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Introduction: Modernism and Modernity at the Edge

I

We write from Tasmania. This island—Lutruwita in palawa kani—is often called the edge of the world. On the northern-oriented map it hangs like a fang in the mouth of the Southern Ocean. Its capital Nipaluna/Hobart is an officially designated "Antarctic Gateway City" and is periodically streaked green with the aurora australis. The sixth Australasian Modernist Studies Network conference was held here in 2024, and its theme, "Modernism and modernity at the edge," was a deeply felt somatic reality for timezone-crossing scholars from the Pacific, Asia, Europe, and North America. But Lutruwita's imagined edginess—as backwoods, wilderness, or cartographical afterthought—is itself a product of colonial modernity and its spatial logic, brought to these shores with guns and wire fences, and perpetuated by a tourism-industrial complex as a compensatory fantasy of purity and escape. So AMSN6 invited presenters to think eccentrically about being on the edge—whether ecologically, geographically, spatially, politically, socially, temporally, or aesthetically—and, beyond this, to interrogate how edges are made and what real cultural work they do.

To better grasp the hard or crumbling, sharp or blurred, closed or open boundaries of modernism and modernity, as we now understand them after the Global Modernist turn, it's necessary to recognise the full truth of what modernity means in a place like Lutruwita. Cherokee scholar Kirby Brown articulates in the introduction to the *Handbook of North American Indigenous Modernisms*:

> "modernity" is not just the industrial revolution, or the World War, or the Armory Show of 1912, or the annus mirabilis of 1922 […]. It's also disease, the arrival of Church and State, of discourses of nationhood and state sovereignty, of private property regimes and capitalism, of total war

> campaigns and genocidal assimilationist policies, of new epistemic forms and relationships[.][1]

As for Brown, modernity here implicates *rupture*, in historical time and family time, measured in the lengths of generations. The Tasmanian Aboriginal people, known as the Palawa, understand this sense of rupture well. The rupture of modernity brought genocidal violence, great losses to culture, irreparable disruptions to kinship, and untold damage to Country. Distinguished Professor and Palawa scholar Maggie Walter has written with her sister Louise Daniels that many of the Palawa people who continue today as custodians of Lutruwita are descended from women like their ancestor Woretemoeteryenner (c.1795–1847), survivors of abduction and sexual violence, whose people had been ravaged by European disease, hunted in the Black War, and forcibly removed from their lands by racist government policy.[2] The historian Henry Reynolds succinctly notes the hypocrisy and cruelty of colonial policies, given that the "whole convict system, even the settlement of Australia, were monuments to the sanctity of property and the savage penal code that enforced it."[3]

For the Palawa, Lutruwita is not the edge but the centre. Yet colonial modernity brought the island into the world-system as an edgeland, a status that has been reclaimed and cultivated. To be an edge, in the discourse of tourism, is to be a green world from which weekend escapees from late capitalism can emerge revitalised—a vision that sits uneasily beside the extractivist foundations of the island's economy. The absence of other humans is a selling point in this green world vision. The "Tasmanian Wilderness" is a UNESCO World Heritage listed site of Outstanding Universal Value.[4] The Tourism Tasmania page, Discover Tasmania, leads with alternating drone shots and close-ups of temperate

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[1] Kirby Brown, Stephen Ross and Alana Sayers, introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of North American Indigenous Modernisms,* ed. Kirby Brown, Stephen Ross, and Alana Sayers (Routledge, 2023), 12.

[2] Maggie Walter and Louise Daniels, "Woretemoeteryenner (c.1795–1847)" (2019), *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://ia.anu.edu.au/biography/woretemoeteryenner-29701/text36773.

[3] Henry Reynolds, *A History of Tasmania* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 27.

[4] "Tasmanian Wilderness," UNESCO World Heritage Convention, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/181/.

rainforests, ferns, gambolling Tasmanian Devils (in palawa kani, purinina) mountain lakes, and coastal bays, under the tagline "come down for air." People eventually feature in the image carousel, usually sitting within or observing from a cosy window one of these scenes of natural beauty. But, as Palawa scholar Professor Greg Lehman writes in his essay "Tasmanian Gothic," "In Tasmania, an empty wilderness was created, not found":

> Where the songs of women praising the harvest should have rung through the tea-tree glades, there is only the plaintive, piping call of a Firetail finch. Instead of the boom of drums around a late night bonfire, only the soft thud of a wallaby, startled in the gloom. Sea eagles soar in still airs that should be streaked with the smoke of a dozen campfires.[5]

