Introduction

Marina Vitale, Mark Nash

1. A question of parroting

There is a revealing moment in Abbas Kiarostami's latest film, *Like Someone in Love* (2012), when the two protagonists express their contrasting interpretations of the meaning of a print of a famous painting: *Training a Parrot* by Chiyoji Yazaki, which hangs on the wall in Takashi's flat. Akiko, the young girl who does not successfully reconcile her existence as a sociology undergraduate at Tokyo University with her work as an escort, has been called to entertain Takashi, a retired professor of sociology. Looking at the print, Akiko remembers that, as an adolescent, she used to believe that the picture had been painted by one of her uncles, as a portrait of herself; and that it represented a young girl being instructed by a parrot. The professor, instead, gives a more learned interpretation: it is the parrot who is being trained by the girl. The work – painted in the year 1900 – is the first Japanese painting rendering a Japanese subject in a European style. Along with many other criss-crossing reflections, this perplexing visual metaphor hints elusively at the labyrinthine play of cultural tensions between westernisation and the grain of Japanese life addressed by the film. Is the girl in the striped kimono (and equally traditional hairstyle) parroting a parrot? How complex is the relationship between modernity and fading traditional ways of life? The questions might continue, and the shifting stance of Kiarostami's parrot between trainer and trainee might prove even more ambivalent, especially recalling the borrowings from traditional Japanese poetics and aesthetic forms to which Western modernism was so authoritatively anchored by "orientalist" intellectuals like Ernest Fenellosa, Ezra Pound, Pierre Loti and so many others.

Beneath the numberless loose-ended questions which remain suspended in the air – ranging from topically social and historical issues, like the intergenerational breakdown, to philosophically universal problems, like the gap between appearance and reality[1] – there lies in this film an interrogation which has been going on since the momentous reopening of Japan to the external world at the turn of the 19th century and which is evoked by Takashi's knowing definition of Yazaki's 1900 parrot. For more than a century Japanese thinkers and artists have pondered the uses and abuses of modernisation for the upholding of a rich and meaningful life and, especially, a distinctive Japanese cultural identity, reaching differently articulated conclusions about the transformations of Japanese ways of being, including Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's 1933 nostalgia about the disappearance of 'Japan' (Tanizaki [1933] 1977), and Mishima's disappointment, which led him to end his own life by seppuku ritual suicide in 1970.

We start with Yazaki's parrot because, though the case of Japan is not an instance of westernisation imposed by blatant Western colonialism, nonetheless it registers the direst outcome of the disruptive technological modernity unleashed by the West in the last few centuries, mainly – but not exclusively – against "the rest". The bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the numberless loss of lives and genetical damage they produced, offer one, horrific, answer to the questions raised in the call for papers for this issue of *Textus*. The tragic irony of the Japanese case has been recently made even more painful by the accidental atomic catastrophe which spread death and terror both in Japan, and elsewhere in the world as a side effect of a natural disaster: the March 2011 tsunami, which triggered latent, previously unappreciated dangers inherent in progress. Japan seems to have paid the highest toll in terms of physical and mental pain, both in times of war and peace, from highly advanced forms of

[1] It is certainly not by chance that the title of the film (taken from Ella Fitzgerald's song *Like Someone in Love*) starts with the word "Like", especially due to the alleged lack of an individually recognisable personality Akiko boasts (or laments). She feels she resembles Chiyoji Yazaki's model (who is in turn modelled on the postures and airs imposed by the imitation of French Impressionism), but also Takashi's late wife, whom she sees in a photograph. At the same time she is more or less confident that both her grand-mother and her jealous fiancé will believe that a shamefully alluring photograph of her as a call girl they have seen in various telephone booths in Tokyo bears nothing but a likeness to herself.

modern technology. This destiny would make it a privileged terrain to investigate modernity and its discontents, even independently from aesthetically and philosophically motivated complaints, such as Tanizaki's about the disappearance of shadow and penumbra (and, with them, of cultural and psychological nuances) in this modern, technologically advanced nation. Kiarostami's characteristic and fascinating way of capturing local atmospheres and human interactions as if reflected on mirroring surfaces (often supplied, as in this film, by the windscreens and rear mirrors of cabs and cars) offers a subtle way of approaching the ambivalent relationship of people with high-tech (often aseptic and anomic) environments, as well as suggesting puzzling queries about the difficult coexistence (in any society) between the old and the new, tradition and progress, and the different pasts and dramatically divergent futures that struggle with one another.

Similar considerations might, obviously, apply to any other society; our own as well as those most distant from Europe and the West[2]: each caught in its specific and ever-shifting conjunctural moment, or "problem space" as David Scott defines the complex knot of political questions and social and cultural answers that constitute the "horizon of possible futures" and that are, at the same time, the premise and the outcome of people's practices, in an endless shift of hegemonic balances (Scott 2004). Though the results of such practices are unpredictable, it is impossible not to be caught up, or "conscripted", in their play, as the argument of Scott's 2004 probing into the dynamics of modernity suggests[3].

---

[2] Another very interesting case in point is the process of modernisation/westernisation attempted in Turkey by Atatürk's political and cultural reforms in the 1920s and 1930s. A discussion of the connections between the State enforcement of nationalism and the introduction of Western forms of music (namely European opera) as part and parcel of modernisation may be found in Bianchi and Balamir Coskun 2009.

