



## Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*

Susan Stanford Friedman

What is *modernity*? What is or was *modernism*? Why is the energetic, expanding, multidisciplinary field of modernist studies so filled with contestation over the very ground of study? Definitional activities are fictionalizing processes, however much they sound like rational categorization. As such, I will begin with three stories, allegorized but rooted in my own experience in an evolving field.<sup>1</sup>

### Story I: Where Have All the Rebels Gone?

Imagine a young woman starting graduate school in 1965 in an American land grant university. Remember the suburban dream of the 1950s for middle-class (white) girls: the penny loafers and saddle shoes; the poodle skirts and prom chiffon; the cheerleaders and Elvis screamers; college for the MRS degree; the station wagon and four kids. NO books. NO art. NO ideas. NO passion. Conformity was the name of the game. Conformity and materialism. Then. The first butts of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Fuck. Shit. Sex. Pot. Buttons. Pierced ears. Long hair. Unisex style. Civil Rights. Vietnam. Pigs. Feminism. Gay Rights. Welfare Rights. Union Rights. “What was modernism” to a graduate student in English and American literature in the heady days of the 1960s? Modernism was rebellion. Modernism was “make it new.”<sup>2</sup> Modernism was resistance, rupture. To its progenitors. To its students. Modernism was the antidote to the poison of tradition, obligation.

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494 **Story 2: What Does a Cyberpunk Really Want?**

Picture an aging scholar in 1995, past the half-century mark, entering into her first graduate seminar on modernism in a land grant university. “What was modernism?” she asks. A circle of eyes and silences. A couple to the side shift uncomfortably. She has cropped purple hair and kohled eyes. He wears fishnet stockings and thick buckled Pilgrim heels. A tidy tail of silky golden hair flows down his back. So thin in black, so pale in whiteface, they are their own shadows. They know “what modernism was.” Modernism was elitism. Modernism was the Establishment. “High Culture” lifting its skirts against the taint of the “low,” the masses, the popular. Modernism was the supreme fiction, the master narrative, the great white hope. To its Po-Mo descendents, Modernism is the enemy. Postmodernism is the antidote to the poison of tradition, obligation.

**Story 3: What’s a Poor Student to Do?**

Listen in on an exchange between two scholars, the one graying and the other balding in the wisdom of their seniorities—she a cultural critic, he a social scientist. Children of the 1960s, teachers of the 1990s. It is 1995 as their manuscripts cross through snail mail. “What was modernism?” they ask, both acknowledging it as a historical phenomenon, but neither willing to assert that it is fully over and done with. For both, modernism both was and is. But *what* was modernism? She knows. It is the (illusory) break with the past, a willed forgetting of tradition, continuity, order. It is the embrace of chaos. It is the crisis of representation, fragmentation, alienation. It is indeterminacy, the rupture of certainty—material and symbolic. It is the poetics of modernity—change—and the aesthetic inscriptions thereof. (*Pace* cyberpunks, for whom modernism no longer “is” as it recedes into the deadness of postmodernism’s past.)

He knows too. Modernism is state planning. Modernism is totalization, centralized system. Modernism is the Enlightenment’s rational schemata. “Progress”—“Science”—“Reason”—“Truth.” Modernism is the ideology of post-Renaissance modernity—conquest—and the inscriptions thereof. (*Pace* cyborgs, modernism still lives in the danger of ever-forming centralized hegemonies and utopian totalitarianisms.)

**Moral of the Stories:** Just what **IS** modernism in an exchange where the word means not just different things, but precisely opposite things?

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The opposition of meanings produced over time (from Story 1 to Story 2) morphs into a binary of oppositions existing across space (Story 3). In toto, the stories represent a conjuncture of temporal and spatial oppositions. So. Let’s move from storytelling to another kind of conjuncture: parataxis—the juxtaposition of things without providing connectives. *Parataxis*: a common aesthetic strategy in modernist writing and art, developed to disrupt and fragment conventional sequencing, causality, and perspective. *Parataxis*: the opposite of *hypotaxis* in linguistics, thus the opposite of hierarchi-

cal relationships of syntactic units. *Parataxis*: a mechanism of the “dream work” in Freud’s grammar for the unconscious processes of disguised expression of the forbidden, indicating unresolved or conflicting desires.

### Parataxis 1:

- “Modernism . . . is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos.”<sup>3</sup>
- “‘Who says modernity says organization,’ it has been remarked.”<sup>4</sup>

### Parataxis 2:

- “We have seen that the creators of modernist works are negative demystifiers: they unmask absolutism, rationalism, idealism—and all illusions.”<sup>5</sup>
- “But I do not think we shall begin to understand modernism unless we look at the way it was seemingly compelled, over and over, at moments it knew were both testing ground and breaking point, to set itself . . . the task of Enlightenment, or the task of bourgeois philosophy, in its ruthless, world-breaking and world-making mode.”<sup>6</sup>

### Parataxis 3:

- “Indeed Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis—in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture.”<sup>7</sup>
- “What is ‘high modernism’ then? It is best conceived as a strong, one might say muscle-bound, version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress associated with the process of industrialization in Western Europe and North America from roughly 1830 until the First World War. At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. *High* modernism is thus a particularly comprehensive vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied—usually through the state—in every field of human activity.”<sup>8</sup>

### Parataxis 4:

- “To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. . . . To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air.’”<sup>9</sup>
- “The paramount figure in modernism is that of the static and abstract model separated from the dynamic ebb and flow of reality. This figure is that of the Cartesian ‘I,’ of the abstract natural rights of the French Revolution, of Kantian reason, of the unsuccessful blueprints of the worst of orthodox Marxism, of city grids, of Corbusier’s *machine à habiter*, of Habermas’s ideal speech situation.”<sup>10</sup>

496 **Parataxis 5:**

- “[I]ntrinsic to the condition of modernity. . . has been a rejection by and within those [Enlightenment] narratives of what seem to have been the strongest pillars of their history: Anthropomorphism, Humanism, and Truth. . . In France, such rethinking has involved, above all, a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives’ own ‘non-knowledge,’ what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a ‘space’ of some kind . . . coded as *feminine*, as *woman*.”<sup>11</sup>
- “I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. . . : this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end—universal peace. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

**Parataxis 6:**

- “If it is possible to talk about ‘modernism’ as the major movement in Western literature (and art in general) of the first half of the twentieth century, I would argue that it is also possible to talk about ‘modernist form,’ a shorthand term used to designate that cluster of stylistic practices. . . : (1) aesthetic self-consciousness; (2) simultaneity, juxtaposition, or ‘montage’ [and] . . . ‘fragmentation’; (3) paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty; and (4) . . . the demise of the integrated or unified subject. . . I would add. . . : abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form . . . the shock, the violation of expected continuities, the element of de-creation and crisis. . . .”<sup>13</sup>
- “Certain schematic differences. . .