The UNESCO heritage listing notes that the Tasmanian Wilderness has always been a cultural as well as natural landscape, cared for and cultivated for millennia by Tasmanian Aboriginal people.[6] To the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, Country is not a "wilderness." It is familiar kin. It is an intimately known life-giver, healer, safe place, and sacred space, described by Palawa Elder Uncle Jim Everett *puralia meenamatta* in his 1987 poem "Spiritual Places," "sites our spirits dwell, for all time our people's will."[7] The wilderness story which tourism brochures sell to visitors was created to fit alongside other self-serving colonial narratives that uphold Western imperialism—of "civilisation" and "savagery," "bold" adventure and "rightful" conquest, all of which require emptiness.

This island was colonised by British settlers as part of what Clare Anderson, following Michel Foucault and Ann Laura Stoler, terms a "carceral archipelago,"

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[5] Greg Lehman, "Tasmanian Gothic: The Art of Australia's Forgotten War," *Griffith Review*, no. 39 (2013): 197.

[6] "Tasmanian Wilderness."

[7] Quoted in Keith "Jim" Everett puralia-meenamatta, "There Is No Other World: Country & Politics," keynote presentation at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature 2022 Conference, Hobart/Nipaluna, 26 October 2022, https://www.tellthetruth.com.au/-s/There-is-no-other-world-Jim-Everett-Puralia-Meenamatta.pdf. For a discussion of Aboriginal philosophy, see Victoria Grieves-Williams, "Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing," Discussion Paper No. 9 (Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009).

one of many "nodes in an imperial network" that connected Hobart as a port town with Sydney, Melbourne, London, and Cape Town, amongst other world cities.[8] In a 2026 special issue of *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, "Writing Tasmanian Lives," our colleagues in the University write:

> The lives lived on and through Tasmania's islands—what Patsy Cameron has called the "colonial sea frontier"—were all, from the early nineteenth century, archipelagic. Most people here had been displaced, sometimes many times over, and sometimes over generations. Theirs were littoral lives, not landlocked ones.[9]

On the eastern shore of the river, where the water meets the land of the Mumurimina of the Oyster Bay nation, lies the wreck of the *Otago*, the ship once captained by Joseph Conrad. Conrad didn't wreck it. It had already passed out of his hands by the time it was brought here as a coal hulk and, in 1931, finally towed to what is now known as Otago Bay and left to rust. It is a transformation uncannily anticipated by Conrad in *Victory* (1915) and *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), which chart the transition to steam and the globalisation of a fossil economy, and which represent, according to Elizabeth Carolyn Miller and George Hegarty, an "aesthetic mediation of the systemic and logistical thinking that the rise of fossil-fueled society produced."[10] The wreck of the *Otago* has been a ghostly tourist attraction since the 1960s, when Harry O'May described Conrad fans "tak[ing] a trip by car to gaze upon her remains."[11]

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[8] Clare Anderson, "Introduction: A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies," in *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies*, ed. Clare Anderson (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1–36; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 130–34.

[9] Annaliese Claydon, Kristyn Harman, and Naomi Milthorpe, "No One Is an Island: Thinking Archipelagically about Tasmanian Lives," *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, no. 11 (2026): 3. See also Patsy Cameron, *Grease and Ochre: The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier*, vol. 3 (Fullers Bookshop, 2011).

[10] Elizabeth Carolyn Miller and George Hegarty, "'The Stepping Stones of Empire': Conrad, Coal, and Oceanic Infrastructure," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 52, no. 2 (2024): 333–54.

[11] Quoted in Derick R. C. Marsh, "A Note on the 'Otago'," *Conradiana* 2, no. 1 (1969): 33–36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24641433.