[3] In his controversial book – which is a re-reading of *Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James's 1938 masterpiece on Toussaint Louverture – Scott attempts to theorise a critical paradigm better suited than established postcolonial theories to interpreting the present post emancipatory historical juncture, dominated in many countries by diffused disillusionment towards the emancipatory hopes nourished at the height of the anticolonial thrust. He insists that a less romantic, more tragically informed outlook is necessary today to make sense of what he calls one's "futures past" as a preliminary step to constructing a new, viable, "horizon of the future" (Scott 2004: 23-57).

When proposing "Modernisms and Other Modernities" as a title for this issue of *Textus* we had in mind a revisitation of historical Modernism – and of the notion of modernity so intimately at the heart of that movement as to be encapsulated in its denomination – from the vantage point of our present, fraught as it is with deep disappointment with the promises of modernity, but also with the awareness that many of the forces at work in today's cultural struggle had their inception in cultural movements and theoretical elaborations whose ground-breaking impact (in other words their 'modernity') has only recently become evident.

We were especially interested in looking back at the internationalist aspirations and cosmopolitan manifestations of the movement, keeping in mind the present conditions of worldwide, though far from uniform, globalisation. We particularly wanted to address the notion of 'primitivism', which was central to the movement, with a special eye to the seeming paradox of a cultural project which was thoroughly fascinated by primitivism and, at the same time, obsessed with newness and modernity. This paradox was also interconnected with the thorny question of the chronology of the different Modernisms that flourished in different areas of the world at different rates of development. This was in turn linked with even more controversial dilemmas about the influence exercised by canonic Modernism over intellectuals and artists belonging to non-occidental societies still drenched in those very cultural traditions seen as "primitive" by the Eurocentric anthropological eye.

Among these themes and dilemmas there were, no doubt, the multiple localities and differential temporalities of the various Modernisms and of modernity itself, especially in their interplay with colonialism, anti-colonialism and post-colonialism. Having in mind the momentous interrogation posed by Stuart Hall in his "When was 'the post-colonial'?" (Hall 1996) and by Geeta Kapur in her *When was Modernism* (2011)[4], what we aimed to propose was not a question of dating the different Modernisms or discussing the "belatedness" of some of them, but rather of reconsidering the very notion of teleological, linear, homogenous time and beneficial, universal progress, inherited from the Enlightenment

[4] More specifically, "When was Modernism in Indian Art?" is the title of a chapter of her book (Kapur 2001: 297-324).

and condensed in the very term "Modernism". This notion of time underpins the intoxication of Modernism with the idea of the new, as well as the construction of "the 'advance guard' as a combative frontier that pushes towards the future" – as Kobena Mercer puts it in his introduction to *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (Mercer 2005: 11). Concentrated mostly on 20th century developments in the visual arts in different regions of the world, Mercer's collection of essays shows how intricate the two-way traffic between Euro-American aesthetical production and that of the rest of the world has been; so much so that pride of precedence is far from being univocally ascribable to the West. Suffice it to mention here that the term 'modernism' (or, better, *modernismo*) was coined by Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dario in 1888 and that its documented use in Guatemala and Peru predates its adoption in the European context (Mercer 2005: 19). Even more important, the interaction among the Euro-American white centres of the avant-garde – and between them and non-occidental realities – on the question of primitivism was all but uniform. Mercer's collection offers fascinating instances of differently inflected constructions of primitivism as forms of counter discourse in as different locations as Harlem and India[5].

By coupling, and almost punning, the notions of 'Modernism' and 'modernity' while declining them in the plural, we intended to stimulate a reflection on the rallying keywords of a literary and artistic movement which manifested itself everywhere in the world in the 20th century in very Protean ways, and at asynchronous paces. Indeed such challenging discrepancies are telling in themselves. The essays in this issue show that the challenge was not lost on our contributors, who all picked up on the element of complexity inherent in the mutual articulation of the notions of modernism, modernisation and modernity. This is true both of those essays which deal with contemporary, post-colonial phenomena and of those

[5] Particularly illuminating is Paul Overy's essay on "White Walls, White Skins: Cosmopolitanism and Colonialism in Inter-War Modernist Architecture" (in Mercer 2005), which discusses very convincingly both the Euro-American hegemonising project of globalising uniformation behind the creation of a modernist (or/and international) style in architecture in the '20s and '30s and the racial sympathies and antipathies of the supporters and detractors of that style, with special reference to the inescapably Mediterranean-looking white walls, ample windows, flat roofs and terraces which were the staple features of that architectonic style.

which revisit more specifically historical, canonical Modernism. All authors felt personally interpellated, and engaged to address the question at issue from an avowed and problematised contemporary perspective, fully averring Walter Benjamin's persuasion of the coincidence of history with the *Jetztzeit* (the 'here-and-now')[6].

2. Some pressing dilemmas

Given the multifacetedness of the themes discussed we preferred not to list the articles in the alphabetical order of their authors, but to divide them into four sections which remain organically linked by the overarching concerns briefly sketched in the previous pages and amply shared by all the contributors. In the section dedicated to "The present collection" we will refer, however rapidly, to some of the points addressed by the single essays. For the moment we would like to underline a few dilemmas which faced both the authors (as well as ourselves as editors) and most of the anonymous referees – whom we heartily thank for their patient, generous and intelligent work on this issue.

