Introduction: Modernities and Modernization in North America

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Modernity is a quality that has been associated persistently with the United States, and that became a staple piece of US self-conceptualization. This long-standing ascription and (self-)stylization has been made possible by the fact that modernity as a concept is highly negotiable; what is considered modem needs to be mapped out against the horizon of what is ancient - while the ancient is assessed on the grounds of what is considered modem.

Debates around modernity and modernization stretch from the so-called age of exploration in the 'early modem' period to our present moment. The relevance of concepts of modernity for North America thus manifests well before the founding of the United States: Key processes of settlement, colonization, and revolution are fashioned, after all, as negotiations of the 'old' and the 'new' and in the oxymoronic terms of persistent revolutions and ongoing disruption (Kämmen, Kerber, Oakes, Slotkin). At the turn of the twentieth century, such negotiations reached a tipping point when fundamental categories and concepts of spatial, temporal, and moral orientation came to be challenged and rede- fined. Questions of modernity thus inform the entirety of North American history, yet they seem to culminate in the beginning of the twentieth century in ways that warrant a closer inspection. At this point in time, the concern with what it means to be modem was not just one issue among many others, it turned into the defining cultural question of the day. This volume assembles new (re-)assessments of modernity in American Studies that grew out of the keynotes and conference papers delivered at the sixty-fourth annual conference of the German Association of American Studies in Hannover in 2017. As such, the papers

focus on both modernity during its crucial phase and on multiple later reverberations and discussions of the modem.

Studies of turn-of-the-century modernity diverge into or conflate two prominent areas of interest. On the one hand, they examine the artistic scenes that were identified or self-identified as 'modernist' and that established 'modernism' as a key category of cultural innovation on a transnational scale. On the other hand, modernity studies explore the technological and social shifts and the multiplying media formats in their impact on cultural expression and experience. "The mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence," wrote Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in 1936 (111) and thus formulated a key tenet of what was later known as the "modernity thesis": the assumption that the fast-paced, efficiency-oriented, and sensation-driven industrial cultures and cultural industries of the early twentieth century managed to effect a profound rearrangement of the cognitive and perceptual underpinnings of modem subjectivities (Singer 102-103, see also Doane, Hansen, Keil, Kern).

'Modernist studies,' then, tend to address the many areas of the modern experience in their interaction, approaching artistic modernism in close connection with the social, medial, and more generally technological shifts. These investigations have always thrived on a comparative perspective to question the uniqueness and ingenuity of artistic innovations and the exceptionality of the distinct early-twentieth-century period. Winfried Fluck has identified a "critical theory of modernity" as the driving force in a particularly American (and Americanist) formation of literary history (69). Other scholars have likewise, if with different inflections and conclusions, traced the impulse and impact of the modem in key figures and texts of North American history (Berman, Lasch, North, Tomlinson) and branched out from there into the study of movements that often conflate ideas of Americanization and modernization (Appadurai, Beck/Sznaider/Winter, Doyle/Winkiel, Friedman: "Definitional Excursions," Giddens, Goankar, Mignolo).

To conceive of modernity as a quality or principle rather than a particular historical condition allows to reflect critically on presumptions such as novelty, innovation, exceptionality or uniqueness and to cast doubt on the exceptionality of the distinct early-twentieth-century period. At the same time, the study of larger tendencies of modernization across

the centuries favors the construction of chronological, if not outright teleological, progress narratives. One way to escape this conceptional gridlock is offered in the notion of a plurality of modernities, which does not only go up against the assumption that modernity is singular but also questions the implied or possible championing of the Western hemisphere. This is what Shmuel Eisenstadt contends from a socio- logical perspective, when he introduces the idea of "multiple modernities" as a means to counteract the prevalent understanding of modernization. He turns against the presupposition that the modernization of Western societies brings about a basic set of institutions that then takes hold in countries all over the world. Instead, he argues that in effect the post-WWII developments in many societies eschewed Western hegemony and modernized in ways that reflect the influence of local norms and customs (1-2): "The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world - indeed to explain the history of modernity - is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (2). Eisenstadt locates the commonalities between the evolving "cultural programs" in their increasing awareness of social roles beyond local and familial ones and in a feeling of being included in larger, wavering communities (4). In this context, one defining feature of modernity is its self-reflexivity, that is, a society's refusal to take a given social and political order for granted (3).