Modernism	Postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	’Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance/Happening
Creation/Totalization/Synthesis	Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext . . .
Hypotaxis	Parataxis . . .
Signified	Signifier
Narrative/ <i>Grande Histoire</i>	Anti-narrative/ <i>Petite Histoire</i>
Master Code	Idiolect
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Origin/Cause	Difference-Differance/Trace
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence <sup>14</sup>

**Parataxis 7:**

- “Modernity, therefore, not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself.”<sup>15</sup>
- “The belief ‘in linear progress, absolute truths, and rational planning of ideal social orders’ under standardized conditions of knowledge and production was particularly strong. The modernism that resulted was, as a result, ‘positivist, technocratic, and rationalistic’ at the same time as it was imposed as the work of an elite avant-garde of planners, artists, architects, critics, and other guardians of high taste.”<sup>16</sup>

**Moral 1:** As terms in an evolving scholarly discourse, *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism* constitute a critical Tower of Babel, a cacophony of categories that become increasingly useless the more inconsistently they are used. We can regard them as a parody of critical discourse in which everyone keeps talking at the same time in a language without common meanings. When terms mean radically different or contradictory things to people, then their use appears to threaten the project of scholarship/teaching altogether.

**Moral 2:** As contradictory terms resisting consensual definition, *modern*, *modernism*, and *modernity* form a fertile terrain for interrogation, providing ever more sites for examination with each new meaning spawned. As parody of rational discourse, their contradictions highlight the production of meaning possible by attention to what will not be tamed, by what refuses consistency and homogenization. Their use ensures the open-ended ongoingness of the scholarly/pedagogical project whose first task is to sustain the continuation of interrogation, to ensure, in short, its own perpetuation.

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*Modernisms* is one thing, but *modernism* as absolute contradiction is quite another. Definitions spawn plurality in the very act of attempting to herd meaning inside consensual boundaries. Definitions mean to fence in, to fix, and to stabilize. But they often end up being fluid, in a destabilized state of ongoing formation, deformation, and reformation that serves the changing needs of the moment. They reflect the standpoint of their makers. They emerge out of the spatio/temporal context of their production. They serve different needs and interests. They accomplish different kinds of cultural work. They change dramatically over time and through space. Definitions wear the mask of synchronic abstraction, but they are always subject to diachronic histories and spatial geographies of continuity, change, and difference. I have no expectation, therefore, of determining or discovering a fixed meaning for terms like *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism*. I expect differences.

But opposition of meanings is something else. It goes beyond difference, beyond resistance to totalizing metanarratives, beyond the provisional, strategic, fluid, permeable, and situationally adaptable meanings that characterize the most useful definitional exercises. I don't seek fixity or plurality. I seek instead to confront directly the contradictory status of meanings.<sup>17</sup>

The stories began with the problematic of *modernism*, but drew us inexorably into a web of words—*modernism* and its siblings, *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernization*. Not only does the meaning of the concept deny fixity but so do its grammatical and semantic aspects. The root word *modern* is both noun and adjective, whether signifying descriptively or normatively. The different suffixes herd the word into different grammatical functions that carry semantic weight. The *-ity* of *modernity* limits the word *modern* to a noun—a status as a thing or condition that is distinguishable from other things or conditions. The *-ism* of *modernism* turns the noun *modern* into an advocacy, a promotion, a movement presumably centered around a systematic philosophy, politics, ideology, or aesthetics. The *-ization* of *modernization* signifies a process, an evolution or revolution from one condition to another, with *modernity* as the condition achieved by modernization.<sup>18</sup>

And what about the cousins of the siblings—*premodern*, *postmodern*, *postmodernity*, *postmodernism*? How do *pre-* and *post-* inflect the root meanings? To what extent are these categories distinctly separate when they appear to merely qualify *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism*?<sup>19</sup> In what way is the entire family of terms dependent on their variously implied or invoked antonyms—*traditional*, *classical*, *ancient*, *feudal*, *agrarian*, *past*?

Once upon a time, literary and art critics used *modernism*—especially with the orthographic marker of the capital, *Modernism*, or the intensifying adjective *high*, as in *High Modernism*—to delineate movements in the arts based in loose affiliations or parallel developments. In contrast, social theorists, historians, and social scientists used *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernization* to refer to historical periods, conditions, and processes. But now, such disciplinary boundaries have ceased to function, as people appropriate all forms of the root concept to serve their different purposes.

Symptomatically and provocatively, the interdisciplinary journal *Modernism/Modernity* yokes two of these terms, as if the slash between them signaled their interchangeability on the one hand and yet their permanent separation on the other. The slash is a bar that forever connects and disconnects (like the Saussurian/Lacanian bar between signifier/signified). This is yet another contradiction that demands attention. Is there a slash/bar separating and conjoining *modern/modernity/modernism/modernization* with all its cognates and antonyms as well?

**A Psychoanalytic Detour:** The family romance of squabbling siblings and cousins invites a psychoanalysis of definitional debate. The dissonance of meanings—particularly the opposition of meanings—opens the possibility of a psychodynamic reading that looks for the irrational and covert processes of repression, return, and transference in modernist studies across the disciplines as these processes reflect unresolved complexes within *modernity* itself.