We encountered a shared concern with the very notion of 'modernity', which is at the same time a mark of historical periodisation and the signifier of one or, rather, various and divergent cultural projects which have dominated a long temporal span of world history in the last few centuries. It is a curious circumstance that the most traditional meaning of the term – which assigns a definite temporal beginning to the 'modern age' – making it coincide with Columbus landing in the New World – happens to overlap with a comparatively recent use of the word in the critical language of culturalist and post colonial thought, which sees the ubiquitous processes of migration imposed first by slavery and then by globalisation, as the most authentic factor of modernity (Anderson 1984; Williams 1989; Gilroy 1993; Chambers 1994 and 2008; Appadurai 1996; Gikandi 2001). This is obviously a mere nominal coincidence, since the centuries-old 'modern' History – which glorifies the Captains Courageous of the geographical 'discoveries',

[6] "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now", as he wrote in his XIV thesis on the philosophy of history (Benjamin [1940] 1985: 261).

heroic landings in 'savage' lands and opening up of oceanic routes along which to launch international trade and pile up the wealth of the (Western) nations – is not the same his/herstory which narrates the forcible uprooting and transportation of immense masses of human beings from one corner of the earth to the other.

For more than three decades this tragic phenomenon has engrossed creative writers, prompting such poignant aesthetic representations as the Middle Passage narratives of Toni Morrison (1987), Michelle Cliff (1990), David Dabydeen (1994), Fred D'Aguiar (1997), and many others, not to speak of the breathtaking poetry of Derek Walcott (1990) and others. In the last two or three decades, alongside the (often militant) analyses offered by the anticolonial and postcolonial historians and theorists, a comparatively recent (new) branch of history, known as World History, has gained terrain especially in the USA, accompanying the reconstruction of the trajectories followed by human migrations with those of industrial products, agricultural produce, financial capitals as well as diseases, viruses and bacteria, landscape and ecological transformations[7].

Also in the light of these widespread and sophisticated debates, a nagging doubt, or rather a cluster of nagging questions, kept cropping up in the exchanges with our authors and referees. That is whether re-vision – both of the modernist experience in Europe and elsewhere and of the Western canon – is still necessary and/or viable for contemporary criticism? Is the practice of "writing back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1989) still inescapable and/or vital for today's post-colonial artists? Is it appropriate and/or desirable to read up-to-date theoretical and critical views back into early stages of literary production (be it modernist or postmodernist, anticolonial or post-colonialist alike)?

Each of the articles collected in this issue provides its own, differently accentuated answer to these questions – and to their

[7] A popularised presentation of this discipline has been recently translated into Italian (Mann 2011 and 2013). A rather severe criticism of the notion of the Anthropocene, which underpins this branch of history, may be found in Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2013) presentation at the Conference on the "Anthropocene Project" held at the Haus der Kulturen in Berlin on 13 January 2013 and still available on-line at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svgqLPFpaOg (last accessed June 6, 2013).

methodological and political edge. What they cumulatively witness is the awareness that though much critical and cultural work has been done in order to better understand both the modernism-modernisation-modernity nexus and the actuality/non-actuality of postmodern and postcolonial re-visions and writing-backs, much is still to be done. Quite obviously, each article speaks for itself, and we are certainly not going to impose any unifying view on them, but only expose our own opinion on these perplexing issues.

Taking, for example, the critical debate about the postcolonial theme, we are aware that in the last few decades many steps have already been taken – by both artists and critics – towards "decolonising the mind", as a seminal essay by Ngugi wa Thiong'o demanded many years ago (Ngugi 1986). On the one hand the Euro-centred 'orientalist' mentality – so generalised in the occidental academic milieus as to provoke Edward Said's strictures many decades ago (1978), but also prompting recurring outcries of impending "clashes of civilizations" (Huntington 1993) – is making room for less prejudiced positions, and, lately, for more radical efforts to "provincialise" our outlook, as was powerfully recommended by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000 and 2002). On the other hand the efforts of so many anticolonial and postcolonial writers, critics and thinkers have succeeded in counteracting the effects of the cultural mimicry imposed by the imperial policies and magisterially described by Homi Bhaba long ago (1994). The anger and rebellion at the basis of the often abrasive writing-back mood of a few decades ago has gradually lost its momentum, as has the "burden of representation" that the first wave of immigrant artists and writers belonging to the so called Windrush generation in Great Britain felt so inescapable. Still, this process is certainly not complete. Just as a mood of "post-colonial melancholia" is still hovering over formerly imperial cultures (Gilroy 2004; Khanna 2003), so the authors belonging to formerly colonial cultures have not yet fully succeeded in shedding their mourning and anger towards the recent past of their ancestors. More and more authors express their desire not to speak *against* past and present injustices, but *for* (however difficult) present and future normality[8]. But, in spite of this pervasive aspiration, they still have

[8] In a similar spirit a literary festival was held in Gaza, from May 23 to 31, 2013, to demonstrate that normalcy can be pursued even in the "state of exception that is

great difficulty finding an autonomous voice, not conditioned by colonial inheritance: David Scott is probably right when he gloomily declares "The colonial past may never let go. This is a hard truth." (Scott 2004: 221).

