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Title: Review of Stephen Ross and Allan C. Lindgren, eds. *The Modernist World*. London: Routledge, 2015

Creator: Kimber, G.

DOI: [10.1515/9783110465938-016](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110465938-016)

Example citation: Kimber, G. (2016) Review of Stephen Ross and Allan C. Lindgren, eds. *The Modernist World*. London: Routledge, 2015. *Symbolism: An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics*. **16**, pp. 332-337. 1528-3623.

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Version: Published version

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Stephen Ross and Allan C. Lindgren, eds. *The Modernist World*. London: Routledge, 2015. 615 pp. ISBN 9780415845038, GBP 130.00.

Interdisciplinarity and transnational modernisms are the key approaches in *The Modernist World*, as sixty-one essays discuss modernism in literature, the visual arts, theatre, dance, architecture, music and film, as well as intellectual currents. The essays themselves are geographically divided into eight sections: East and Southeast Asia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the Arab World, and finally Canada and the United States. Indeed, a real indication of the new approach taken in this volume is precisely the order of these geographical subdivisions, where Europe and the West no longer begin the conversation, but instead appear half way through and at the end.

The above methodology thus foregrounds the editors' intentions from the outset, as the excellent introduction affirms:

The reconceptualization of modernism is an ongoing and collective project. Until the end of the last century, Anglo-American and European writers and artists dominated the landscape, with the rest of the world reduced to a mere standing reserve upon which canonical geniuses drew for inspiration. (1)

For those readers who have not engaged with global modernisms before, the editors explain the move away from what Hugh Kenner termed *The Pound Era* (1971), with its mostly male, literary, Western practitioners, towards the “new modernist studies” concept of 1999, when modernism was deliberately reconceived to restore the “vibrant plurality” (1) that had marked its origins. In addition, the notion of a carefully delineated time period of 1890–1940 (particularly for Western modernist literature), now saw a “temporal, spatial and vertical expansion” (1), with Ezra Pound’s famous dictum “Make it new,” applied in an interdisciplinary and transnational way. The richness of the seam uncovered by such an approach is revealed in the essays assembled for this volume. Literature (with a peppering of visual arts) no longer holds sway; the study of modernism now rightly accords a place at its table for a multitude of disciplines.

Many of the chapters engage in the socio-political implications of modernism, and especially the relationship between modernism and imperialism, given the volume’s broad transnational coverage. Over time, an historical dichotomy emerged, whereby it was possible to crave “imperialist modernity for the sake of becoming modern,” whilst at the same time abhorring “the imperialism by which it arrived and was established” (8). One caveat noted by the editors is that disputes over terms such as modern, modernism and modernity “will re-

main unresolvable in large part because they are so context-dependent” (2). Thus, plural, global modernisms necessitate a “shifting terminological, as well as conceptual and aesthetic, terrain” (3).

The Modernist World is not the first volume to discuss global/geo-modernisms, but it is the first to offer such comprehensive coverage in an accessible way, for both the scholar and lay reader. There are two possible reading approaches: by region (thus encouraging interdisciplinarity, which is the approach taken in this review), or by art form (thus encouraging a transnational perspective). Both work admirably. All the essays are of a uniformly short length, and clear subheadings allow for directional and purposeful arguments.

The first section on East Asia and Southeast Asia encompasses an enormous geographical area. The contextual chapter on intellectual currents by Christopher Bush offers a fascinating introduction to the modernist cultural production in this vast and diverse region, “though the range of its application and its relevance to East Asia remain subjects of debate” (17). Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.’s chapter on modernist theatre and drama offers an absorbing discourse on how the region’s theatre tradition was influenced by the West, whilst at the same time the West was looking East, with authors such as Yeats, Brecht, Artaud, Craig and Pound seeing Japan, in particular, as “a model to bring life to what they perceived as a tired, spiritually dead theatre” (77).

In the book’s second section, on South Asia, the focus of attention shifts to the Indian subcontinent, where nationalist art, “one form of counter-colonial sensibility, appealing to bourgeois nationalists, was replaced by a modernist anti-imperial imaginary” (93). For Vinay Dharwadker,

South Asia’s literary modernism [...] begins in the early 1880s as an aesthetic outcome of a quest for social reform and self-modernization under colonialism, and not merely as an imitative offshoot of Euro-American *modernismo* or modernism. (129)

This is defined in four distinct phases: realism and reform, 1880–1920, nationalism and experimentation, 1922–1947, independence and nation-building, 1950–1980, and finally diaspora and cosmopolitanism, 1980–present.