The scene of analysis for Freud is a psychodynamic one, a stage onto which the analysand and the analyst transfer repressed desires and complexes long since seemingly forgotten. Transference (and countertransference) in analysis involves the repetition of what cannot be consciously remembered, the reenactment of repressed patterns not yet consciously faced. Freud's clinical practice involved the deliberate incitement of the transference so that the drama of repetition could become the grounds for analysis itself.<sup>20</sup>

The terminological quagmire of modernist studies may be the result of a transference process in which people become caught in a repetition of the unresolved contradictions present and largely repressed in modernity itself. The stories and parataxes of this essay deliberately stage this dissonant drama to shift the focus from the debate about signifieds for the disputed terms to an analysis of what produces the dissonance in the first place. I am adapting and blending Julia Kristeva's notion of the "textual unconscious," Fredric Jameson's concept of the "political unconscious," and Shoshana Felman's psychoanalytic interpretations of contentious critical literatures on Edgar Allen Poe and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*.<sup>21</sup> Particularly heated and unresolvable debates about literary meaning, Felman argues, can be read as transference scenes of resistance and repetition. Such scenes, often confrontational and even bitter, have an "unconscious" that can be read psychoanalytically as a "case history" that brings to light hidden complexes repressed and unresolved in the original literary texts. Adapting Jameson's notion of the political unconscious for this scenario allows for a reading of how oppositional views encrypt a politics not immediately evident or intended.

Similarly, multidisciplinary modernist studies spawns terminological debates that reenact contradictions already present within the terms and the phenomena to which they allude. What then is hidden within the proliferation of meanings for *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism*? How might the dissonances and oppositions constitute fault lines inviting interpretation in and of themselves? What might such fault lines tell us about the contradictory and complex-ridden meanings and politics of the phenomena to which the terms refer as they change and vary in different historical moments and spatial locations?

**Pathways in the Wanderland of Modernist Studies:** How to enter into and perhaps emerge out of the maze of contestation and opposition in modernist studies? I suggest two routes for definitional excursion—the first, grammatical and philosophical; the second, political and cultural. They engage the issue of oppositional meanings in complementary ways. Without resolving anything, they open up different routes to the contradiction of meaning, different ways of negotiating definitional debate, each necessary in its own way. Without resolving or silencing it, they clarify what is at stake in the debate and why interrogating what produces it can loosen fixed loyalties to partial meanings.

500 **Grammatical/Philosophical Route:** This pathway starts with the recognition of the difference between nominal and relational modes of definition—that is regarding the terms (the siblings, *modern/modernity/modernism*) as **nouns** with a specific, definable content (however debated) and viewing them as **adjectives** implying comparison to some other condition of being.<sup>22</sup> The difference between these approaches to definitional tasks accounts for some of the opposition in modernist studies, but not all. Contradiction exists not only between the modes but within each mode as well.<sup>23</sup>

### Nominal Mode—The Noun

In nominal terms, the words *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism* signify a specific content: a set of characteristics with particular material conditions and spatio/temporal locations. This is not to say, however, that there is always agreement about this specific content. But for those working within or seeking a nominal framework, the definitional project centers on fixing the categories to a set of meanings to which others might be persuaded. Whether canonical or revisionist, such projects assume the nominal status of modernism or modernity: it is a noun, with a specific meaning, albeit subject to disagreement about its potential explanatory power.

Nominal discussions of *modern/modernity/modernism* tend to be very field specific, with definitional dissonance and even outright contradiction developing as a result of disciplinary boundaries and considerable isolation of disciplinary discourses from each other. The most radical disjuncture of nominal meanings exists in the chasm between the social sciences and the humanities. Social theorists, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists tend to follow the lead of historians of Europe, who typically periodize their field into the subfields of classical, medieval, early modern, and modern, thus defining *modern* as the initial break with medieval institutions and outlooks that evolved over time. Within this context, *modernity* signifies a specific set of historical conditions developing in the West, including the industrial revolution, conquest of and expansion economically and politically into other continents, the transition to urban culture, the rise of the nation state, and growing power of the bourgeoisie. Consistent with this periodization, philosophers often regard the theories of reason in Locke, Kant, and Hegel as the embodiment of a distinctly modern secularism and humanism. For political scientists, modernity often involves the development of specific kinds of political systems, away from feudalism to limited monarchies, democracies, and various autocracies; for economists, types of markets, capital, or labor; for anthropologists, the eradication or (forced) assimilation of traditional cultures through conquest or encroachment by nation states, market systems, more “advanced” technologies, or hegemonic cultural groups. Postcolonial theorists often link modernity with imperialism and the national struggles for emergence within the contradictory conditions of hybridization and continued dependence on the colonial power. And so forth.<sup>24</sup>

In the humanities, on the other hand, modernity and modernism are most often associated with the radical *rupture* from rather than the supreme embodiment of post-

Renaissance Enlightenment humanism and accompanying formations in the West. Artists and writers, within this view, constitute an avant-garde of change, seeing sooner and more searchingly the profound significance and future effects of epistemological, ontological, political, technological, demographic, cultural, and aesthetic transformations. The dating, location, and forms of rupture associated with a modernist style sometimes overlap, sometimes vary considerably. Critics of modernist poetry often identify a poetics of fragmentation, parataxis, image, and idiosyncratic rhythms and sound patterns. Art historians often focus on the rupture from realism in the heightening attention to form, especially pure geometric shapes and planes. Architectural historians often look to the stark, functionalist minimalism of Bauhaus design or cityscape towers as the expression of modernity and its aesthetic in the age of the machine. For music historians, the embrace of primitivism and atonality in a composer like Stravinsky might constitute modernism. Media critics look to the radical impact of the new mechanical means of reproduction—photography, radio, cinema, television—for the sights and sounds of modernity. And so forth.<sup>25</sup>

However debated, modernism in the context of the humanities is most often understood as the loosely affiliated movements and individuals in the arts and literature that reflect and contribute to the conditions and consciousness of modernity in Europe, Britain, and the United States.<sup>26</sup> Periodization, however much it varies among different subfields, differs sharply from that proposed by social theorists and historians. Moreover, the epitome of modernity for those in the social sciences is precisely what modernity dismantles for those in the humanities.

At first glance, this definitional divide seems arbitrary, produced through the accident of disciplinary location and isolationism in the academy and thus not particularly interesting for definitional interrogation. However, several factors challenge such a view.