3. The tradition of the new

> One of the main characteristics of modernism […] was the play of allusion within and between texts […] The effect is to break up the homogeneity of the work, to open up spaces between different texts and types of discourses […] The space between the texts is not only semantic but historical too, the different textual strata being residues of different epochs and different cultures[9]. (Wollen 1975: 102)

In the post-colonial literary canon Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), relocates Homer's *Iliad* to the West Indian island of St Lucia. Mainly using the same hexametrical rhyming scheme as Homer, Walcott loosely superimposes the map of the Aegean onto the Caribbean and merges Homer's heroic characters with St Lucian fishermen. He is able to transform one of the foundational cultural narratives of Western culture into a post-colonial parable, one that connects the triangular trade of slavery both with pre-colonial Africa and Ancient Greece as well as the West Indies of today. Formally this magisterial epic of collage, quotation and illusion has clear links to modernist writers such as Eliot and Joyce.

In 1948 a number of Caribbean writers heard T.S. Eliot's Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech on the radio. The registration of his speech and non-standard inflection made them understand that the received dichotomy between Caribbean and standard English was meaningless. Listening to Eliot's accent and rhythm of his voice transformed their understanding of the poems they had read in school. Hearing his voice they realised that poetry was creole

---

always looming around Gaza as a site of conflict", as stated by Lina Attalah on the site of the festival (http://palfest.org/beyond-crisis-making-space-for-laughter-in-gaza/, last accessed June 6, 2013), in a short presentation she titled "Beyond Crisis: Making Space for Laughter in Gaza" (Attalah 2013) on the basis of a quotation ("make space for laughter") from the prison diaries of Egyptian Marxist writer Sonallah Ibrahim.

[9] Wollen is discussing the use of quotation in Godard's *Vent d'Est* (1970).

or it was nothing. Behind the St Louis black "riddims" they could detect the African and Africanist roots (Brathwaite 1984; Laforest 2007).

British born Isaac Julien continues Walcott's collage of the literary canon in a three-screen moving image installation, *Paradise Omeros*, first shown in Documenta11 in Kassel in 2002. He makes extensive use of Walcott's work through a process of revisiting-reimagining the canon, which we take to be one of the key features of modernist art and literature. Julien's work includes both visual and verbal quotations from *Omeros* (for example fisherman Achille drowning at sea) as well as lines composed and spoken by Walcott himself especially for the work.

Julien's *Paradise Omeros* links St Lucia to England, the former colonial power, and now the site of race riots, through the device of a young black man who might be a maroon slave, escaping through a banana plantation, but whom we also see floating in the ocean and, further extending the aesthetic of quotation, as a waiter – tending to actor Thomas Baptiste sporting gold rings on both hands to spell out "love" and "hate" – reworks a famous scene from Charles Laughton's film *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), now transposed to a beach in St Lucia.

Julien's subsequent work *Fantôme Afrique* (2005) follows one of the trajectories of Walcott's enquiries back to Africa – although all Julien's work, from *Looking for Langston* (1989) on has been engaged with issues of racial representation. Julien's *Fantôme Afrique* (the title a homage to Leiris) (Nash 2006) juxtaposes ethnographic footage of African art, rituals and daily life with contemporary scenes shot in the Sub-Saharan city of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, the former French colony of Upper Volta, which had established a cinema production infrastructure after independence, and still hosts the Pan African Film Festival, FESPACO. In one scene, ethnographic images flicker on the screen of an open air theatre; in another we see the film-maker himself documenting the mix of Hollywood and African cinema posters which form the basis of West African film culture. Actor Stephen Galloway returns performative traditions from Western Contemporary dance to Africa and so on. Julien's film is modernist precisely in Wollen's sense as it cuts and mixes "residues of different epochs and different cultures".

The challenge facing contemporary artists and writers, including those discussed in this volume, is still somehow to square the circle between the local and individual experience of modernisation driven by global capital today, and the artistic forms that have their own history and ideology. The tradition of the new that so haunts contemporary culture is, of course, the new of the endless self-renewal of capital, and so has to be regarded with some scepticism. Works such as Julien's and Walcott's, which lay bare the conditions of their making and if only for a moment help tease out some of the components of capitalist subjectivity, are, we would argue, part of today's avant-garde.

The contributors to this issue of *Textus* grapple with the challenge posed by Stuart Hall to shift from seeing history "as a universal movement which can be located securely within *a* culture" to one actively rewritten by writers, artists and critics as a set of cultural translations:

> The world is absolutely littered by modernities and by practicing artists who never regarded modernism as a secure possession of the West but perceived it as a language which was both open to them but which they would have to transform. The history therefore should now be rewritten as a set of cultural translations rather than as a universal movement which can be located securely within *a* culture, within *a* history, within *a* chronology, and within *a* set of political and cultural relations. (Hall 2001: 5)

From the tangled web of the terms 'modernism', 'modernity' and 'modernisation', broached earlier in this introduction, and addressed in various ways by the contributors to this volume of *Textus*, we would like to tease out a critical art historical question concerning the connections between the experience of modernity and modernisation and the cultural forms traditionally described as modern, experimental and avant-garde[10]. Being *Textus* the journal of the Italian Association of English Studies, it deals only obliquely with art, yet these questions cross all cultural forms, so we thought it important to address them here, however briefly.