This asynchronous and self-reflexive understanding of modernity curiously echoes the ways in which early-twentieth-century art came to be classified as modernist, similarly emphasizing self-awareness as key (Bad Modernism 11/12 epub). Seen in this way, Eisenstadt's "multiple modernities" converge toward an unacknowledged committing reference frame, as they read diverse developments in various spaces through an early-twentieth-century lens. Modernism serves as a tool of bundling modernities together. While the concept of "multiple modernities" intends to counter an equation of modernization and Westernization, it still does establish 'the West' as a point of reference and reinforces a binary of 'the West' versus 'non-Westem' societies. As Dipesh Chakrabarty points out: "if modernity is to be a definable, delimited concept, we must identify some people or practices as nonmodem" (xix, see also Ashcroft, Cooper, Love). But since the concept of modernity is subdued in a discourse of Westernization, Chakrabarty argues that this identification of non-

modern elements implies "a gesture of the powerful" (xix). The solution to this problem cannot consist in abandoning the critical vocabulary of modernity altogether, however, since this vocabulary reaches far beyond the confines of academic discourse. Instead, Chakrabarty emphasizes the political need of self-reflexivity, as an awareness of the violent implications and histories of the modem help to curb the possibilities of their continuation (xxiv).

Therefore, in order to counteract the binary logic of a sharp divide between the modem and nonmodem, the very conceptualization of modernity needs to be addressed and questioned. This would also serve to challenge the long-standing conflation of the modem and the West. Taking up this train of thought, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz point out in their critical review of theories of modernity: "early-twentieth-century writers were themselves [...] preoccupied with border crossings such as cosmopolitanism, synesthesia, racial masquerade, collage, and translation" ("Introduction" 11). Transnational impact and exchange thus appear as systematically and systemically inscribed in modernism and its conceptualization of modernity. A similar move away from a locally limited focus, the authors argue elsewhere, informs modernist studies in the new millennium more generally. They attest an expansive quality to the field itself, as it extended its areas of inquiry in terms of space and time and abandoned earlier distinctions of high art versus popular culture ("The New" 737-38). This shift resonates with shifts in American Studies, which simultaneously and in relation turned to notions of transnational and cross-cultural intersections and ramifications (Banerjee, Fluck/Pease/Rowe, Friedman, Planetary Modernisms, Jay, Mayer, Rowe). The current conception of modernity capitalizes on resonances between the early twentieth century and other time periods, and between locally specific and cross-culturally comparable occurrences. As a result, the essays collected in this volume both revisit tum-of-the-century modernity and approach notions of modernization and the modem at other times. It was this mixture that informed the sixty-fourth annual conference of the German Association of American Studies in Hannover.

On the one hand, modernity thus emerges as an important nexus of cultural phenomena that allow to situate current and historical experiences across timescales and locales. On the other hand, modernity appears to be a somewhat fleeting concept that only manifests as a result

of the comparison and contrasting of divergent, comparable phenomena. Ironically, the idea of modernity can be said to result from a study of modernities - casting 'modernity' as what Michel Foucault describes as "discontinuities." Describing shifts in historiography since the 1960s, Foucault argues for an introduction of elements into the writing of history that disrupt orderly evolutionary sequences and chronological chains of causes and effects. Viewed against the horizon of history as a coherent development, these elements stick out as discontinuities. Discontinuities thus break up a supposed spatio-temporal coherence, yet the elements or anecdotes introduced to facilitate that break only become discontinuities because they pry open a formerly continuous sequence. The result, for Foucault, is an understanding of historiography as a layering of series that overlap and relate but cannot, and should not, be neatly ordered (7-10). In this context it makes sense to understand modernities not as individual instances in individual places, but precisely in their layered seriality. After all, consecutive developments are never entirely identical but relate to and reference each other in ways that allow to draw conclusions on how industrialization, mediatization, commercialization, and progressive political projects take effect. Modernity as a concept, then, results from such acts of contrasting multiple series and of comparing the discontinuities effected by social, technological, and artistic change.