First, the opposition between the social sciences and the humanities cannot be so easily dismissed as arbitrary or insignificant because some fields like cultural anthropology, history, geography, political theory, media studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, and postcolonial studies are multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary. They exist on the liminal threshold between the two divisions, equally engaging in questions of representation, theory, social organization, power relations, and empirical as well as imaginative formations. Consequently, the oppositional meanings of *modern/modernity/modernism* often coexist within certain disciplines, fields, and institutional units in the academy.

Second, the borders between disciplines and divisions of knowledge have become increasingly porous in the past thirty years with the re-legitimation of interdisciplinarity. Such cross-disciplinary work with modernity produces rich hybridities, but also some confusion. For example, in his collection *Modernist Anthropology*, Marc Manganaro (who holds an appointment in a literature department) brings together anthropologists and literary critics to examine the interplay between literary modernism and modernist anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century. The result is an exciting interdisciplinary examination of the intermingling of aesthetic and ethnographic

502 projects in the period. But the term *modernism* slips and slides between oppositional meanings—from rational ordering sought in Boasian or Malinowskian anthropology to anarchistic disordering found in avant-garde art and poetics. This oscillation is never directly confronted anywhere in the volume and is even reproduced in many individual essays. The collection intensifies rather than illuminates the definitional problems evident in an uninterrogated mixing of social theory and aesthetic meanings of *modernism*.<sup>27</sup>

To take another example, the geographer David Harvey begins his influential book, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, with an invocation to Charles Baudelaire's notion of modern life as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent," cites the literary critic Marshall Berman on modernism and modernity in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, and then quotes W.B. Yeats's paradigmatic modernist lines in "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (*CP*, 10). Firmly entrenched in the conventional literary meanings of *modernism* as disruption, Harvey develops his discussion of postmodernism with a thoroughgoing association of modernism, particularly what he calls High Modernism, with the Enlightenment project of the "development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought" (*CP*, 12). Having detailed the formalist ruptures of modernist epistemology, ontology, and representation, he then cites Ihab Hassan's famous schematic chart asserting the absolute break between modernism and postmodernism over modernism's supposed alignment with the Cartesian subject and Enlightenment reason (*CP*, 42–44). In his splendid book, influential across the disciplines in modernist studies, Harvey slides back and forth between "anarchy" and "organization" as the defining modes of High Modernism with only occasional allusion to the tension between these meanings.

Third, the insistence on arbitrary disciplinary difference obscures what is shared across the social sciences and humanities—namely, the emphasis on rupture from the past; debate about the politics of modernity/modernism, and a pervasive Eurocentrism. Just what "past" modernity abandons differs, but transformative change is a constant component of definition. Social theorists and art critics alike argue fiercely among themselves about the value of modernity and modernism in debates that are more similar than different across the methodological divides. Is modernity or modernism liberating or oppressive, progressive or regressive, something to be reinforced or dismantled? Do its ideas and ideals require the oppression or exclusion of some for the benefit of others? Or do they open doors for ever-expanding, ever-more inclusive conditions of freedom and plenty? The questions are similar, whether addressed to issues of revolution and slavery or avant-garde art and mass culture. Some defend modernity/modernism; others attack it. Underlying all these nominal debates is the problematic assumption that modernity/modernism originated in the West and is either forced upon or imitated in diluted form by the Rest. Given these similarities, the dissonance in the core meanings of *modern/modernity/modernism* is deafening.

A nominal approach to defining *modern/modernity/modernism* presumes the possibility of consensual agreement about the meanings of the terms as nouns with a

specific content: a set of characteristics existing within discernable boundaries of meaning, space, and time. However, a closer look reveals little consensus, either across disciplines or within them. This capacity of the nominal approach to spawn diverse and even opposite meanings undermines the naming function of nouns. If what a noun signifies cannot be consistently named, of what use is it as a category?

### Relational Mode—The Adjective

A relational approach to the meaning of *modern/modernity/modernism* looks for the latent structure rather than the manifest contents of the root term. Instead of locating modernity in the specific time of the post-Renaissance or post-Enlightenment West, a relational definition stresses the condition or sensibility of radical disruption and accelerating change wherever and whenever such a phenomenon appears, particularly if it manifests widely.<sup>28</sup> What is modern or modernist gains its meaning through negation, as a rebellion against what once was or was presumed to be. Just as adjectives such as *tall* or *big* have meaning only in reference to other adjectives like *short* or *small*, the relational meaning for *modern* (and its siblings) exists within a comparative binary in which the opposite is *traditional*. Neither term has a fixed or universal meaning in and of itself, but rather acquires meaning only in relation to its implied opposite. Where tradition signals the unfolding of the future within the continuous pathways of the past, modernity calls for perpetual subversion of the past as the precondition of the future.

Relationally speaking, modernity is the insistence upon the Now—the present and its future as resistance to the past, especially the immediate past. It establishes a cult of the new that constructs retrospectively a sense of tradition from which it declares independence. Paradoxically, such a tradition—or, the awareness of it as “tradition”—might come into existence only at the moment of rebellion against it.

Precisely because a relational definition does not seek the fixity of nominal definitions, modernity need no longer reside solely in a specific set of institutional, ideological, or aesthetic characteristics emergent in the post-Renaissance West, radiating globally along the pathways of empire and postcoloniality, and appearing as pale copies of western genius. Instead, a particularized modernity located in space and time could potentially emerge wherever and whenever the winds of radical disruption blew, the conditions of rapid change flared up, or the reflexive consciousness of newness spread—whether these were eagerly sought or resisted; whether imposed from without or developed within.

But the relational approach to defining *modern/modernity/modernism* raises as many questions as it appears to resolve. First, there is the impossibility of perpetual disruption or revolution as change becomes institutionalized. What begin as multiple acts of rebellion against prevailing hegemonies become through their very success a newly codified, often commodified system. Margins become centers with the proliferation and dissemination of rupture. In intellectual and aesthetic realms, for example, outsiders become insiders; pariahs become icons; the rebels become the Establishment.