---

[10] There is no necessary connection between the experience of modernity and particular cultural forms that we might say "express" it. While all humanity might be said to be subjects of modernity, we do not as individuals necessarily elect to engage with modernist cultural representations.

As the centenary of the Great War approaches, 1914 is becoming the focus of much political, historical and cultural reflection. This intra-imperialist war, as we all know, was immensely destructive, illustrating, if it were still necessary, Marx's concept of Capital as needing destruction in order to renew itself:

> Creative destruction is embedded within the circulation of capital itself. Innovation exacerbates instability, insecurity, and in the end, becomes the prime force pushing capitalism into periodic paroxysms of crisis. (Harvey 1995: 105-6)

The catastrophe of the First World War was, however, immensely productive culturally and artistically for Western, European culture. It both provoked Dadaism with its anarchic rejection of bourgeois forms, and gave encouragement to those (Italian) futurists who saw war as a form of human expression to be celebrated. During the same period, the 1917 Russian Revolution produced the artistic revolution that was Russian constructivism (Malevich coined this term in 1917). Much of the artistic innovation that constituted what art historians have called the historic avant-gardes was established before 1918, of course.

Artistic and literary production have been haunted by this immensely productive period ever since. Some artists and writers have been straightforwardly uninterested in issues of equality: particularly the regimes of colonialism and racial segregation which concern many of the authors referred to in this volume. Other artists and writers, inspired by the Soviet exemplars in which 'revolutionary' forms attempted to anticipate the coming Soviet socialist millennium, attempted to reconcile aesthetic innovation with the promotion of radical social reforms. Indeed, the first recorded use of the term 'avant-garde' in its now-customary sense was in an essay by Olinde Rodrigues, a follower of socialist Saint Simon in an 1825 essay, "L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel" ("The artist, the scientist and the industrialist", 1825). Rodrigues insisted that "the power of the arts is indeed the most immediate and fastest way" to social, political, and economic reform (quoted in Calinescu 1987: 103).

One of the most influential post World War II theorists of the avant-garde, Peter Bürger (1974), argued that the political aims of

the avant-garde remained largely unachieved. Instead, avant-garde art entered into what he regards as a fateful dialogue with the art establishment, one which continues to this day. Rather than being the harbinger of social, political and economic reform, the avant-garde in fact helped speed up the development of the capitalist market of the culture industry. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of this call and response between art institutions and the avant-garde over the past century, but it does help us recall one of the structural disadvantages facing artists and writers in the colony and post colony: the universities and art school training was overly traditional there, and artists and writers, if they could, had to migrate to European art schools and universities if they wanted to communicate with their peers being schooled in the, then-contemporary, modernisms. Many of the former colonies that achieved independence in the 1960s did so with the help of the Soviet Union and, out of necessity, artists and writers in these countries adopted the heroic and humanist style of later Soviet art as part of their nation-building process. These artistic forms were by and large out of kilter with those developing in Western countries and formed a further barrier to their incorporation in the dominant discourse of Western modernity.

Many artists and writers in the colony and post-colony were still engaged with the project of realism, one which still had a lot of life left in it, as Raymond Williams (1977) pointed out (in relation to the subordination of quasi Brechtian experimental television to the dominant majority of realist television programmes). Once the realisms that came into play as a response to the development of the industrial working class in the 19th century had returned in the mid 1930s, they remained the dominant aesthetic for the rest of the 20th century.

Again this is not the space for a discussion of the cold war politics by which the CIA effectively scuppered the development of a socialist and/or humanist realism (Guilbaut 1983; Morris, Grunenberg, Bernatowicz 2010)[11] in post war contemporary art. Figurative work, however, continued in the colony and post

[11] The "Picasso: Peace and Freedom" exhibition held at the Tate Liverpool in 2010 detailed precisely the kinds of sympathy with the French Communist party that was of such concern to the CIA.

colony, finally re-entering the fine art mainstream through eastern European artists such as A.R. Penck in the 1980s, who became known for paintings with pictographic, neo-primitivist imagery of human figures and other totemic forms. His work, like that of his younger, New York-based contemporary Jean Michel Basquiat, owed much to the 'traditional' African art that had been shown in European and American galleries since before the First World War. While some of this influence was readily acknowledged, and indeed taken up by the Negritude movement, the paradox is that the Euro-American avant-garde had been sustained throughout the 20th century by African art through the ethnographic investigations of artists writers and anthropologists such as André Gide (1927) and Michel Leiris (1934).

If the dominant aesthetic of the art and literature of the post colony could be said to be realism (and this is far too broad a generalisation) there have nevertheless been important avant-garde counter currents in the sense broached earlier in this section. The tension between these opposed aesthetics should be borne in mind while reading the contributions to this issue of *Textus*. This tension is sometimes interpreted as the result of uneven development of modern art and literature in the colony and post-colony, as an opposition between a monolithic Western modernity and a relatively conventional or old-fashioned peripheral one 'waiting to catch up'. It is in fact a tension between two avant-gardes – one uniting formal experimentation and political engagement, the other reworking realist forms to give voice to the political and cultural development of the post-colony compared to the West.

