Afterword

Modernism is all around us. Not late modernism, not postmodernism, but modernism. One of the things that we discover in this collection is the myriad ways in which modernist ideas, techniques, and aesthetics are revived, re-used, invoked, or critiqued in the popular culture of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the same time, these contemporary modernisms are themselves indebted to the popular appropriations of modernism that happened much earlier, in silent cinema, early radio drama, operetta, or gangster flicks.

In her chapter on modernist time, Aimee Wilson quotes William Faulkner's famous pronouncement that "the past is never dead. It's not even past." Taken together, the essays in this collection seem to suggest an adaptation: "Modernism is never dead. It's not even past." But can we reach it and immerse ourselves in it, or do we always experience it through a veil of nostalgia or twenty-first-century knowingness? In his chapter on broadcasting, Adam Nemmers proposes that radio is the modernist medium par excellence, "the only art-form born and matured during the modernist period." Not only this, but radio drama, "freed from technical considerations and the tyranny of the 'visual scene' . . . could venture anywhere within the human imagination." Yet, according to Nemmers, these days, "radio drama is all but defunct, and radio sets themselves have largely disappeared from households." After reading this, I walked around my apartment counting my radios. Six. I thought back to the three BBC radio dramas I had listened to (live, analogue) in the last week. Have I been left behind in a past century? Or is my attachment to live radio simply another proof of the continuing power of the modernist imagination in the present day? Indeed one of the plays I had listened to was set in a railway carriage in the 1920s. Another was about Noël Coward and E. Nesbit: both popular authors who engaged warily with modernism.

I read on. Soon, it became clear that television must also be taken into account. Television was foreseen in the early twentieth century: Nicholas Daly points this out, using the example of Ivor Novello's "Ruritanian" operetta, *Glamorous Night*. Yet television is not a modernist technology, and I have always felt I could ignore it. Indeed, I have unfortunately not paid attention to *Mad Men,* or *The Wire*, and I have no patience with *Downton Abbey*. Now, however, I am fully persuaded that all these series perform what Scott Ortolano describes so astutely as "a strategic invocation of past modernisms to help the audience confront the modernities of our present moment." Oh dear. I had hoped that I was eschewing nostalgia and sentimentalism by refusing to watch *Downton*. But it turns out that I am simply failing to celebrate the resurgence and reinvention of modernism in popular cultural forms. As Ortolano puts it: "modernism's sense of experimentation, engagement with new technologies, and paradoxical relationships with the past and future have always been in conversation with – and a driver of – mass culture. It is to this important but often unappreciated truth that the essays in this collection are dedicated." Bravo!

Among the technologies of modernity that interest me especially are those of printing and textile manufacture. These come together in Marsha Bryant's chapter on the 1950s men's magazine *Gentry*, which was famous for including fabric samples in its beautifully designed pages. Bryant comments that the magazine's portrayals of the photographer Alfred Stieglitz and the shirt designer Alfred Shapiro "highlight the way each figure brought the artist's hand to mechanical means of making photographic prints and menswear, respectively." She also describes the modernist sculpture and painting that was presented in the art sections of *Gentry*, observing: "Modernism was no longer new in the 1950s. Yet modernist art, design, literature mixed with men's high fashion to make *something else* new in the pages of *Gentry*." This comment could equally be applied to many of the other cultural products discussed in this collection. The modernist moment is past, but modernism still has immense generative power. It can still make new things. At the same time, the physical things that were made by modernist artists and designers, and even by the production lines of the early twentieth century, are a crucial part of modernism's legacy to us. The circulation of modernist stuff in contemporary culture might have been an apt subject for another chapter in this collection. Think, for instance, of the growing popularity of exhibitions of modern design: in London, this is culminating in the November 2016 re-opening of The Design Museum in a dramatic renovated space in Kensington. Think, too, of the prices that can be fetched by the sale of couture clothing or art deco objects from the interwar years – a Poiret dress, for example, can sell for up to $50,000 at auction.

Gentry purveyed an ideal of affluent, cultured masculine modernity, encouraging well-off middle-class men to aspire to distinction. At the other end of the social scale, the gangsters in the 1930s films explored in Jonathan Goldman's chapter, and the prisoners depicted in *The Wire* and discussed here by Walter Bosse, also aspire to "be somebody." They turn to crime in a bid to escape the restrictions of the low social stratum that they belong to. In both chapters, *The Great Gatsby* is a reference point, because Gatsby is both a criminal and an emblem of (failed) social mobility. These two fine essays, though so different in approach and content, arrive at remarkably similar conclusions. The gangsters and the prisoners were, in Bosse's words, "duped by the American myth of self-making," and the films and TV series rely, in Goldman's phrase, "on a modernist notion of self-objectification."

An alternative, and more triumphant, version of this American mythology is played out in the career of Josephine Baker. She is a figure who has provoked intense debate, particularly about whether she was reiterating or contesting racial stereotypes. As Asimina Ino Nikolopoulo comments in her chapter on Baker and her afterlives: "To announce Baker's performance as emancipatory, one needs to address the representational conundrum of her iconic self-making." Nikolopoulo argues that Baker's provocative performance did indeed disrupt conventional categories and ways of seeing, as well as offering other artists insights into the way modernism was experienced by a black subject. Her legacy in the present moment, according to Nikolopoulo, is especially visible in the work of Beyoncé, whose self-reflexive and citational performance "contributes to an emancipatory modernist discourse, as her body contests iconic renderings of black femininity." In concluding her essay in this way, Nikolopoulo points to one of the primary interventions of this collection as a whole. It offers us ways of reading contemporary artists as contributing to, rather than simply referring back to, modernist discourse. It enables us, as critics, to move away from retrospection and explore modernism from within – as an element of our own twenty-first-century intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere.

— Faye Hammill