The region delineated in the third section is Sub-Saharan Africa, where, for Yahia Mahmoud, “modernity is a multiple and shared condition” (157), and where the confrontation and deconstruction of Western representations of Africa is essential to approaching the continent’s realities through a lens of modernity: “Some see African ruling elites as bearers and defenders of modernity, but others as a hindrance to it” (159). Lizelle Bisschoff, in her chapter on African cinema, indicates the problems associated with trying to view modernism as a purely Western construct, since “any application of modernism on African artistic

and aesthetic practice would then indicate a Eurocentric approach to understanding this time period in Africa" (174). Tsitsi Jaji takes a slightly different approach in an essay on African music, by suggesting that African modernism in fact can be viewed as an aesthetic response "to the shock of modernity in the violent encounters with European colonization and the haunting histories of internal, Arab, and trans-Atlantic slavery" (197). For Jaji, there is a "global circulation of black aesthetics" (198), viewed in the way that African diasporics seek out African culture, whilst Africans themselves seek out African-American literature and music. The process might be viewed as an unwieldy pendulum, swinging back and forth.

Section four covers the region of Australia and Oceania. David Macarthur's compelling chapter on aboriginality and the radically new views modernist art as a Western response to tribal culture, "and Australasian modernism [as ...] a Western response to Aboriginal culture," quoting Henry Moore's famous words: "All art has its roots in the 'primitive' or else it becomes decadent" (228). Macarthur cites Picasso's influence of African masks in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, and the influence of Tahiti in paintings by Gauguin, who saw exposure to the primitive as an essential tool for recreating art; in these instances, the fact of being confronted with "otherness" engendered creativity. Matthew Hall, in his chapter on literature, believes that "[t]he incipient modernism of early-twentieth-century Australian literature is strongly correlative with the creation and legitimisation of a hegemonic national identity" (265). In New Zealand, on the other hand, a strongly puritanical grip by the literary establishment shaped much of the nation's literature, which remained both patriarchal and colonial for the first half of the twentieth century at least. For Hall, the social homogeneity of the Maori and the Pakeha (white settlers) was a myth which imploded in the 1970s with the ascent of Maori culture and writing:

Twentieth-century literature in New Zealand represents less a literary tradition than a social transformation in which the barriers of access were broken and New Zealand literature was redefined by the representation of the country's multi-cultural, post-colonized voices. (271)

The section on Europe begins with an essay discussing modernist intellectual currents by Irene Gammel and Cathy Waszczuk, where they observe how, against the cataclysmic backdrop of WWI, radical thought provided a breeding ground, both intellectually and culturally, for the move towards modernity. Michael Johnson's essay on European modernist architecture focuses by necessity on the German Bauhaus and its adherents, as well as the Swiss-born architect known as Le Corbusier, with his infamous declaration: "A house is a machine for living in"

(317). The closure of the Bauhaus by the Nazis in 1933 “launched a diaspora of modernist architects and designers throughout the world” (319). Michael Valdez Moses offers a comprehensive overview of European modernist cinema, that “seventh art,” which would provide a new lens through which to view life, with its fractured representations of time, and which offered, for the first time, the power “to move the spectator – figuratively, but most important, virtually” (322). In their essay on dance, Juliet Bellow and Nell Andrew posit the thesis that modernist dance predates painting in its use of abstraction and that, as a result, it should be accorded an equally important place with those other art forms perceived to be at the heart of modernist expression.

The subject of section six is Latin America. According to Amy A. Oliver, there is a general consensus among scholars that “literature is the medium most associated with modernism in Spanish America,” where anti-bourgeois, as well as anti-imperialist, modernist literature created its own very distinct literary style. Felipe Hernández in his chapter on architecture makes the point that modernism in Latin America is anchored in the decades 1930 – 1960, slightly later than in Europe and North America, “precisely to exceed the limitations imposed by Euro-American curation” (383). Emily McGinn relates how Buenos Aires quickly became the hotspot of modernist literary activity in the Latin American literary world, led by writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Macedonio Fernández. Alejandro L. Madrid notes that Latin American composers were also forging a new kind of music, invigorating and renewing “their inherited European musical languages through the self-exoticizing recourse to Indigenous or Afro-Latin American musics” (410).

