studies, 28, 34, 38, 217
posthumanism, 11–12
postindustrialism, 235–236
Postmodern Culture, 32
postmodernism, 28, 29–33, 212, 217–219, 248, 257; and fine art, 5; and form, 13–14, 82–84, 96–98, 121, 186, 188, 201, 204, 223; and Latin American literature, 99–100,

119–120; and literary studies, 14–16, 63, 74, 112–113; and periodization, 1–7, 9–11, 59–70, 74, 87–88, 94–95, 97–98, 105, 111–113, 118–119, 142–143, 165, 173, 197–198, 212–214, 242–243; and theory, 12, 61, 64, 128, 134, 138, 187, 188
poststructuralism, 12, 32–33, 48, 61, 64, 128, 187, 188
postwar: and the novel, 153–162; and periodization, 5–8, 15–16, 112–113, 138, 142–143, 165–167, 173, 182
Pound, Ezra, 43
Powers, Richard, 2, 127–130, 135–136, 138
Pressman, Jessica, 9
Pritchett, V. S., 154
psychology, 127–128, 130–131
Public Books, 28
Pynchon, Thomas, 1, 2, 31, 62, 64, 65, 68, 74, 81–82, 83, 89, 105, 113, 144, 146, 169–173

Rancière, Jacques, 48
Rawls, John, 136–138, 162
Reader's Digest, 76
realism, 89, 100, 154–160
Revkin, Andy, 255
Rhys, Jean, 62
Richardson, Samuel, 160
Riesman, David, 157
Robbins, Bruce, 135
Robinson, Kim Stanley, 45–46, 70
Robinson, Marilynne, 46
romanticism, 38
Roth, Philip, 77, 78, 101
Rowling, J. K., 68
Rushdie, Salman, 28, 45, 64, 100

Sacco, Joe, 46
Sapnar, Megan and Ingrid Ankerson, 47
Saporta, Marc, 211
Saunders, George, 202
Sauri, Emilio, 96
Schlosser, Eric, 143
Schulz, Bruno, 75
science fiction, 62, 69–70, 135, 255–257
Scott, Ridley, 69
Selvon, Sam, 39
Sen, Amartya, 136
Shaw, Carolyn, 48
Shteyngart, Gary, 100–105
Silliman, Ron, 182
Sillitoe, Alan, 39
sincerity, 1, 81–84, 87, 198–200
Slick, Grace, 61
Small, Helen, 55
Smith, Zadie, 89, 205
Smithson, Robert, 5
social choice theory, 128, 136–138
sociology, 157
Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, 75
Sontag, Susan, 14, 75, 76–77
Sorrentino, Gilbert, 64
Soviet Union, 75, 101–103
Soyinka, Wole, 46
Spark, Muriel, 39
Spielberg, Steven, 156
Spinoza, Baruch, 135–136
Spiotta, Dana, 205
State Department, 73, 75
Storey, David, 39
Studies in Contemporary History (Palgrave Macmillan Series), 36
surface reading, 11, 12–13
Swenson, Cole, 181
Szalay, Michael, 6, 13

Tanenhaus, Sam, 186–187
television, 69, 143, 147
Thomson, Judith Jarvis, 162
Toffler, Alvin, 252
Tomasula, Steve, 212
transmedia fiction, 211
Trilling, Lionel, 153–154, 198–200
typography, 86–87

United States Information Agency (USIA), 73, 75
Updike, John, 74–75, 78, 143
utopia, 117–119, 121

Venturi, Robert, 61, 63
Victorian novel, 155
Vietnam War, 60, 74, 76–77
Vizenor, Gerald, 46
Vollmann, William T., 64
Vonnegut, Kurt, 74, 75

Wachowski siblings, 68
Walkowitz, Rebecca, 27, 37
Wallace, David Foster, 1, 2, 66, 142–143, 144,186, 198, 200, 205–206, 232–237
Wampole, Christy, 87
War in Afghanistan, 104
Warhol, Andy, 61, 63, 241–242, 243–244
Warren, Kenneth W., 8
Watchmen, 145
Watt, Ian, 153–156, 160–161
Watts, Carol, 84
Wayne, Teddy, 100
Wegner, Phillip, 11, 66, 97–98
welfare economics, 128, 136–138
Whitehead, Colson, 202, 245
Wiener, Jon, 141–142
Wilde, Alan, 33
Williams, Jeffrey J., 52
Wingrove, David, 69
Winthrop, John, 37
Wolfson, Susan, 159–161
Wood, James, 45, 189–190, 191–192
Wood, Michael, 48
Woolf, Virginia, 39, 60
Worden, Daniel, 97–98
world literature, 93–105
World War II, 37–39

Yamashita, Karen Tei, 45, 99, 105, 113

Žižek, Slavoj, 48, 94, 128, 138

THE NEW AMERICAN CANON

Violet America:
Regional Cosmopolitanism in
U.S. Fiction since the Great Depression
by Jason Arthur

The Meaning of J. Robert Oppenheimer
by Lindsey Michael Banco

Workshops of Empire:
Stegner, Engle, and American Creative
Writing during the Cold War
by Eric Bennett

The Legacy of David Foster Wallace
edited by Samuel Cohen
and Lee Konstantinou

American Unexceptionalism:
The Everyman and the
Suburban Novel after 9/11
by Kathy Knapp

Pynchon's California
edited by Scott McClintock
and John Miller

Richard Ford and the Ends of Realism
by Ian McGuire

Reading Capitalist Realism
edited by Alison Shonkwiler
and Leigh Claire La Berge