4. The present collection

The wide spectre of implications of the modernism-modernity-modernisation constellation proposed in our call for papers might have been addressed from a large variety of disciplinary perspectives. And, indeed, the present collection offers many instances of the interdisciplinary opening that characterises modernist, post-modernist and post-colonial aesthetic production and that, consequently, demands flexible critical responses ready to accept the challenge of such a complexity. This might well be expected from the contributors to this year's Cultural Studies issue of the

journal. Though literary texts remain the central objects of their analyses, they all had to cope with a variety of cultural influences encroaching upon them – from the charms of media techniques, to the impact of scientific, philosophical and spiritual currents, the constraints of social and political conjunctures or reactions to such conjunctures.

The two essays included in the first section – "The Modernity of Modernism" – highlight the continuing currency of the revolutionary thrust of Modernism that set in motion elements of cultural and social renewal which have not yet exhausted their potentialities and momentum. Alessandra Violi's stringent study of the modernist interest in occultism concentrates on the antirational streaks of the movement, which disprove the pretended continuity of scientific rationality bequeathed to Modernity by the Enlightenment. Drawing her examples from both literary and film sources she throws light on the cultural significance of magic and divinatory practices in modernist aesthetic production and thought, inviting us to investigate the conflicting cultural formations that contributed to the making of the modernist movement. She takes the ubiquitous presence of tarot reading in the modernist imaginary (from Eliot's Madame Sosostris to Méliès's experiments) as a test-case to prove the multilayered nature of this movement, "fractured into alternative and competing cultural conceptions", as she writes (*infra*: 31). With its attention to such innovative thinkers as Aby Warburg, Violi's contribution seemed to us the best introduction to a volume largely centred on the criticism of the notion of homogenous, progressive time and consequent belatedness of certain non-canonical modernisms and/or modernities. As she says, quoting Georges Didi-Huberman, art historians – and, we might add, literary and cultural critics – should take up "the role of […] diviner[s] who would 'play with the cards of art history' and shuffle their temporalities, endlessly re-combining them in new decks to map out alternative cartographies of time" (*infra*: 41). Marco Canani's essay chooses another field – that of gender – about which quite advanced speculations and cultural battles were carried out in the early decades of the last century. These can be understood in all their implications only nowadays, in the wake of contemporary theories and practices, and especially with the help of contemporary gender and queer studies. Canani re-reads

Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and *Between the Acts* alongside coeval treaties by psychiatrists and sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, emphasising the very modern conception of a gender continuum adumbrated in Woolf's narratives. His analysis not only contributes further to deflate the obsolete (but hard to die) myth of a male-gendered Modernism, but also predates present-day refutations of sexual and gender binaries.

The three essays in our second section – "Whose Modernism, Whose Modernity?" – discuss three counter-narratives, which denounce the arrogance and callousness underpinning the Eurocentric self-celebratory tale of the white man's civilising mission and intellectual distinction. Manuela Coppola's article aptly introduces this section by discussing Marlene NourbeSe Philip's radical exposal of the Euro-American appropriation of History. In her 2008 book titled *Zong!* the Trinidadian poet revisits one of the most atrocious episodes in the history of slavery, the massacre of 131 slaves who were thrown overboard as ballast and referred to in official documents only as the object of a legal dispute over insurance compensation. The episode, uncannily narrated in a famous (but factually reticent) painting by Turner, and reimagined in a number of Middle Passage novels, has been recently discussed by post colonial historians and critics. It is, however, NourbeSe Philip's contention that no pseudo-rational discourse can tackle such a beastly feat – deeply rooted as it is in the inhuman logic of slavery. Her aim, therefore, is to explode that 'rational' logic, simply projecting her own silences and textual erasures on the pages of the legal documents of the insurance case, thus showing them for what they are. Fiorenza Pedrabissi's essay moves on to a more recent moment in the history of colonial and postcolonial migrations: the massive flow of former colonial subjects who migrated to the metropole from peripheral areas of the globe in the years following World War II. George Lamming was one of the numerous intellectuals and artists who followed this route, meeting great personal disappointments and crises, but creating new forms of 'creolised modernisms' which were often looked down on by European critics as belated. Pedrabissi analyses Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* as a distinctively postcolonial (i.e. creolised) form of *Bildungsroman*, where the digressions and slowing downs of the narrative rhythm invert or modify the movement toward knowledge and closure typical of

the genre, and reverse the mode of subjectification consolidated in the canonical coming-of-age novels. Her answer to the question "Whose Modernism, whose Modernity?" is that for that generation of migrant writers: Modernism – as well as culture and History itself – was not "the secure possession of the West", but an incessant process of translation, as she says following Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, both prominent postcolonial thinkers, themselves part of the migration movement from the Caribbean to the metropole. A radical – though very witty – cultural, linguistic and transmodal translation is offered by a recent work by Syrian-born poet Mohja Kahf, discussed by Marta Cariello: "*Thawrah* des Odalisques at the Matisse Retrospective" ([1996] 2003). Cariello analyses the poem with a view both to present contrapuntally – as Edward Said would have said (Said 1993) – a series of 'orientalist' paintings by Matisse (his celebrated *Odalisques* famously revisited by Picasso), and problematically to present Kahf's negotiations with her postcolonial heritage. As one of Matisse's female figures – who come to life during a retrospective and walk out of the picture frames and from the museum – angrily says, "we don't fit in anywhere anymore it's too late too late, / with Matisse we are nothing, without Matisse we are nothing. / You can take the odalisque out of the oda, but can you ever / take the oda out of the odalisque, can you can you?". This is another morose answer to the questions of belonging and unbelonging which pervade this issue, and a nuanced reflection on the present position of Arab-Muslim women and on the implications of their feminist and postcolonial representations.