There is something depressingly emblematic about this ruin of modernity, the tool of global colonialist and extractivist capitalism, once mastered by the great proto-modernist writer, slowly rotting in a river at the southernmost point of the populated world over the course of the twentieth century under the sporadic gaze of literary tourists. You can see parts of the ship's interior in the Hobart Maritime Museum if you want. In 2022 our colleague Danielle Wood published a prose poem, "Here Passed Your Head," about the *Otago*, written during a residency there:

> Here passed your head, and within it, an imagination rich enough to hold a heart of darkness and fill Marlon Brando's mouth with apocalyptic works. The horror, the horror. You wrote that we live in the flicker, but I hope that in your life's brief dance of light, there were things you never imagined. Like the shudder of axe into mast timbers. Your high-bred barque reduced to a shabby sisterhood of coal hulks. The crushing hands of the shipbreaker. The timbers of this hatch-way swelling in a suburban Hobart garden's forty years of rain. Your command reduced, on the banks of the Derwent, to a shellfish-crusted carcass. The lone cormorant, perched on your beloved's rusted ribs, who hangs his washing out to dry.[12]

This poem is interested in transition, in the agential and the passive shifts of use, occupation, and relation that mark the *Otago*'s passage from heroic vessel to abandoned ruin. Here the crisp encounters the fuzzy edge—the boundaries of the backyard, the waterlogged expansion of the timber, the hulk's bare frame, the black ink on the page fading over time. The poem apostrophises an ideal of "imagination" set against time's ravaging. Though we might seek for a trace—the same fingers that wrote "the horror, the horror" may have gripped this hatchway—any real physical connection has been washed away by ocean and rain many decades since.

Writing of the significance of the littoral in understanding the "overlap," "amalgamation," or "matrix" of geographical and representational forms, bodies, and rhythms, Hannah Freed-Thall suggestively asks, "What can we see when we

[12] Danielle Wood, "Here Passed Your Head," *Island* 164 (2022).

linger at the water's edge?"[13] Gail Jones's *One Another* (2024), written during a writing residency here, stitches together dual narratives of Conrad in the nineteenth century and of a doctoral researcher, Helen, working on a thesis on his novels in the twenty-first.[14] Helen's interest in Conrad is sparked in part by a childhood visit to the wreck of the *Otago*. Fragments, wrecks, dreams, associations, and attachments figure. Alix Beeston, in the *Sydney Review of Books*, writes that in *One Another*, "the hidden element in our knowledge of other people, history, and the world that emerges flickeringly to view. It is a way of knowing, as Jones says, that cherishes small fragments pulled from oceanic oblivion."[15] In the case of the wreck of the *Otago*, we might see the wastes of capital, imperialist remnants, literary ghosts, and naturalcultural entanglements overlaid and co-existing.[16] As Julia Hell and Andreas Shönle remark in their introduction to *Ruins of Modernity*, the ruin has "suggestive, unstable semantic potential":

> The ruin has blurred edges in more ways than one. […] Where does the ruin start, and where does it end? Is a well-preserved but empty building already a ruin because it has lost its practical and social function? And at the other end of the spectrum, does rubble still qualify as ruin? More broadly, is a ruin an object or a process? Does it signal the loss or the endurance of the past?[17]

The idea of the ruin as process is relevant for the present era of anthropogenic climate change, in which catastrophic weather events, rising temperatures, and air and water toxicity push us, in the words of Adriana Petryna, "towards some edge,

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[13] Hannah Freed-Thall, "Beaches and Ports," *Comparative Literature* 73, no. 2 (2021): 131–32.

[14] Gail Jones, *One Another* (Text, 2024).

[15] Alix Beeston, "One with Another," *Sydney Review of Books*, 16 October 2024, https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/reviews/one-with-another.

[16] *Natureculture*, coined by Donna Haraway, names the entangled relationality between the otherwise opposed concepts of nature and culture: "Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and non-human, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways." Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Prickly Paradigm, 2003), 4.

[17] Julia Hell and Andreas Shönle, *Ruins of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

some horizon beyond which existence ceases to be viable—call it extinction—without our even noticing."[18] Twelve years after the publication of "Tasmanian Gothic," the sea eagles that Lehman wrote about are listed as vulnerable due to extensive coastal development.[19] As Petryna explores in *Horizon Work* (2022), the effect of our collective actions in pushing towards the ecological edge has been well documented for at least the extent of the twentieth century. It is not lack of knowledge or of material evidence that prevents us addressing the ramifications of this double vision but, as Petryna argues, "narrowed self-understandings [...] that leave us stranded in a present that may not be survivable."[20] The ruin is thus suggestive of a relationship between the loss, the history, and the endurance of the past in material form—and the frailty of this materiality. "Here Lies Your Head" acknowledges this, Wood's words conjuring a physical world of timber, rust, rain, shellfish, bird, hands, axe. The wreck of the *Otago* shows the part each plays in the process of loss; the poem shows what flickering, mournful remnants might be salvaged and what are futile to regrasp. Conrad himself was attuned to what becomes possible and impossible at the edge. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow describes the vision of Kurtz, attained by his "extremity," the irrevocable fact that Kurtz

> had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible.[21]

II

We might see ruin as a suitable emblem of modernism and modernist studies itself, as T. J. Clark suggests. In *Farewell to an Idea* (1999), Clark argues that "already

[18] Adriana Petryna, *Horizon Work: At the Edges of Knowledge in an Age of Runaway Climate Change* (Princeton University Press, 2022), 18.