Such a conceptualization of modernity in terms of crossreferences and intersections runs the risk of exhausting itself in quasi-New Historicist tracking exercises, in which the shock experience that Walter Benjamin identified as a core element of modernist meaning-making is spotted in ever varying contexts and ever widening temporal and spatial circles. In order to avoid conceptualizing modernity exclusively in terms of resonance, return, and recognition, the concept of modernity itself needs to be critically interrogated. The study of modernities as transnational phenomena has to acknowledge the dispersed and uneven character of processes of cultural and social communication and contact, which may very well cast themselves in terms of correspondences or clashes of a center and a periphery - the West and the rest - and still defy this binary logic in the particularities of their unfolding. In this volume, scenarios of repercussion, revisitation, or reciprocity are examined with close attention to formative and paradigmatic instances of cultural expression - most notably early-twentieth-century modernist culture. But

the focus of the following essays is on instances of inversion, disjunction, and dissemination - they are interested in how the very idea of modernity hinges on a plurality of factors, voices, perspectives, and agents. In concert, they show how modernity hinges on negotiations of the old and the new, innovation and tradition, the man-made and the natural, and notions of past, present, and future, and they offer ways in which clear distinctions of all of these categories become increasingly improbable.

This volume begins with reflections on the more traditional representatives of literary modernism, featuring essays that reconsider 'classic' authors in a transnational context and explore their contributions to "Conceptualizing Modernities." Anita Patterson revisits T.S. Eliot and traces the impact of Buddhist ethics in his poetry both as a result of transpacific exchange and as a reexamination of previous intercultural exchanges, as Eliot's fascination with Buddhism is grounded in a history of exchange between the two cultures that manifests in Ralph Waldo Emerson's works, enabling Eliot's simultaneous study of the impact of transpacific exchange in New England. Birgit Capelle studies Gertrude Stein's works in a comparable manner, in an essay that considers the modernists' own myth of novelty and new beginnings in the light of Taoist and Zen Buddhism and thereby manages to draw a line from Stein to Jack Kerouac's work. Ulla Haselstein explores how Gertrude Stein appropriates and refashions a core principle of modernist production - seriality - in order to exhibit (rather than represent or replicate) the apparatuses of modernist meaning-making and the cognitive mechanisms of perception and reflection. Heike Schaefer takes these authors to the classroom in an essay that details the fruitfulness of teaching Gertrude Stein's literary portraits and John Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer in the context of modernity as manifest in, for instance, Cubist painting, Edison's tum-of-the-century motion studies, and urban documentaries and avant-garde film of the 1920s. Schaefer's text thereby stresses the interdependency of the classical modernists and the larger context of cross-media modernity, which takes place outside of the written forms. The final two contributions to this first section of the volume hark back to a previous generation of authors, unearthing the immediate predecessors to modernist literary projects. Florian Sedlmeier takes recourse to William Dean Howells' critical texts in order to assess the shifting cultural function and status of literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Sedlmeier's basic premise is that literature and modernity correspond in

two ways, because the novel itself as a form of genre hybridity is essentially modem, while the literary market and its institutions undergo a similar process of modernization. Herwig Friedl's contribution returns to a study of Ralph Waldo Emerson and considers a concept of the frontier as a metaphor for an unstructured mental space the basis for the modernist's self-conceptualization as writing outside of tradition or history.

The second section turns away from literary studies proper to include the multiple ways in which modernity comes to characterize performance arts, both during the early twentieth century and afterwards. Laura Horak situates early-twentieth-century cinema and its many trans- formations at the intersection of modernity and tradition and shows that cinema's moves to categorize and label forms of sexuality took place in the same force field of "Performed Modernities." She furthermore traces how economic considerations impacted contemporaneous categories of sexuality and gender, highlighting the interdependence of modernity and capitalism's market economy that Sedlmeier tracks for the literary marketplace. The following two essays consider stage performances of the same era. Echoing Horak's move to consider the interrelation of modernity and history or tradition, Johanna Heil studies the modem dance techniques of Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Katherine Dunham, who created a (self-)perceived novelty in dance through recourse to pre-cultural forms of organic movement as well as to, in Dunham's case, a transnational history of cultural displacement. Birgit M. Bauridl takes notions of play and performance back to literary studies in her reading of five of Zora Neale Hurston's short stories that were rediscovered in the twenty-first century, in which performance becomes a means to negotiate identity formations within the shapeshifting cultural environments of modernity's urban spaces. The final two contributions to this section turn away from the early twentieth century and focus on more recent performances. Astrid M. Fellner zooms in on Guillermo Verdeccia's 1993 play Fronteras Americanas and joins in the conceptualizing of modernity as transnational and mobile, indicating how Verdeccia's play questions existing maps as Western geopolitical constructs and casts modernity as an imperial project that can be countered by stressing contingent, "Alternative Modernities." Whereas this approach conceptualizes possible alternatives mostly in spatial terms, Florian Weinzierl turns to recent productions of the musical A Man of No

Importance to investigate alternative temporalities. He argues that the musical, and particularly its musical numbers, offer temporal disruptions that serve to queer time and complicate distinctions of past, present, and possible futures.