504 The new science of the Enlightenment that overturned the symbolic order based on religious faith itself became the hegemonic norm based in a faith in Reason. The avant-garde artists initially greeted with hoots of derision—the impressionists, postimpressionists, cubists, abstract expressionists—are now the great masters whose works are mainstays of museums and sell for fabulous sums. Rejected, banned, ridiculed, and often unread in the beginning, figures like Freud and Joyce are for many the supreme avatars of the age, essential reading in any history of ideas and literature. As Raymond Williams argues, the antibourgeois origins of modernism are lost as modernism is canonized in the post-World War II era.<sup>29</sup> As the principle of disruption, the more widespread modernity becomes, the more codified and authoritative it becomes, thus undermining its character as the spirit of explosive rebellion and change. Institutionalized, the avant-garde of rupture becomes the new Establishment to be revoked in the making of new avant-gardes. The very success of modernity (and its modernist expressivities) evident in its institutionalization accomplishes its demise—the imperative of postmodernity.

Second, for all its insistence on the new, a relational modernity is inevitably part of a generational dynamic. Modernity rebels against its parental precursors, only to be rebelled against by its inheritors: yet another form of the family romance. It occupies an uneasy location between the *pre*-modern that it disrupts and the *post*-modern that disrupts it. Never fully stable, it exists in the middle of a prepositional chain, defined by its coming *after* the traditional and *before* the postmodern.

Third, this chain of prepositions in generational succession challenges the relational assumption of freedom from history. The (self)consciousness of modernity—the sense of radical rupture from the immediate past—refuses the principle of historical continuity and evolution in its insistence on origin, newness, and revolution. Indeed, it denies its own production as a historical formation. History produces change as well as continuity; the new cultural and institutional formations of modernity are themselves the product of historical process.

Moreover, the relational notion of modernity tends to resist just the immediate past, often leapfrogging the prior generation in a reinvocation of a more distant past as an inspiration of rebellion. To justify this rejection, inaccurate or heuristic readings or even demonizations of one's recent precursors are common, much as the modernists (inaccurately) condemned the Victorian realists to epistemological and psychological naïveté, much as the postmodernists (inaccurately) reduce the modernists to mere makers of Enlightenment grand narratives. As Paul de Man suggests in echoing Nietzsche, modernity involves a form of "ruthless forgetting," the "*desire* to wipe out whatever came earlier," not the actual erasure of the past.<sup>30</sup> As such, the relational consciousness of modernity is based in historical illusionism—an insistence on "making it new" as a manifesto that refuses to acknowledge the presence of the past in the present and future. The more modernity protests its absolute newness, the more it suppresses its rootedness in history. And the more that history is repressed, the more it returns in symbolic forms to haunt and disrupt the illusionary and ideological mythology of the new.

A relational approach to defining *modern/modernity/modernism* presumes the possibility of consensual agreement about the meanings of the terms as the structural principle of radical rupture—wherever, whenever, and in whatever forms it might occur. Freed from the fixity a noun suggests, the relational definition appears to garner more agreement across and within disciplines. However, a closer look reveals a pattern of contradiction just as the nominal approach does. Like the noun *modernity*, the adjectival form slips and slides between meanings rooted in the possibility and impossibility of “making it new.” If the adjectival form of *modernity* signifies both revolution and evolution, both the break from history and its return, of what descriptive use is it?

\* \* \*

Both nominal and relational meanings of *modern/modernity/modernism* end in contradiction, signaling a phenomenon that signifies both the formation of hegemonies and their dissolution, the production of grand narratives and their dismantling. As noun and adjective, *modernity* is a term at war with itself, a term that unravels its own definition, a term that codifies the principle of indeterminacy and in so doing opposes its own commitment to perpetual change.

In sum, the grammatical/philosophical approach to a definitional project confirms the partial and misleading nature of any definition that focuses on only the nominal or only the relational meanings of modernity. Modernity is not solely a fixed set of characteristics that might have appeared in a given space and time, such as the European Enlightenment or the twentieth-century avant-garde in the arts. Nor is modernity exclusively the principle of rupture. Modernity is best grasped as a set of meanings that encompasses both the specificities of nouns and the relational structures of comparative adjectives. Additionally, this combined approach suggests that meaning does not lie exclusively with either the formation of hegemonies or their dismantling. Instead, modernity encompasses both centripetal and centrifugal forces in contradiction and constant interplay. I pose this neither as a concept of historical stages nor as a utopian dialectic. Rather, I insist upon a meaning produced liminally in between, a dialogic that pits the contradictory processes of formation and deformation against each other, each as necessary to the other.

**Political/Cultural Route:** The grammatical/philosophical excursions lack historical and geographical contextualization, lack reflexivity about the production and consumption of meaning, lack attention to issues of power and the institutionalization of knowledge in the definitional project itself. Definitions don’t come into being or function in an abstract cosmos of pure reason or arbitrary signification. (*Pace* linguists and philosophers: decontextualized definitions have their place, but only a partial one in the arena of contestation.) The textual unconscious of definitional debate is also a political unconscious. More issues must be posed under a broadly defined umbrella of cultural studies in historical, global, and comparative contexts.

We need to ask: Who is producing a given set of meanings for *modern/modernity/modernism*? For what audience? From what position or standpoint in space and time?

506 For what purpose and with what effect? What cultural work do these meanings perform? In what way was and is modernity a set of cultural formations with diverse parts and functions, manifesting differently in various temporal and spatial situations, with different effects? How do power relations condition the production, dissemination, and reception of contested meanings? In short, how do questions of power and politics shape both the concept of modernity and the historical phenomena to which the term refers? These are questions upon which a cultural studies approach to definitional power relations focuses.<sup>31</sup>

Modernist studies tends to produce three distinct configurations in the politics of definition: the binary, the circle, and the metonym. Recognizing all three helps to expose the flows of power in the institutionalization of knowledge.