[19] "White-Bellied Sea Eagle," Derwent Estuary Program, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.derwentestuary.org.au/species/white-bellied-sea-eagle.

[20] Petryna, *Horizon Work*, 7.

[21] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899; Penguin, 1973), 101.

the modernist past is a ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not remotely grasp."[22] For Clark, modernity means "contingency" and "blankness":

> It points to a social order which has turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future—of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information. This process goes along with a great emptying and sanitizing of the imagination.[23]

Clark, writing at the end of the twentieth century, linked this contingency—borrowing the phrase "the disenchantment of the world" from Max Weber—to capitalism's expansion into "more and more of the world and the texture of human dealings." This was a view which he then assumed was a "vestige," a "minority view," but which now, in an era in which the technocratic push of large language models threatens creativity, knowledge work, and the availability of potable water, drives many of our collective intellectual and political actions as scholars. We're acutely aware of the troubled status of Humanities and Arts departments in universities in Australia and around the world. If your institution isn't actively cutting programs, it may nevertheless subscribe to neoliberal ideologies of labour and productivity that trivialise humanist and creative disciplines, and the work we as scholars do to understand the meeting points in time of the ragged edges of ideas, feeling, and material existence.[24] It is with pleasure that we note the resistance of our colleagues across the world to the marginalizing of humanities scholarship, such as in the workshop and subsequent organizing towards Mutual Aid in Modernist Studies at the 2026 British Association for Modernist Studies / Modernist Studies Association conference, led by Nissa Ren Cannon and Catherine Hollis.

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[22] T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press, 1999), 2.

[23] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 7.

[24] See Lauryl Tucker, *Unexpected Pleasures: Parody, Queerness, and Genre in 20th-Century British Fiction* (Clemson University Press, 2022), 230.

Judith Butler, writing on melancholia and community, suggests how the relentless unfurling of the new creates communities founded on ruins, bound together through a shared sense of loss:

> Places are lost—destroyed, vacated, barred—but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of this new place. What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it. [...] Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community cannot overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community.[25]

In the face of relentless loss, the work of Thomas S. Davis, a keynote speaker at AMSN6, thinks about how we form attachments to "things, beings and places" in the Anthropocene. Davis asks,

> What aesthetic forms allow us to comprehend and to tell the stories of the places we inhabit and the beings with whom we share these places? What cultural and critical lexica might help us articulate the effects we have on them and describe how they affect us?[26]

One of the mechanisms by which we can connect with place, Davis argues, is through a scholarship that connects the specificity of our place and its stories and forms to the world, a scholarship that bears witness to the ruins, remnants, and legacies of modernism and modernity experienced here. The site that hosted the AMSN Conference provides a rich case study for this kind of analysis. We met in the University's Centre for the Arts on Nipaluna's Hunter Street, which occupies one part of the former IXL jam factory owned by Henry Jones. Before the colony, Hunter Street was not a street but a rocky tidal island, connected to the land by a

[25] Judith Butler, "Afterward: After Loss, What Then?," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (University of California Press, 2003), 468.

[26] Thomas S. Davis, "Aesthetic Education for the Anthropocene," *Modernism/modernity Print Plus*, 27 August 2019, https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/aesthetic-education-anthropocene.

strip of sandbank—an edge upon which a person could observe, understand, and make use of the meeting-point of land and river. The Muwinina, a mariner people who regularly traversed what is now called the D'Entrecasteux channel between mainland Tasmania and Bruny Island, would have fished here for abalone and crayfish. By the time the colony was established in the early nineteenth century, Hunter's Island was known as "Old Wharf," a gateway used for Hobart Town's sex work, shipping, and stevedoring, as well as an embarkation point for new arrivals, both freemen and convicts.[27] As Isobel Hofmeyr observes in *Dockside Reading* (2022), though port cities "aim to pave the ocean and assert sovereignty over the conjuncture of land and sea," they are "unstable spaces" of exchange and definition of bodies, things, and documents, including literature.[28] (As Hofmeyr documents, that definition occurs especially through legal and regulatory frameworks.) Alongside Hobart Town's other piers (including the New Wharf at Salamanca Place), the port provided a major function of "exchange" that, as R. J. Solomon comments, was "basic to the capital's increasingly normal role as a 'trading town,' and the warehousing backing the wharves formed the link between production of the land and commerce of the sea."[29] The boom of business was accompanied and facilitated by the genocide perpetrated on the Muwinina and other peoples of the South East Nation by settlers during and following the Black War.

