Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time. **Susan Stanford Friedman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Pp. 451 (cloth).**

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In *Planetary Modernisms* Susan Stanford Friedman proposes a fundamental rethinking of the historical and spatial parameters through which we understand and define modernity and modernism. It is an exciting and provocative study that invites modernist scholars to reappraise some of the fundamental assumptions that have to date shaped the field. In the now well-established landscape of the "new modernist studies" we are accustomed to revisionist and expansionist projects. For example, in their 2008 essay, "The New Modernist Studies", Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz observe that the temporal, spatial, and vertical axes of modernism have been significantly redefined since the late 1990s.[1] Modernism's historical span now encompasses what might best be described as the long twentieth century; there is an increasing focus on transnational, post/colonial, regional, and ex-centric modernisms (thereby moving away from the conventional geographies of Europe, North America, and the metropolitan centre); and there is now a much stronger appreciation for modernism's engagements with mass and popular culture. However, what Friedman calls for in *Planetary Modernisms* is a much more radical paradigm shift: an epistemology that could be said to represent the limit(less) point of the new modernist studies. She argues that we need to leave behind the old comfort zones that have traditionally defined the field (such as the conventional temporalizing of modernism from 1890 to 1950), for what she calls "the contact zone".[2]

For Friedman, a properly planetary turn in modernist studies requires a rethinking of the spatial and temporal parameters through which modernity is conventionally defined in the West and, in tandem with this, a rethinking of the definitional frameworks for modernism. Drawing on the "archives of world historians," Friedman rejects the dominant narrative that sees modernity as a

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

[2] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 80. Hereafter abbreviated as *PM.*

Western creation born in the sixteenth century, instead arguing for an epistemology that acknowledges the multiple modernities that have unfolded in a global framework not just after but also before 1500 (*PM* 10). Following on from this, Friedman proposes a relational, planetary view of modernism that sees it as "the domain of the aesthetic that shapes, gives form to, and responds to the modernity of which it is a part" (*PM* 186). Modernism is the "aesthetic dimension" of a particular modernity and "cannot be separated" from it (*PM* 190, 185). Thus, rather than approaching early twentieth-century European/Anglo-American modernism as the aesthetic or philosophical benchmark by which all other modernisms are understood, she proposes that modernism be viewed as the cultural and aesthetic expressivities that arise in relation to a particular modernity: as there are plural and interrelated modernities, so too are there multiple and networked modernisms. We can trace, she argues in chapter five, modernisms that arise as a part of the modernity of the Tang Dynasty of the eighth century, just was we have identified a particular set of modernisms that arise as a component part of early twentieth-century British modernity. As I explain further below, both modernity and modernism are framed in Friedman's study through quite familiar relational terms and concepts. What are jettisoned are the spatial and temporal parameters that have traditionally circumscribed their application, as well as dominant narratives regarding origins and patterns of influence. Planetarity is adopted and understood throughout as "an epistemology, not an ontology" (*PM* 7). A genuinely planetary turn in modernist studies requires, Friedman argues, a rethinking of "*modernity* and *modernism* outside the long twentieth century, outside the post-1500 temporal frame commonly understood as the *period* of the *modern*" (*PM* 7, original emphasis).

Planetary Modernisms is divided into three parts. Part one explores through critical models of parataxis and perspectivism the challenges and possibilities of defining the terms "modernism" and "modernity" within an interdisciplinary framework. Part two draws on narrative theory and figural language to challenge dominant narratives that posit Western modernity as originary and singular, and explores stories of modernity from across the globe during the *longue durée* (i.e. pre-1500 modernities). Through a series of case studies that put to work Friedman's relational concepts of modernity and modernism, part three examines some of the "aesthetic expressivities" and innovations—the

modernisms—that arise from particular modernities, both pre-1500 as well as of the long twentieth century (*PM* 11).