The penultimate section of the volume engages with modernism in the Middle East and the Arab World, which, as Kaveh Tagharobi and Ali Zarei affirm in their opening chapter on intellectual trends, “is a very fitting endeavour, as ‘Middle East’ itself is a ‘modern’ term, which has only become common since the early twentieth century” (439). They argue, however, that as a result of political instability in the region over the last hundred years or so, together with the West’s colonial presence, the transition to modernity in the region has not been easy, since it “was thrown into a developed experience of modernity while its nations were still struggling with issues like illiteracy, dictatorship, and underdevelopment” (444). Indeed, Anna Bernard takes this argument further in her chapter on literary modernism in the region, when she states that demands for political and cultural autonomy from European imperialism were closely allied to the region’s modern literary production. Dina Amin, in her discussion of Arab theatre, makes some important points concerning Arab culture in general, condemning the colonial viewpoint that prior to the twentieth century the Arab World “had experienced some 500 years of cultural wasteland”

(482). For Amin, “this period-division of a ‘dark age’ and an ‘age of enlightenment’ initiated by colonial presence only benefited Orientalists’ view of Arab history and ignored five centuries of creative output” (482–483). Thus, a prime aim for Arab modernists was to connect “the modern self with its ancient roots” (487).

The final section of the volume turns to Canada and the United States, where, according to Leif Sorensen, the region’s artists and thinkers developed their own domestic versions of modernism, shaped by their growing sense of independence from Europe. Rhodri Windsor Liscombe asserts that after the second world war, North America’s developments in architecture and design “attained an apogee but also a nadir” (509) as modernist architecture sought “the creation of a more efficient, entire and equitable urban demos” (514). According to Juan A. Suárez, modernist cinema in the region had to fight the overwhelming reach of Hollywood and its “exclusive reliance on escapist storytelling” (520). Early modernist films were influenced by expressionism as a means of rendering psychological interiority. Allana C. Lindgren explains how New York quickly became the center of dance experimentation outside of Europe, emphasizing how moral superstition was overcome by positioning such dancing as a serious art form. Ballet helped to promote this modernist dynamism with the founding of the New York City ballet by George Balanchine, who had originally worked for that most celebrated of early modernist European dance companies, the Ballets Russes.

The reader’s journey through this volume, then, is a rich and varied one. Several chapters stand out from the rest: Michael Johnson’s “Modernist Architecture and Design in Europe” is a tour de force: brilliantly researched and at the same time a pleasure to read; Alejandro L. Madrid’s “The Modernist Musical Experience in Latin America” presents a fascinating discussion of the importance of this genre to the region’s modernist heritage; and Nada Shabout’s “Modernism and the Visual Arts in the Middle East and North Africa” offers an excellent overview of modernist art from a postcolonial viewpoint.

Overall, *The Modernist World* is a ground-breaking volume in the field of modernist studies, and the editors are to be congratulated for assembling so many expert contributors covering such a diverse range of modernist genres and geographical locations. One minor point: the volume would have been better served by a more stimulating cover. I assumed it must be a standard one for the whole series until I examined the Routledge website and saw that all the other volumes in the series have striking covers, each depicting an iconic image from the subject at hand. The vague ink swirls on this cover don’t even offer a hint as

to the volume's contents and, in effect, are the only real disappointment in this otherwise captivating volume.

Gerri Kimber

University of Northampton

Review Essay:

Between Formalism and Social, Cultural, and Ideological Approaches: Comics Studies in Transition

Nick Sousanis, *Unflattering*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 2015. 196 pp. ISBN 9780674744431, USD 22.95.

Santiago García, *On the Graphic Novel*. Trans. Bruce Campbell. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2015. 375 pp. ISBN 9781628464818, USD 60.00.

Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji, eds. *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities*. New York, London: Routledge, 2015. 264 pp. ISBN 9780415738132, USD 145.00.

Those who are new to comics studies may find themselves irritated by a pervasive tendency of the field: the insistence on finding an essential, catch-all definition of the medium. The search for a definition of what distinguishes comic books as a medium has considerable impact on the direction most research takes. Lukas Wilde sums up the two often diametrically opposed poles in what he, alongside Meskin,¹ calls “the definitional project” of comics studies: on the one hand, there are those who try to define comics by focusing on “the medial signs, production, distribution, and cultural reception of comic books.”² The adherents of this culturalist branch of the definitional project typically produce monographs and essay collections that can be grouped by the labels “comic books as” or “comic books and”: they study superheroes as capitalist icons,³ think of *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures*,⁴ focus on *Comics and the History of Twen-*

1 Aaron Meskin, “Defining Comics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 4 (2007): 369–379, 369.

2 Lukas Wilde, “Comic,” *Glossar der Bild-Philosophie* <<http://www.gib.uni-tuebingen.de/netzwerk/glossar/index.php?title=Comic>> (acc. 15 April 2016). My translation.

3 Dan Hassler-Forest, *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Neoliberal Age* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2012).

4 Mark Berninger, Gideon Haberkorn, and Jochen Ecke, eds., *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures: Essays on the Interplay of Media, Disciplines, and International Perspectives* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010).