[27] Hunter's Island is not to be confused with Hunter Island. See Noel Frankham, "Hunter Island: A Visual Investigation and Interpretation of the Precinct's Heritage Material Culture," refereed paper, conference of the Australia Council of University Art and Design Schools, Hobart/Nipaluna, 1–4 October 2003, http://acuads.com.au/wp-content-/uploads/2014/12/frankham.pdf; Russ Gloster, "Two Hundred Years on Hunter Street, Hobart 1822-2022," *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 69, no. 1 (2022): 28–32, https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.-416925697309801.

[28] Isobel Hofmeyr, *Dockside Reading: Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House* (Duke University Press, 2022), 4.

[29] R. J. Solomon, *Urbanisation: The Evolution of an Australian Capital City* (Angus & Robertson, 1976), 363.

Over the course of the century, Old Wharf developed as a hub for commerce; it was here that the jam factory was first built by George Peacock in 1870.[30] Henry Jones took over from Peacock as the nineteenth century clicked over into the twentieth. He rebranded the jam company as IXL—a pun on "I excel."[31] The scent of boiling fruit would have filled the air. By the 1940s, Jones had taken over the whole street. A classic turn of the century industrialist, Jones was at the cutting edge of finance, shipping, and manufacturing, of tin-dredging, and of tyre manufacturing, as well as of fruit bottling.[32] But eventually boom turned to bust. In 1970 IXL was bought out and asset-stripped, and in 1986 the site was purchased for redevelopment as the School of Art. Since then, our colleagues have educated students in fine-arts studio practices—painting, sculpture, textiles, photography—within walls that, in the heat, still occasionally exhale a fruity odour. We recall Butler again: "And so this past is not actually past in the sense of 'over,' since it continues as an animating absence in the presence, one that makes itself known precisely in and through the survival of anachronism itself."[33] Noreen Masud, who also delivered a keynote at AMSN6, writes in *A Flat Place* that the landscape of the fens "demands a strange double vision: rich with fertility and a symbol of death; smooth and perfect, and yet a place where something went very wrong. It's impossible to separate the two. Is the life marked by loss? Does the life spring forth from that loss?"[34] The Hunter Street site similarly requires that double vision, an ethical orientation towards the site's heritage of endurance and loss: the forcible removal of Indigenous peoples, the "reclamation" of "waste" tidal land for capital, the expansion and contraction of economies, the gentrification of ex-industrial areas for arts, tourism, and hospitality, the unfinished and necessarily provisional project of education.

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[30] "Peacock, George (1824–1900)" (1974, last modified 2006), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/peacock-george-4378/text7125.

[31] John Reynolds, "Jones, Sir Henry (1862–1926)" (1983, last modified 2006), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/jones-sir-henry-6874/text11911.

[32] Reynolds, "Jones, Sir Henry (1862–1926)."

[33] Butler, "Afterward," 468.

[34] Noreen Masud, *A Flat Place: Moving Through Empty Landscapes, Naming Complex Trauma* (Melville House, 2023), 209–210.

III

In *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea* (2015), Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers conclude by noting that modernism,

> Cut free from precise historical or geographical markers, [...] has been able to morph constantly into new forms, contracting into a tightly defined historical period at times and expanding deep into the past and present at others. Modernism, it seems, is everywhere, but nevertheless always wriggling away from any attempt to pin it down and fix it in the amber of periodization or professionalization.[35]

The 2024 AMSN conference showcased the ways we can use this place, towards reconceiving the edges of modernism and modernist studies: flat landscapes, aesthetic and ecological attachment, the extremity that is Antarctica, the meeting of modernism and Pacific literature, and how experimental writing is done now, beyond the temporal boundary of modernism traditionally conceived. The essays gathered here all sprang from the conference and demonstrate the breadth of possible approaches to our conceptual framing—an expanding horizon.

