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## Peter Kalliney. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

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**Peter Kalliney. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.**

**Abstract**

Review of Peter Kalliney. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 190 pp.

**Keywords**

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Peter Kalliney. *Modernism in a Global Context*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 190 pp.

Peter Kalliney has contributed a vital globalizing study of modernism to Bloomsbury's laudable *New Modernisms* series of innovative texts reassessing the meanings and manifestations of modernist aesthetics and the catalytic political engagements of its multi-media practitioners across the twentieth-century world. Long overdue, this cleverly designed and briskly written survey of modernism's shifting "imaginative geography" (123) around the globe should re-vivify and expand how academic and student audiences conceive the multi-cultural and political forces always conjoining to drive forward this pioneering movement still shaping world cities and globalizing villages North, South, East, and West.

Kalliney's engaging synopsis offers six trenchant chapters with an introduction evoking modernists everywhere as actual fellow travelers often committed to self-assertion and self-exploration through resolute, real, or virtual voyages traversing or transgressing state borders, literary conventions, and gender norms globally. There follows four core chapters surveying modernism's intersections and convolutions with "Imperialism," "Cosmopolitanism," "Cultural Institutions," and "Media." A sharp conclusion explores current authorial and critical tensions between modernities construed in the plural versus apprehensions of an emergent and Westernized, capitalistic cultural hegemony. As in other volumes for this Bloomsbury series, this text concludes with a completely up-to-date and informative bibliography alerting attentive readers to the most recent controversies generated by the globalization of modernist discourses and the critical responses to each across multiple media of expression.

In each of the core chapters, Kalliney first surveys influential classic and contemporary critical theory relevant to the topic, usually eschewing jargon and demonstrating a rare even-handedness to often colliding and vituperative combatants. (In the chapter devoted to "Media," Kalliney even takes the venerable Marshall McLuhan along for the ride, saluting him as the most helpful companion one could have in charting the social impact of media and communication technologies disseminating modernism.) Kalliney then deftly contrasts these literary critical surveys with close readings of select authors, celebrated and unjustly obscure, covering the territories in the global North and South, where modernisms imperialize, de-colonize, nationalize, de-nationalize, urbanize, and institutionalize. Kalliney's own travelling companions are admirably diverse. He extends close readings to twelve authors, six men and six women, gay and straight and in between, shaping modernism(s) in (or across) fifteen different nations including coastal China, the Czech Republic, Denmark (via Chicago), Indonesia, Ireland, Martinique, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and the West Indies. Here, adventuresome readers get a ticket to ride and every incentive to light out.

Embarking from Baudelaire's kinetic Paris, Kalliney essentially defines modernism as "an aesthetics of motion" (1) impelling its devotees and analysts to venture abroad and embrace the revelatory opportunities and discomfiting ambiguities of long range travel, once real and then also virtual, thanks to the displacements modern communications technologies like radio and phonograph recordings encouraged. Voyages of discovery became a common practice among early generations of authors and artists now identified as modernists on a global scale and one that must be reclaimed now if we are to comprehend modernism in all of its many dimensions, geographic and cultural.

Finding that "[t]ravel and translation are right at the core of modernism's aesthetics of motion and dissonance" (3), Kalliney stakes out cultural crossroads, especially great and diverse metropolitan communities *and* their serial literatures, little presses, soundscapes, and airwave networks, where modernists congregated, connected, and collided. Appropriating and capitalizing upon Tsitsi Jaji's concept of "stereomodernism" (deeply linking modernist discourse in multiple media and decolonization struggles worldwide) (133), Kalliney insightfully reconstructs how modernist motifs actually circulated via innovative broadcast technologies reaching new audiences and provoking significant political and cultural change globally. In his chapter "Media," Kalliney insightfully compares the impacts of photography and phonography on the evolutionary paths of modernist novelists, poets, and memorialists. Taking inspiration from Christopher Isherwood's famous modern dictum "I am a camera," Kalliney charts the photographic and cinematic allusions vivifying modernist artistry moving from Dos Passos' "Camera Eye" to the "universal visuality" Ezra Pound imagined to be found in Chinese logographic characters, where vision and representation are supposedly linked in revelatory ways apt for modernist invention (137). Turning immediately to the global literary and expressive impacts of modern and modernist Western sound recording and amplification technologies, Kalliney finds that T.S. Eliot innovatively "describes the artist as someone who records, stores, and transmits data—sound information, especially—without in any fundamental way tampering with that data" (140). Here, one is tempted to interject that Eliot's riposte to Isherwood might have been: "I am a Victrola." But as Kalliney insists, these modernist techno-fusions are no ephemeral matter since, for example, Eliot's recording of *The Waste Land*, distributed to the Anglophone Commonwealth via the British Council, reached Barbados in radio performances where its simple, conversational tone profoundly inspired Kamau Brathwaite, "the most innovative theorist and practitioner of vernacular writing" in the Caribbean (141), to assert his own, indigenous "Nation Language," amplifying regional struggles against British colonialism. Such syncopated insights linking modern literatures, modern technologies, and modern politics above and below the equator jazz up this volume, making it far more than a mere survey of canonical modern masterpieces in new and different locales. And

although the temporal frame of this text precludes Kalliney from examining the impacts on modern artists of computers and all the social and anti-social media they have spawned, the author's attentiveness to modernists' historic anxieties over the grotesque superficialization of cultures everywhere threatened by new communication technologies offers excellent literary, poetic, and political contexts for better understanding similar but much more recent apprehensions.

Kalliney's penetrating attention to the infrastructures by which modernist art forms actually circulated worldwide displays key institutions integral to this process, like the British Council, international conferences on politics and culture, and international book prize juries and events such as the Nobel literary awards and the Mann Booker Prize. Central to this analytical framework is Kalliney's revealing, reiterated juxtaposition of the notorious 1884-85 Berlin Conference (where northern hemispheric imperial powers ratified their colonial supremacy over Africa) with the lesser-known 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, where resolutely anti-colonial agitators of color, repudiating both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, stoked indigenous cultures worldwide, "opening a symbolic war with imperialism on all fronts" (49). The Berlin Conference curiously fomented the anti-imperial strain in European modernist literatures, while the Bandung delegates freely embraced modern modes of economic development and telecommunications, recognizing them as imperative for successful assertion of culturally innovative local political independence from European overlordship. Contrasting "Berlin modernism" (39) with "Bandung modernism" (48) enables Kalliney globally to lay bare the essential and evolving cross-fertilizations between contemporary world politics and contemporary forms of cultural expression integral to a comprehensive understanding of what "modernism" really means: simultaneous modes of expression, displacement, and dissent around the twentieth-century globe.

Emphasizing "modernist formations around the world" (18), "strains of modernity" (39), and the "wide range of modernist practices around the world" (119)—all in the plural—shows Kalliney's acute sensitivity to the sheer variety of artists and events co-generating modernism itself. Recognizing the integral in the plural is an admirable analytical goal but perhaps Kalliney might dispatch entirely with "modernism" in the singular. Embracing modernisms (now always global and always plural) and then defining them successively and cogently (as attempted in other volumes from this series) would be the only clear improvement I can see here in an otherwise moving, swift, and finely synthetic text.

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