### The Binary

The definitional act itself typically depends upon a binary of inclusion and exclusion. Depending on who does the defining, certain phenomena belong to the category of *modern*, *modernity*, or *modernism*. Other phenomena do not. By definition. Definitional acts establish territories, map terrains, determine centers, margins, and areas “beyond the pale.” Attempts to establish permeable borderlands instead of fixed boundaries and liminal spaces of considerable intermixing between differences diffuse to some extent the territorial imperative of definition but cannot ultimately eliminate the function of categories to demarcate some phenomena in opposition to others which do not belong. As Toni Morrison writes about canon formation (a type of definitional act in literary, art, and religious history), “Canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range . . . is the clash of cultures. And *all* of the interests are vested.”<sup>32</sup>

Take, for example, the conventional social theory concept of modernity as the invention of the West, as reflected in this assertion by a leading sociologist of modernity, Anthony Giddens:

When we speak of modernity, however, we refer to institutional transformations that have their origins in the West. How far is modernity distinctively Western? . . . [T]wo distinct organisational complexes are of particular significance in the development of modernity: the *nation-state* and *systematic capitalist production*. Both have their roots in specific characteristics of European history and have few parallels in prior periods or in other cultural settings. If, in close conjunction with one another, they have since swept across the world, this is above all because of the power they have generated. . . . Is modernity distinctively a Western project in terms of the ways of life fostered by these two great transformative agencies? To this query, the blunt answer must be “yes.”<sup>33</sup>

To what extent does this definition reflect the western standpoint of Giddens and social theorists like him—not only as products themselves of the West but also as specialists in western societies and history? Without a sufficient knowledge base in the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and the non-Anglo Americas, is it any surprise that the

definitional binary of inclusion/exclusion is profoundly Eurocentric, all the more so when the approach is more nominal than relational? (No.) Such Eurocentrism is pervasive in the field whether the writer is celebrating (like Habermas) or critiquing (like Harvey) western modernity. Left intact is a center/periphery model of globalization in which the West invents and exports, while the periphery assimilates and copies. Left unexamined is the degree to which the production of western forms of modernity resulted from the heightened interaction western societies had with nonwestern others—with the Other of the western imaginary; and, with the real, heterogenous, multiplicitous others outside the West. Also left unexplored is the production of different modernities through the histories of nonwestern peoples.

Listen to the difference between Giddens's binarist logic and that evident in Sanjay Subrahmanyam's view, which originates in his standpoint and knowledge base outside the West, foregrounds intercultural contact among civilizations as constitutive of modernity, and assumes multiple nodal points for the modern around the globe:

I have tried to argue that modernity is historically a global and *conjunctural* phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another. It is located in a series of historical processes that brought hitherto relatively isolated societies into contact, and we must seek its roots in a set of diverse phenomena—the Mongol dream of world conquest, European voyages of exploration, activities of Indian textile traders in the diaspora . . . and so forth.<sup>34</sup>

Subrahmanyam's notion still establishes an inside/outside for modernity, but the center is not by definition western and singular. Rather, it is scattered, interactive, and multiple. His approach invites a rethinking of the times and places of modernity. Where else might accelerated societal change brought about by a combination of new technologies, knowledge revolutions, state formations, and expanding intercultural contacts contribute to radical questioning and dismantling of traditional ontologies, epistemologies, and institutional structures? What about the Tang Dynasty in China, with its great metropolis as the cultural/political center of a vast empire (about 600–900 A.D.)? Or Mughal India? Or Timbuktu, a large city and mercantile hub in West Africa at about the same time the cities of Europe were, relatively speaking, backwaters to the great centers of learning and trade in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East?

### **The Circle**

The approach of Giddens and Subrahmanyam to defining modernity—however different their politics—exhibits the familiar problem of the hermeneutic circle as well as the binary of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>35</sup> Defining historical periods and conditions or movements in the arts and writing depends upon a circular process. Definers often identify the characteristics of the *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism* by describing the qualities of the phenomena that they have already assumed to exist within the boundaries of the category. Put differently, definitional mapping relies upon prior

508 assumptions of where the boundary belongs, assumptions that reflect the preexisting beliefs or standpoint of the mapmaker. Such circularity has a politics—all the interests are vested, as Morrison says.

Take for example the literary history of modernism. Periodization, canonization, and the naming of the defining characteristics of modernism are all based on a pool of tenets, people, and/or events whose selection depends upon preexisting notions of the period. Thus, Hugh Kenner declares that expatriate internationalism is a central defining characteristic of High Modernism and uses writers like Pound, Eliot, and Joyce to demonstrate his assertions. On this basis, he asserts that Williams, Faulkner, and Woolf are “provincial” or “regional” writers, not modernists. But if he had included these writers in his pool of modernists to begin with, his generalizations about modernism would have been different. So might his concept of the internationalism of modernism if his pool had included writers from Africa, South America, and Asia.<sup>36</sup>

The case of the Harlem Renaissance in modernist studies is even more striking. The literature, arts, and music of African Americans centered in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s are simply missing from conventional maps of modernism. Not even represented with an occasional token figure, as female modernists like Woolf and Stein sometimes are. Simply not there. Picasso’s primitivism, Fitzgerald’s Jazz Age, Eliot’s apeliike Sweeney, Sherwood Anderson’s “dark laughter,” Faulkner’s racially divided South—all exist on the terrain of canonical modernist studies. But not the primary producers of jazz, not the black artists turning to an imaginary (or real) Africa, not the blues singers and the folk, leaving the rural South for the urban North in the Great Migration, not the soldiers returning from a brutal war to demand more freedoms. Their linguistic and rhythmic experimentation, intertextual “signifyin,” Africanist mythmaking, parodic mimicry, revolutionary fervor, and self-identification with the New do not seem to qualify them for literary modernism in most histories of the movement even though these same histories frequently list formalist experimentation, citation, mythic analogues, irony, and self-reflexivity as definitional markers. Since the Harlem Renaissance is largely absent from the pool of texts out of which literary historians generate definitional characterizations of modernism, the particular formulations of modernity produced by African Americans are also missing.<sup>37</sup>

### The Metonym

Another form the politics of definition takes is the identification of certain figures or qualities to stand for the whole. This metonymic substitution of the part for the whole is widespread in the establishment of the reigning characteristics of the historical condition of modernity or the aesthetic constellation of modernism. To some, Locke or Rousseau are supreme embodiments of Enlightenment modernity; to others, Joyce is the defining icon of modernism. Similarly, some might characterize western modernity in terms of the rise of the bourgeoisie, democracy, and science; others might define modernism in terms of utopian social planning or the poetics of disruption. Common to all such definitional generalizations is the heuristic tendency to characterize

the whole in terms of what the historian retrospectively believes to be its most influential or significant components. In this way, categories like modernity and modernism govern or contain different cultural formations, absorbing their specificities within the definitional boundaries of the privileged metonymic part. And such categorical discipline returns us to the locational question of who is producing these metonymic histories. Who and what has been left out? For what purposes? With what effects?