Several essays consider paradigmatically modernist texts' use of spatial boundaries to signal explorations of conceptual limits. The externalised, concretised edge provides a determinate and visible reference from which culturally or psychologically contingent terrain can be explored. Eileen Yu contemplates the journeys "forth and back" on Bond Street and the Strand taken by Clarissa and Elizabeth, respectively, in Virgina Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). These "momentary trespassing experiences" occur in physical and psychic spaces, and both journeys are ultimately constrained by patriarchal capitalist systems that in 1925, Yu argues, Woolf herself was seeking to modify rather than overturn. The article draws together Andrew Thacker's work on literary geography and Griselda Pollock's on "spaces of femininity" to demonstrate but also delimit the extent of the strategic transgressions that take place in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf allows that crossing a spatial edge which licenses, as Yu says, a "search for an alternative private identity." That Woolf also accepts without question a return physical

[35] Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers, *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 207.

journey is, as Yu argues, at least comprehensibly correlated with the suspension of that search. By way of contrast, Heather Joyce explores the crossing of a geographic threshold by Chike in Chinua Achebe's *Chike and the River* (1966) and its refraction of similar movements by Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's early fiction. Even if forward motion is understood as demonstrating progress along personal, economic, and political dimensions, arriving at a new location creates the possibility of looking back at the starting point. Heather Joyce's essay argues that in echoing James Joyce, Achebe draws the reader's attention to a critique of colonial and class norms, generating an implicit critique of the ethical assumptions that must underlie straightforward readings of any form of Bildungsroman. To talk of development is to assess an initial state and to condone a direction of travel; Heather Joyce draws out the ways in which these texts allow us to differentiate between vectors of progress, to reconsider their beginnings, and to conceive alternative futures. Henry Barlow's essay is in conversation with Heather Joyce's, and not only because he takes *Ulysses* (1922) as his central text. Barlow is interested in the reconsiderations of the past that take place in the "unique point of temporality of waiting which occurs on thresholds," a moment in which there is both a temptation to mythologise or valorise a past that is about to be left behind and the possibility of recognising that past as a space of unrealised dreams. Drawing on the relationships between waiting and thresholds contained in Walter Benjamin's work, Barlow emphasises the alternative valences that waiting has for James Joyce, points at which multiple inconsistent futurities are offered by competing sources of authority: race, class, wealth, religion, state, and empire, among others. Moving the reader back to a position before the edge has been crossed, this essay argues, allows them to recognise and reappraise the unrealised dreams of the past.

A significant vein explored in this issue involves instantiations of modernism in Australasia, in spaces found on the edge of any conventional map of the movement. These essays reprise and reconsider work done in the name of modernism in locations where physical distance delayed and disrupted iterative communication with the cultural epicentre, and the essays show that these places' common awareness of their (perceived) marginality generated very different responses. Samuel J. Cox offers an unprecedentedly rich account of the "virtually unknown" *Phoenix*, a literary magazine—indeed a little magazine—of four issues printed between 1935 and 1939 "upon the edge of modernity in the Antipodes, its

marginality […] further compounded by its publication in the city of Adelaide." Cox brings us the informed individuals, the live debates, the specific literary conditions to which *Phoenix* was a purposive response, and he positions the magazine as a basal work from which the Jindyworobaks and the Australian modernists would soon cleave, the prominence of and the difference between the latter two movements having previously obscured their common ancestor. In attending carefully to the fulness, aspiration, and evolution of *Phoenix*, Cox suggests a broadly applicable truth: that those on the margins do "not view themselves as peripheral, belated, or passive receivers of culture and knowledge." Giacomo Bianchino discusses the socialist poet John Manifold and his efforts to "connect the most far-flung parts of an activist geography" through his writing, editing, and organising. The essay argues that, amidst sincere global debates amongst Soviet-inflected socialist writers about purpose, form, and vocabulary, Manifold makes clear and coherent artistic and political choices, seeking "rhythms of expression which best resonate with the people" that "remain sensitive to the requirements of [Socialist] struggle in his own country." Bianchino argues that these political undertakings kept Manifold and Australia's Realist Writers Groups beyond the conservative literary establishment's pale, in a space where they had the intellectual freedom to pursue deliberate, directed, formal invention. There is a powerful suggestion that it is this commitment to continually developing the new *in situ* that marks the group as a truer heir to European modernism than those developing in concert with originary modernists. An alternative motivation for pursuing modernism at the edge is discussed by Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward in *The Rise of Pacific Literature* (2024), reviewed here by Wayne Bradshaw. As Bradshaw says, the book focuses on a time (1960 to 1990) and a place (primarily Papua New Guinea and Fiji) "far from the centres of industrial modernisation." He draws out the book's argument that the act of teaching modernism in the context of colonial, rather than literary, history, was a radical step; that acknowledging the ambiguous moral valence of modernism's ruptures and responses to colonial modernity did not prevent modernism being positioned as the proximate touchstone for those developing a Pacific literary community.