The third section, dedicated to "Diasporic Modernities", contains two essays which present the work of two diasporic writers: Abdulrazak Gurnah and Bernardine Evaristo. Gurnah's *By the Sea* is taken by Nicoletta Brazzelli as the paradigmatic example of a novel centred on the contemporary postcolonial condition. A diasporic writer himself (born in Zanzibar and transplanted to Great Britain when he was very young), Gurnah deals in all his novels with issues of identity and displacement, both in the present and in the colonial period. In *By the Sea* his characters continuously connect their present condition of uprootedness with their not-altogether happy past in Zanzibar, living "contrapuntal" existences, with the past and the present mutually impinging on one another. As one character says, "It's a dour place, the land of memory, a dim

gutted warehouse with rotting planks and rusted ladders where you sometimes spend time rifling through abandoned goods" (*infra*: 119). However, thinking of the past (pre-modern) history of Zanzibar, and more generally of the Indian Ocean, the protagonists agree that contacts and hybridisation are an essential part of human civilisation and that human identities, far from being one-dimensional, may be productively tangled up in webs of multiple connections and multi-layered perspectives. The necessity to connect past and present experiences and to acknowledge the challenge of migrant existence to modern (Black and White) essentialist identities is also the contention of Ester Gendusa's article. She examines Evaristo's *Soul Tourists,* a sort of fantastic travelogue whose protagonists (two black Britons) travel to the Middle East and back in time to Shakespeare's age, encountering a few historical or quasi-historical black figures (from Mary Seacole, the Jamaican counterpart of Florence Nightingale, to Lucy Negro, the mysterious "Dark Lady" of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and the black slave who was Alexander Pushkin's grandfather) whose existences testify a long-standing black presence in Europe and demonstrate, if need be, the total inconsistence of white European essentialist models. The wit and brilliance of Evaristo's style also testifies that a relatively lighthearted mood is trying to find its way in contemporary post-colonial literary production. Even Lucy Negro's rude writing back to Shakespeare's *Sonnet 147* belongs to a thoroughly different cultural mood from the necessarily angry re-writings of the Euro-American literary canon which characterised a large part of post-colonial writing for a few decades.

A further step away from a limiting, however oppositional, relationship with Western versions of modernity is taken in the last section of the issue, titled "Counter-Modernisms and Counter-Modernities". Alessandra Marino looks at the complex history of the diffusion of forms of Modernism in India, especially in the fields of the visual arts, architecture and town planning since the momentous Bauhaus exhibition held in Calcutta in 1922 and the commission to design Chandigarh, the provincial capital of Punjab, which Nehru conferred upon Le Corbusier in 1950 as a measure of rationalisation and modernisation. In the turbulent decades marked by the nationalist anticolonial movement and the establishment of independence, most forms of avant-garde were entwined with anti British and indigenising aspirations. Indian Modernisms,

therefore, were always rather divergent from contemporary avant-garde experiences elsewhere. Moreover the very idea of modernity could never simply overlap with Western notions of democracy and citizenship, nor can the question of civil rights for migrants and refugees in the Occident be considered on a par with the condition of people in a postcolonial nation like India. Drawing her inspiration from the work of the Subaltern Studies intellectuals and even more from Mahasweta Devi's creative writing, Marino questions the possibility of seeing citizenship as the passage to modernity in India, and acknowledges the originality of the Indian way to another 'modernity'.

Finally the asynchronous development of different Modernisms is discussed by Katherine Russo in the last article of this volume in connection with the work of a number of Indigenous Australian new media artists. As she reminds us, "[t]he preeminent role of electronic media in globalisation has contributed to the questioning of the geographical indexing of modernity which has opened its understanding to the acknowledgement of its multiple and entangled histories" (*infra*: 176). The main features of new media (interactivity, intertextuality, and hypertextuality), are particularly compatible with the Indigenous Australian belief in simultaneity and timelessness and akin to the direct interpellation logic of storytelling and traditional Indigenous multimodality. This is why a number of new media collective projects are being established, also with a view to allowing Aboriginal communities to add their own information to produced material, thus enabling interactivity and active participation in knowledge as happens in traditional Aboriginal learning. Russo's essay discusses a few examples which offer the possibility of writing back to the ideological functions of media, putting hypertextuality and intertextuality to new political uses. Her contention is that these groups pursue the genuinely avant-garde aim of "opening up the Western progressive history of media, modes and technology to the performative, disjunctive elements that have been historically left out" (*infra*: 182).

It is clear that many nodes and complexities of the modernism-modernity-modernisation constellation which has inspired this issue of *Textus* have been left out or would have deserved deeper insight and discussion. We wish to conclude here by saying that working

on this subject with our contributors and referees has been highly stimulating and gratifying.

References

ASHCROFT, BILL, GRIFFITHS, GARETH, TIFFIN, HELEN, 1989, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London.

ANDERSON, PERRY, 1984, "Modernity and Revolution", *New Left Review* 144, pp. 96-113.