\* \* \*

The tendency of binarist, circular, and metonymic definitional acts to reproduce the play of power relations within institutions of knowledge might lead some to affirm the need for epistemological anarchy—the elimination of all such periodizing categories. However, the problematic of definitional history should not, in my view, result in its abandonment. Rather, as Jameson writes, “The problem of periodization and its categories, which are certainly in crisis today . . . seem to be as indispensable as they are unsatisfactory for any kind of work in cultural study” (*PU*, 28). Without historical categories, we would face an infinity of singularities, an approach to knowledge that requires some form of selection that is no more politically neutral than the heuristic construction of historical narratives. Without some definitional categories, the politics of choice would be driven further underground, rendered even less visible.

Given our need for definitional categories, however imperfect they are, what, then, does the political/cultural route have to offer? I regard the binarist, circular, and metonymic problems inherent in definitional acts not as dead ends but rather as opportunities for interrogation that lead right into the heart of the dialogic meanings of *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism*. They insist upon a recognition of how such terms are themselves historical constructions—with their own history, development, function, and effect, all of which invite interpretation and critique. Different configurations of modernity reflect the different positionalities of their producers, serve different interests, and have different effects. It is this which returns us to the question of politics—how power relations inform not only the cultural artifacts of modernity but also the subsequent readings of them.

**BangClash:** In a Nietzschean (or perhaps Fanonian) mood, Amiri Baraka writes:

Harlem is vicious  
modernism. BangClash.  
.  
.  
.  
Can you stand such beauty.  
So violent and transforming.<sup>38</sup>

Whether the BangClash of definitional contestation produces such transformative beauty is doubtful. But this excursion—through the byways of story, parataxis, hypertextual detour, aphorism, and collage—has an end point. I have been resisting the desire to come up with my own product, yet another definition of *modernity* and

510 *modernism* for others to argue about or ignore. (Resistance is never easy. The magnetic slide toward fixed meaning feels irresistible at times.) Instead, I have attempted to shift attention to the processes and patterns of definitional contestation.

In these terms, there is a conclusion of sorts to be made. Definitional dissonance matters. The fact of not only diverse but downright opposite meanings signifies. These differences should not be ignored as accidental or arbitrary, the ordinary product of disciplinary background or semantic disagreement. Nor should they be tamed within the deceptive inclusiveness of pluralism. In practice, the pluralization of *modernity* and *modernism* runs the risk of covertly reinstating a center/periphery pattern in which a hegemonic norm is covertly privileged over marginal variations.<sup>39</sup> Instead the BangClash should be confronted directly.

The grammatical/philosophical and political/cultural routes I explored suggest that the oppositional meanings of *modern/modernity/modernism* point to the contradictory dialogic running through the historical and expressive formations of the phenomena to which the terms allude. Order and disruption are symbiotically necessary to each other for each to have its distinctive meaning. The center comes into being as it dissipates. Modernity's grand narratives institute their own radical dismantling. The lifeblood of modernity's chaos is its order. The impulse to order is the product of chaos. Modernism requires tradition to "make it new." Tradition comes into being only as it is rebelled against. Definitional excursions into the meanings of *modern*, *modernity*, and *modernism* begin and end in reading the specificities of these contradictions.

## Notes

1. This essay is a short version of a chapter in my work-in-progress, "Transnational Modernism: Spatial Poetics, Politics, and the New Modernist Studies." An even shorter version was presented at the University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal, May 2000, and at the Modernist Studies Association conference, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, October 2000. I am indebted to these audiences for their questions and encouragement and to Rita Felski for an astute reading and critique.

2. I echo here Ezra Pound's famous slogan and two influential early essays, Harry Levin's "What Was Modernism?" in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 271–95, and Maurice Beebe's "What Modernism Was," *Journal of Modern Literature* 3 (July 1974): 1065–84.

3. "Introduction," *Modernism, 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 27.

4. Anthony Giddens, Foreword to *NowHere: Space, Time and Modernity*, ed. Roger Friedland and Deirdre Boden (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xii.

5. Robert Caserio, *The Novel in England, 1900–1950* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 82.

6. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 139.

7. Bradbury and McFarlane, *Modernism*, 26.

8. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 89–90.

9. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 151.

10. "Introduction: Subjectivity and Modernity's Other," in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 1. But they also write, "modernity is a matter of movement, of *flux*, of *change*, of *unpredictability*" (*ibid.*).

11. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 25.

12. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii–xxiv.

13. Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.

14. Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 267–8.

15. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 10–2; hereafter abbreviated as *CP*.

16. *Ibid.*, 35. I end this chain of paratactic pairs with quotations from the same author to highlight the existence of unexamined and seemingly un-self-reflexive contradiction within the work of the same person.

17. In ways different from my own, others have noted contradictions in passing or in an attempt to resolve the conflict. See for example Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), where her succinct summary paves the way for her advocacy of a cultural studies approach to western modernity from the Enlightenment to its break up in the early twentieth century (12–3); hereafter abbreviated as *GM*; Bernard Yack's *The Fetishism of Modernities: Epochal Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Social and Political Thought* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), where he reviews four distinct concepts of modernity in the West (philosophical, sociological, political, and aesthetic) and argues that for all their differences they share “an emphasis on innovation and challenge to traditional authority” (35, 1–40); hereafter abbreviated as *FM*; Eric Rothstein emphasizes the heterogeneous distributions of modernity within the modern while refusing nominal, relational, and stagist approaches in “Broaching a Cultural Login of Modernity” in *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2000): 359–94; and Marshall Berman's *All That Is Not Solid Melts into Air* resolves the contradictions with a notion of evolutionary stages within modernity.

