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Countermapping Modernism: An Introduction

This special issue has emerged out of AMSN 5: Cultures of Modernity, the fifth conference of the Australasian Modernist Studies Network, held from 12 to 14 December 2022 at Waipapa Taumata Rau / University of Auckland in Tāmakimakaurau, in collaboration with Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato / University of Waikato and Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka / University of Otago.

As conveners, we conceived of the conference as an opportunity to extend and respond to the work of Indigenous scholars like our keynote speaker Kirby Brown, who in 2017 pointed out that modernist studies had an "Indian problem."[1] Despite the radical upheaval in the field over the past few decades, Brown argued, Native American modernisms and modernities had largely gone unaddressed. While Brown's focus was North America, the charge of ignoring Indigenous texts and perspectives could equally be applied to modernist studies in many other places around the world. As Brown and other Indigenous scholars have insisted, modernists—including non-Indigenous scholars who, like the three of us, live and work in settler-colonial contexts—need to attend responsibly to Indigenous modernisms and modernities, a refocusing that can only enrich the texts, histories, and genealogies of the field.

The four essays presented here are four possible responses to this need for reconfiguration. They are not, of course, exhaustive of such possibilities nor of the wide variety of interventions seen at AMSN 5. Like the conference, the articles do not offer definitive answers, but direct us towards a more reflective, more nuanced modernist studies that is more attentive to Indigenous perspectives.

Brown's essay, stemming from his keynote address, illustrates why this approach has potentially radical field-changing implications. In "Me and Hank," Brown

[1] Kirby Brown, "American Indian Modernities and New Modernist Studies' 'Indian Problem,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 59, no. 3 (2017): 289.

prioritises a Cherokee perspective by writing about his own grandfather's story. Brown illuminates important aspects of Cherokee modernity and Cherokee modernism, reminding readers that Indigenous peoples were and are "central contributors to and active co-creators of some of the most important political currents, aesthetic movements, and intellectual conversations of their time." By turning to his grandfather's story, Brown explicates how his work on "North American Indigenous modernisms" draws on the principle of "writing from home," situating "Indigenous peoples in an ever-present moment of creation, of agency, of always becoming in relation to the pasts we have inherited, the presents we are currently negotiating, and the futures we are attempting to imagine into being." Brown joins other Indigenous scholars of modernism in suggesting a profound upheaval of the field, so that Indigenous texts are studied not—or not only—for their assimilation of modernisms that come from elsewhere but as the source of their own modernisms and modernities. Brown centres Indigenous modernisms and modernities in a way similar to, for instance, Alice Te Punga Somerville when she asks us to consider not just "what does Māori modernism tell us about modernism?" but also "what does Māori modernism tell us about Māori?"[2] Brown prompts a parallel question about Cherokee modernism through his interweaving of family and wider Cherokee history, illustrating the extent of the gravitational shift required to re-centre Indigenous modernisms and modernities.

The second essay in this issue, by Cai Lyons, explores the context and implications of Irish artist Mary Swanzy's work in Sāmoa in the 1920s, a period during which her art was deeply influenced by the tropes of Euro-American South Seas fantasies. Yet, as Lyons shows, Swanzy's preparatory sketches for the series of paintings she did during her visit to Sāmoa reveal a "working landscape shaped by a Sāmoan modernity interacting with a colonial Euro-American modernity," reflecting Sāmoa's imbrication in modern economic and transport networks, as well as its increasing urbanisation and industrialisation. In her desire for professional advancement, Swanzy suppressed these details in her finished paintings, instead reinscribing images of untouched natural beauty and "Native"

[2] Alice Te Punga Somerville, "'[Modernism] in Māori Life': Te Ao Hou," *New Oceania: Modernisms and Modernities in the Pacific*, edited by Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long (New York: Routledge, 2019), 166.

innocence and sensuality. Lyons's essay thus highlights the market-driven pressures that narrow creative practices and scholarly fields, and which remain with us today, in both art and academia.

Bonnie Etherington shows us yet another mode of scholarly response to Indigenous modernisms and modernities. Etherington centres Indigenous modernisms by attending to the West Papuan novel *Anggadi Tupa: Harvesting the Storm* (2014) by Ambai author, journalist, and playwright John Waromi. Etherington, like Lyons, identifies modernity with imperialism, marked in Waromi's novel by the slow violence of United States munitions dumping after the Second World War and the larger ongoing effects of United States and Indonesian imperialism. But Etherington also honours Waromi's West Papuan "visions of modernity," implicitly rejecting the ongoing tendency in modernist studies to assume Western modernism and modernity as a normative frame of reference for the field. Instead, Etherington highlights Waromi's equally modernist vision of "multi-being ways of living that do not conform to imperial structures."

Paul Saint-Amour's essay turns to one of the most canonical texts of European modernism, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), in an essay that further demonstrates the ways Indigenous studies prompts fundamental reconsiderations of how we read and map modernist spaces. Saint-Amour employs the concept of *countermapping*, a term first coined to describe Indigenous mapping practices that counter colonial power structures. Saint-Amour shows how Joyce, drawing on Ordnance Survey maps originally used by the British as a tool of subjugation in Ireland, countermaps Dublin. Joyce's alterations to scale and relation underpin the parallels he draws between Irish and Native American histories of displacement and land loss and allow him to reclaim "spatial meaning from urban devastation" after the Easter Uprising. In Saint-Amour's piece, Irish and Indigenous experiences of colonisation come together to disrupt and enrich core modernist reference points.

As all four essays in this special issue demonstrate, it is not enough merely to expand the field of modernist studies to include Indigenous texts and contexts. Instead, we join voices with all those who have long called for new spatialisations, new visualisations, new family trees within modernist scholarship. A full

recognition of Indigenous modernisms requires a shift in the centre of gravity, the ability to recognize that the centre of modernist studies is as much Tāmakimakaurau as London, West Papua as New York, Apia as Dublin. It also reminds us that we need to cease seeing those "Western" centres through old hierarchies, and to respond instead to the Indigenous peoples already there, and always there. It requires a countermapping of modernism itself.