APPADURAI, ARJUN, 1996, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

ATTALAH, LINA, 2013, "Beyond Crisis: Making Space for Laughter in Gaza", http://palfest.org/beyond-crisis-making-space-for-laughter-in-gaza/, last accessed June 6, 2013.

BHABHA, HOMI K., 1994, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London-New York.

BENJAMIN, WALTER, [1940] 1985, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by H. Arendt, trans. by H. Zohn, Schocken Books, New York.

BIANCHI, RAFFAELLA and BALAMIR COSKUN, BEZEN, 2009, "Opera across Borders: the Construction of Italian and Turkish National Identities", *Anglistica* 13 (2), pp. 59-70.

BRATHWAITE, KAMAU E., 1984, *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, New Beacon, London-Port of Spain.

BÜRGER, PETER, [1974] 1984, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, English trans. by Michael Shaw, Minnesota U.P., Mineapolis.

CALINESCU, MATEI, 1987, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Duke U.P., Durham (NC)-London.

CHAMBERS, IAIN, 1994, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Routledge, London-New York.

CHAMBERS, IAIN, 2008, *Mediterranean Crossings. The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, Duke U. P., Durham-London.

CHAMBERS, IAIN and CURTI, LIDIA (eds), 1996, *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, Routledge, New York-London.

CHAKRABARTY, DIPESH, 2000, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton U. P., Princeton.

CHAKRABARTY, DIPESH, 2002, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Chicago U. P., Chicago.

CHAKRABARTY, DIPESH, 2013, "The Anthropocene Project", Berlin, Haus

der Kulturen, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svgqLPFpaOg, last accessed June 6, 2013.

Cliff, Michelle, 1990, *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*, Dutton, New York.

D'Aguiar, Fred, 1997, *Feeding the Ghosts*, Chatto and Windus, London.

Dabydeen, David, 1994, *Turner: New and Selected Poems*, Jonathan Cape, London.

Gide, André, 1927, *Voyage au Congo*, Gallimard, Paris.

Gikandi, Simon, 2001, "Globalization and the claims of postcoloniality", in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100 (3), pp. 627-58.

Gilroy, Paul, 1993, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard U. P., Cambridge (MA)-London.

Gilroy, Paul, 2004, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture? Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia*, Routledge, London.

Guilbaut, Serge, [1983] 1985, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, English trans. by Arthur Guilbaut, Chicago U. P., Chicago.

Hall, Stuart, 1996, "When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds), *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, Routledge, New York-London, pp. 242-60.

Hall, Stuart, 2001, "Museums of Modern Art and the End of History", in Campbell, S., Tawadross, G. (eds), *Annotations 6: Modernity and Difference,* INIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts), London, pp, 8-23.

Harvey, David, 1995, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell, London.

Huntington, Samuel P., 1993, "The Clash of Civilizations?", in *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3), pp. 22-49.

Kapur, Geeta, 2001, *When was Modernism. Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi.

Khanna Ranjana, 2003, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Duke U. P., Durham-London.

Kristeva, Julia, [1974] 1984, *Revolution in the Poetic Language,* Columbia U. P., New York.

Leiris, Michel, [1934] 1980, *L'Afrique fantôme*, Gallimard, Paris.

Mann, Charles C., 2011, *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*, Knopf, New York (Italian trans. by Carla Lazzari, *1493: Pomodori, tabacco e batteri. Come Colombo ha creato il mondo in cui viviamo*, Milano, Mondadori, 2013).

Mercer, Kobena (ed.), 2005, "Introduction", in K. Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, INIVA and MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London, pp. 6-23.

MORRIS, LYNDA, GRUNENBERG, CHRISTOPH, BERNATOWICZ, PIOTR, 2010, *Picasso: Peace and Freedom*, Tate Publications, London.

MORRISON, TONI, 1987, *Beloved*, Knopf, New York.

NASH, MARK, 2006, "Expeditions: True North and Fantôme Afrique", in Görner, Veit, Bernasconi, Eveline (eds), *Isaac Julien: True North/ Fantôme Afrique*, Hatje Cantz, Ostflidern, pp. 54-60.

TANIZAKI, JUN'ICHIRŌ, [1933] 1977, *In Praise of Shadows*, New York, Vintage.

SAID, EDWARD W., 1978, *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

SAID, EDWARD W., 1993, *Culture and Imperialism,* Chatto and Windus, London.

SCOTT, DAVID, 2004, *Conscripts of Modernity: the Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, Duke U. P., Durham (NC)-London.

SPLENDORE, PAOLA and WILKINSON, JANE (eds), 2011, *Isole Galleggianti. Poesia femminile sudafricana 1948-2008*, Le Lettere, Firenze.

WALCOTT, DEREK, 1990, *Omeros,* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

WILLIAMS, RAYMOND, [1989] 2007, *Politics of Modernism*, with an introduction by Tony Pinkney, Verso, London.

WILLIAMS, RAYMOND, 1977, "A Lecture on Realism", *Screen* (18.1), Spring, pp 61-74, republished by *Afterall* at http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.5/lecture.realism, last accessed June 9, 2013.

WOLLEN, PETER, [1975] 1982, "The Two Avant-gardes", in *Readings and Writings*,Verso, London.