Sections three and four of the volume focus on the intersection of modernity and novelty. The third section, "Mapping Modernities," initially returns to the temporal safe haven of modernity, the first half of the twentieth century, but turns away from the classic authors of modernism to consider conceptions of novelty and change in popular culture. Sascha Klein, Connor Pitetti, and Martin Holtz show in different though interlocking ways how technological development and the forces of nature form a pair that is negotiated in short stories, editorials, and in documentaries. Klein demonstrates how science fiction literature merges the oppositional ideas of the Western frontiersmen and the workers in the new, urban frontier of metropolitan high-rises. Pitetti's essay turns to the work of author and theorist Hugo Gemsback to question the dichotomy of fossil and alternative energy sources and the uncritical championing of the latter. Focusing on three documentary films that portray ecological destruction and posit governmental intervention as a solution, Holtz argues that New Deal-era propaganda films evoke a romanticized idea of a pastoral past to criticize modernity's implication of unchecked progress and offer governmental intervention as a means to ensure a controlled, uncorrupted notion of technological advancement. Development, progress, and the new, it seems, need to be managed and steered.

According to Michael North, the difference between the 'modernist art' of the first half of the twentieth century and the products that came afterwards rests on their attitude vis-à-vis the possibility of the new (epub 9). He argues that the hailing of the 'new' stopped in the 1960s, when people thought everything had been done already (8). Florian Groß's contribution intervenes at the breaking point in this distinction and shows how at the New York Worlds' Fair of 1964/1965, in contrast to its predecessor three decades earlier, the championing of the new itself took on the air of a bygone time. As a final contribution to this section, Torsten Kathke studies non-fiction bestsellers of the 1970s and 1980s, which helped to re-formulate a popular perception of time in that they described a moment of the present that interlinks the past and the future, resulting in a popular tradition of futurologist literature. In turning towards texts from the later stages of the twentieth century,

Kathke's essay also leads the way towards the final section, which explores contemporary inflections of modernity.

Simon Schleusener opens the volume's final section on "21st Century Modernities" with a reading of the recent notion of a 'post-fact society.' Studying the aftermaths of modernity, Schleusener considers contemporary right-wing arguments as informed by critical currents of the postmodern era, whereas academics, artists, and intellectuals have abandoned postmodernism's more radical tendencies in the face of material realities such as climate change and poverty. Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich then probes the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which challenged the modernity-as-progress narrative and the concurrent close relationship of modernity and capitalism. He charts how post-millennial zombie films provide allegories for a wageless, surplus force of workers and envision a future that only accommodates a small range of beings. Buscher-Ulbrich's text describes the cultural impact of the question of whether modernity as a progress narrative will ultimately cease to depend on human labor - a question which Christian Guese's essay then takes from the film screen to the American trucking sector. In Guese's essay, trucking and the economic structures on which the business depends emerge as a force field in which the question of whether technological progress and artificial intelligence will ultimately aid or replace human workers can be seen to play out.

The final three contributions turn away from modernity's intersection with employment and instead focus on the recreational engagement with digital-era marvels. Diana Wagner undertakes a reading of Siri Hustvedt's novels as invitations to critically reflect on the ways in which social media transform and reshape human interaction and allow for communal, reciprocal practices of surveillance. With regard to the 2016 computer game Pony Island, Sören Schoppmeier details the ways in which the game displays its dependence on software and code and thereby encourages the player's self-reflexive engagement with computer gaming and with the digital structures that inform our everyday lives. Finally, Ingrid Gessner mobilizes recent augmented reality art- works to indicate the ways in which the digital becomes re-inscribed in the material world. Augmented and virtual technologies, it seems, may come to blur the boundaries of nature and technology, the digital and the material, that informed modernity and the discussions thereof through- out the previous century.

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