18. I do not examine the term *modernization* because there is more consensus about its basic meaning as the process that brings about *modernity* (however that may be defined); debates about the causes, effects, and politics of modernization of course abound.

19. The relation between the terms *modern/postmodern* and *modernism/postmodernism* is as contested as the meanings of the root words and beyond the scope of this essay. Many social theorists use *postmodern* or *postmodernism* to refer to the rupture from Enlightenment modernity, regarding the aesthetic dismantlings of this modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as early harbingers of the change to come later and more broadly in the twentieth century. What many others understand to be modernity and modernism are thus folded into postmodernism. See for example Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* and Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Because of the inconsistency in terminology, their critiques of societal modernism are often misunderstood to be attacks on aesthetic modernism as well. The difficulty in determining whether postmodernism represents an intensification of modernism or a radical rupture from it is compounded by these differing uses of the terms *modernity/modernism* and *postmodern/postmodernism*. Left unexplored is the possibility that the most significant break from modernity is just now in the making, through the knowledge revolution instituted by the computer and the related effects of accelerating globalization.

20. See Freud's Papers on Technique, especially “The Dynamics of the Transference” and “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” volume 13 of the *Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 85–327. In *The Fetishism of Modernities*, Yack characterizes the postmodernists' attention to modernity as an “obsession” and a “fetishism” that leads to misleading totalizations of a epoch much at odds with their advocacy of *petits recits* and heterogeneity (1–16).

21. See especially Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 36–91; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981); hereafter abbreviated as *PU*; *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 94–207; and Shoshana

512 Felman, *Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27–51.

22. I am indebted to Noel Carroll for bringing to my attention nominal and relational modes of definition in the discipline of philosophy. I have added to his observation the grammatical dimension, emphasizing the distinction between nouns and adjectives in definitions of *modern/modernity/modernism*.

23. Although some scholars invoke one mode rather than the other, many use both. See for example Anthony Giddens's nominal assertion in *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 14–5: "I use the term 'modernity' in a very general sense, to refer to the institutions and modes of behavior established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth-century increasingly have become world-historical in their impact. 'Modernity' can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialised world', so long as it is recognised that industrialism is not its only institutional dimension." But in a relational mode, he writes, "Inherent in the idea of modernity is a contrast with tradition." *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 36.

24. See for example, Giddens; Harvey; Lyotard; Scott; Yack; Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 3–14, and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); *Model Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall, et al. (Malden, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1996).

25. See for example, *Modernism*, ed. Bradbury and McFarlane and *The Modern Tradition*, ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), collections which in spite of their exclusions maintain a seminal position in defining the meanings and canon of aesthetic modernism. For more recent definitional overviews, see Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Margot Norris, "Modernist Eruptions," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 311–30; Marjorie Perloff, "Modernist Studies," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Publications, 1992), 154–78; Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1987); Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Clark; and Jardine.

26. The association of modernism and modernity with Europe and the United States in the humanities not only excludes nonwestern locations but also contains peripheries within "the West"—including, for example, margins based on gender, race, and geography, namely those of women, ethnic and racial minorities, and locations such as Spain, Portugal, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, Brazil, and the Caribbean. See for example Scott; DeKoven; Felski; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Joseph Allen Boone, *Libindinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988–1994); Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ned J. Davison, *The Concept of Modernism in Hispanic Criticism* (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Press, 1966).

27. *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3–50.

28. In developing a “scalar” model of modernity in “Broaching a Cultural Logic of Modernity,” Eric Rothstein works with a relational mode in describing societies as “hot,” “warm,” or “cold” in reference to how intense or pervasive the phenomenon or phenomenology of rupture are in a given time and space. His relational approach to periodization takes into account the heterogeneity within any so-called period at the same time that some measure of nominal generalization is acknowledged.

29. Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Thomas Pinkney (New York: Verso, 1989), 32–36. The first essay in this collection, “When Was Modernism?” alludes to and revises the earlier essays by Levin and Beebe.

30. Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 147–8. See *GM*, *CP*, 36–8, and *FM*, 12–3 for variations on this argument.

31. See *GM*, and “New Cultural Theories of Modernity,” in *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), in which she claims that the blend of aesthetics and sociology that characterizes cultural studies fosters consideration of not only elite culture but also the cultural practices of everyday life, popular and mass culture, and the voices of those often marginalized or regarded as sheer victims.

32. Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (winter 1989): 1–34, esp. 8.

33. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 174–5.

34. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400–1750,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 99–100. Himself part of the South Asian diaspora, Subrahmanyam lives and works in Paris. His essay is part of a special issue of *Daedalus* edited by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Schluchter entitled “Early Modernities” that critiques the use of the West as “the major yardstick” by which other modernities are measured and calls for the exploration of alternative early modernities (7). Eisenstadt followed up this pathbreaking issue with another special issue called “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000). For another attack on western diffusionist models of modernity, see Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 1–47.

35. I am indebted to Cyrena Pondrom’s application of the notion of the hermeneutic circle to definitional issues in modernist studies (unpublished paper). For related critiques of the circularity of literary history, see for example Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Meaning, 1910–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 9–12, and Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*, 27–8.

36. Hugh Kenner, “The Making of the Modernist Canon,” *Chicago Review* 34 (spring 1984): 49–61.

37. This absence has begun to change with the publication of literary histories that incorporate black writers into the landscape of a diverse modernism, although some critics still segregate black modernism and others discuss only white appropriations of black art forms. See for example Gilroy; Baker; DuPlessis; Boone; Nelson; Gambrell; James De Jongh, *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Laura Doyle, *Bordering the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

38. Amiri Baraka, “Return of the Native,” cited as epigraph for De Jongh’s *Vicious Modernism*.

39. See for example, Nicholls’s *Modernisms*; its plural title suggests heterogeneity, but its contents devote twelve chapters to western, white, male modernism and female modernism is herded into one chapter entitled “At a Tangent: Other Modernisms.” In my book in progress, “Transnational Modernism,” I argue for the resingularization of *modernity* and *modernism*, suggesting that these phenomena take on historical and geographical specificity within a transnational and global landscape.