Chapter one, "Definitional Excursions", explores how the terms "modernism," "modernity," and "modern" have been understood and deployed in quite different and often contradictory ways across disciplines in the academy. Here Friedman deftly shows that in the Humanities and Social Sciences the definitional frameworks for these terms are by no means clear-cut or stable but replete with contradiction and complexity. Committed to a resolutely interdisciplinary approach to modernism, Friedman argues that we need to "confront the definitional monster head on" and examine the dissonances and contradictions such terms generate. In chapter two, "Planetarity," using Wallace Steven's poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" as a framework, Friedman aphoristically proposes a provisional definition of modernity that may have the flexibility to accommodate a properly planetary approach. The mode of definition that she favours here and throughout the study is relational rather than nominal, as relational definitions "resist fixity" (for example, of time, place, ideology) and work comparatively (*PM* 145). While the expanded temporal framework that Friedman considers is unconventional, the "set of conditions" that she proposes might be understood as shared features of multiple modernities across the *longue durée* of history are familiar and, to my mind, apt: radical and rapid change, rupture, hybridity, mobility, the phenomenology of the new and now (*PM* 57-8). Against critics such as Fredric Jameson in *A Singular Modernity*, modernity for Friedman must be understood as recurrent, multiple, networked, and global, often propelled by conquest, imperialism, and colonialism—but not only the European example (61-2).[3]

Further developing her account of a planetary modernity in the *longue durée*, in chapter three Friedman draws on the work of world historians to challenge theories of European exceptionalism and "centre/periphery models [of modernity] with broad-scale concepts of global interculturalism and circulation over the millennia" (*PM* 9). In short, she contends that we must relinquish the conventional narrative that modernity is a Western or European invention

[3] See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

(defined by a set of nominal characteristics such as urbanization, capitalism, democracy, the bourgeoisie subject, secularism) that spread in a linear fashion to the rest of the globe following the Enlightenment. Modernity—if understood as a set of relational conditions such as rapid change, sudden conflicts between the old and the new, eruptions often caused by the clash of peoples and cultures—is a recurrent, global phenomena that has many instantiations prior to European, Enlightenment modernity. Asia is a particularly important focus in Friedman's study, the Mongol Empire (1206-1400 CE) and the Tang-Song Dynasties (618-1279 CE) providing the basis for two key case studies (or "stories") in her account of pre-1500 modernities and their attendant modernisms. Friedman's case for a plural, networked, and temporally expansive understanding of modernity, one which insistently works to decentre the privileging of the European/Western model and builds on the insights and arguments of world historians such as J. M. Blaut and Janet Abu-Lughod, is clear and persuasive. It is also, I imagine, the less controversial part of Friedman's thesis. The part of the argument that is, in my view, less thoroughly worked through in the book, is the case for the 'modernisms' that arise as a constituent part of pre-1500 modernities.

Friedman's conception of a planetary, relational definition of modernism as the cultural expressivities that arise as a component part of any specific modernity is exciting and, indeed, provocative. She argues that we need to relinquish the conventional "laundry list of aesthetic properties drawn from the Western culture capitals of the early twentieth century as *the* definitional core of modernism" and be receptive to the particular "forms of creative expressivities" and innovation that arise as a component part of any given modernity (*PM* 69-70). This is an interesting proposition with clearly significant implications for the field. While the case studies provided in chapter five of pre-1500 modernisms are interesting, they are less developed than the case studies explored in chapters six and seven, which focus on texts from the long twentieth century. The discussion of the modernisms of the Arab-Islamic Empire during the Abbasid Caliphate (the story of cobalt-blue glazing in Iraq-China ceramics) and the Tang Dynasty (Friedman focuses on the poetry of Du Fu) are suggestive but not as robustly worked through as the literary case studies from the long twentieth century discussed in part three. This is likely because Friedman's principal scholarly background is not in the history of ceramics or Tang Dynasty poetry, and she would contend

that the expertise of many pre-1500 literary scholars, translators, and art historians is required for a planetary modernist studies to be possible. But this important component of the project—and arguably its most provocative stage in terms of its implications for modernist studies—requires more exemplification and working through, beyond the base claim that these particular artistic and cultural formations reflect aesthetic innovation that can be linked to, for example, new intercultural, artistic, and trade networks, or conditions of social and political upheaval. No doubt Friedman's broader thesis will be explored by many other scholars in the years ahead as they test the possibilities of her planetary model and approach.