Finally, three scholars consider works in which narrative centres are dislocated, dissolved, or disorientated; where assumed edges are obfuscated or occluded; where senses of progress are called into question. Each of them finds modernist texts contesting edges that appear to offer organising principles or boundaries,

suggesting new ways of envisioning ourselves, our actions, and our environment. Gan Ainm writes from sea level, looking up at the 1,271-metre peak of kunyani, Lutruwita, to review Masud's book *A Flat Place*. The book connects Masud's memoir of complex childhood traumas suffered in "cramped and bustling Lahore" with her subsequent longing for and travel within a series of flat landscapes. Ainm appreciates Masud's resistance to the obvious provocations of dynamic landscapes, drawing out her argument that, unlike mountain summits or city streets, "flat places offer an opportunity to shed ourselves of the need for trajectories" and may, therefore, offer some sort of analogy for the inexplicability, the lack of meaning, that may be part of traumatic experience. Perhaps, Ainm suggests, Masud is sharing a beneficial "kind of oblivion" found in the "freeing and alienating, and so perhaps indifferent" landscape and in the "literal disorientation" that it causes. The dissolution of the edges of what we normally take to be our discrete self also motivates Tyrus Miller's essay. Miller begins with André Breton's claim that boundaries between our dreaming and waking consciousnesses are not necessary limits but avoidable habituations, and Miller suggests that if we overcome these apparent edges then we will reach an alternative perspective on both individual artworks and the history of art in general. Breton asserts that our consciousness is, during sleep, utilising all sorts of psychic forces to perform all sorts of meaningful labour that, when consciously recalled, constitute unwork: a "surrealist interpenetration of sleep and waking" generating its own "immanent, self-valuing expressions." Informed by Benjamin and by Maurizio Lazzarato, Miller then considers Marcel Duchamp's readymades as "unwork"—Duchamp as not generating sculptures but "unworking" paintings—exemplifying unwork as a "suspension of the work of painting" through temporal delay and financial extrication, such that some degree of unwork must be present in all artworks. Miller's argument invites us to begin considering an alternative history of art, taxonomized, ordered, and prioritised by the unwork involved; the edges no longer in the same places as before. If Masud, as read by Ainm, and Breton, as read by Miller, displace and disrupt the centre by blurring or ignoring conventional edges of place and person, then Sarah Fantini compares the work done by poetic strategies dependent upon recognising edges as "the points which do not cohere" to signal sites of underlying disjunction. She takes Sarah Reilly's *Styrofoam* (2009) as a paradigm of an ecopoetic text, a work of trash poetry composed from disparate scraps taken from other places, plastic in both their malleability and their commercially driven human creation, and shows

us the appeal of aligning such work with the projects of futurism or vorticism. The essay suggests both that the commonalities in their approach to poetic form may result, at least in part, from a shared antagonism to the pastoral, and that they have "a commitment to the belief that words used in new ways have the power to change the world." And it is here that Fantini calls us to understand that the different interrelationships of the disparate shards of the work with the world account for the important, radical, political differences between the two poetic modes. Implicit to Fantini's essay is the suggestion that if—when—we understand that we are on a cultural edge, we are not left to choose between valorising the future or the past but are rather faced with deciding whether to (continue to) accede to industrial, commercial, and financial systems of atomisation or to seek fragile, live, messy connection instead.

A note of acknowledgment and thanks to our colleagues and postgraduates and Honours students at the University of Tasmania who gave their knowledge and labour towards the conference and to this introduction across its various stages, especially to Emily Direen and Anna Claydon for reading this at, respectively, the beginning and end stages. We are grateful.

To you, the reader, were you not present at the conference, we hope that the essays collected here both delineate and extend the horizon of possibilities for modernist studies and invite you to see what the field looks like, from here.