Utilizing the reading strategies proposed in chapter two for a planetary approach to modernism and modernity ("re-vision," "recovery," "circulation," and "collage"; *PM* 76-8), and building on recent scholarship in postcolonial and transnational modernisms, chapters six and seven offer nuanced comparative discussions of authors and texts from the long twentieth century. In these case studies Friedman focuses on networks of "circulating modernisms" that have emerged from the "modernities of [European] colonialism and its legacies" (*PM* 216). Adopting collage as an interpretative structure, chapter six discusses modernist fictions "caught up within the logic and structures of empire," specifically the British Empire in India and Africa (*PM* 12). Friedman provides insightful readings of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and related novels and short stories by Rabindranath Tagore and Swarnakumari Devi. Building on Édouard Glissant's "multinodal poetics" (*PM* 221), Edward Said's concept of intellectual affiliation, and Jahan Ramazani's transnational poetics of "enmeshment" (*PM* 220), Friedman argues for the need to break away from diffusionist and centre/periphery models of modernity/modernism that would read the postcolonial modernism of a writer such as Arundhati Roy as belated or derivative of, for example, Woolf or Joyce. Rather, the distinctive aesthetic styles of postcolonial modernists such as Roy must be understood within the context of "the hybrid modernities of postcoloniality" (*PM* 187), which in Roy's case includes the complex politics of race, caste, gender, and sexuality in India during the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter seven discusses the diasporic modernisms of Aimé Césaire and

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, emphasizing the importance that returning home (if only imaginatively) assumes in the development and articulation of their respective modernisms. Both chapters are erudite and perceptive, illustrating how a more supple and flexible approach to the categories of modernity and modernism—one which consistently troubles centre/periphery models and narratives of origin and originality—offer new ways of thinking about canonical and lesser-known modernist fictions.

As recent international conferences and new book series in the field attest, transnational and postcolonial approaches are assuming an ever-important position in contemporary modernist studies, but most of this work focuses on cultural productions and contexts spanning the late nineteenth through to the late twentieth centuries. Whether or not the relational definition of modernism/modernity that Friedman proposes in *Planetary Modernism* can be applied to a much wider range of cultural artefacts spanning the plural modernities of the *longue durée,* in a way that remains sufficiently focused and meaningful, remains to be seen. Some of the arrows that would need to be drawn are undoubtedly very long. Does the map that will start to emerge remain sufficiently coherent? Will modernist scholars still be able to speak meaningfully to one another—across vastly different historical epochs, geographies, epistemologies, vernaculars and languages, cultural formations, and disciplinary knowledges? Do they need to? Friedman acknowledges that the "archive of modernisms" that would be produced by the planetary approach she is proposing would be "staggering in its global and temporal reach" (*PM* 75). As I've already indicated, on one level I see Friedman's thesis for a planetary modernism to represent the logical end point of the new modernist studies: it's where we have been (if at times unwittingly) driving ourselves. But the question must of course be asked: can the field (if not the centre) hold? How might we understand the political and ethical motivations and implications of such radically expansionist gestures? As Friedman summarizes these particular issues: "the danger of an expansionist modernism lapsing into meaninglessness or colonizing gestures is real" (*PM* 50). Friedman's scholarly, rich, and self-reflexive project anticipates and debates the anxieties and oppositions that she knows her call for a planetary approach will generate. These are explored dialectically at stages in chapter two and in the conclusion "A Debate with Myself". As one of the most influential

international scholars in the field, Friedman is well aware of what is at stake and is explicit about the project's speculative nature.

Planetary Modernisms is an important, thought-provoking, and exciting book that will undoubtedly shake up the field and generate lively debate. It is methodologically avant-garde and intellectually generous and generative. Friedman draws on an enormous range of texts, materials, and sources from myriad fields including world history, transnational, global and postcolonial studies, feminism, literary studies, and modernist studies. In the spirit of the modernist project she deftly deploys a range of engaging critical and scholarly modes—collage, parataxis, contradiction, self-reflexivity—which beautifully complement the provocative thesis she is proposing. It is a thoroughly energizing read and, given the sophistication and intellectual scope of the project, remarkably accessible and clear. The implications of making modernism planetary in the way Friedman proposes are far-reaching and, for that reason, it is a book that will and should be debated by scholars working not just in modernist studies but also in postcolonial studies, transnational studies, and world history. This is because the paradigmatic shifts she is calling for in the way we think about modernity and modernism have significant implications for the scholarly landscape in those fields too. Whether and to what extent modernist studies will become truly planetary (not just "transnational" or "global"; *PM* 7-8) remains to be seen, but Friedman's book undoubtedly proposes a brave—if dizzying—new world.