



current issue

Issue Four

Introduction

Melinda Harvey, Gillian Sykes, Deborah Pike
Conference Convenors

This special issue of *Colloquy* is devoted to papers arising from the postgraduate conference, "Curious Eyes: Sites and Scenes of Modernism," held at The University of Sydney on 28th September, 1999. The motivation behind this conference was to provide a forum for current innovative and challenging postgraduate work in the field of Modernist Studies, in its literary, social, political, artistic and philosophical contexts. Our aim was to supply a space - a real and discursive 'site and scene', if you like, in which postgraduate students from all over Australia could speak, first and foremost as Modernists - an apt intent given Modernism's association with coterie, the group, the network and the web. In this way, "Curious Eyes" can be seen in the wider context of the reemergence of Modernist Studies as an active and piquant area of critical dialogue, discussion, debate and disputation. A number of recent phenomenal successes in Modernist Studies gatherings suggest this: in The United States, the newly formed Modernist Studies Association's inaugural "New Modernisms" conference held at Penn State University in October last year boasted figures of more than five hundred participants. Meanwhile, in New York, The Museum of Modern Art held a major retrospective exhibition entitled "Modernstarts: People-Places-Things." Across the Atlantic, in London, The Royal Academy of Art's "1900: Art and the Crossroads" and the Tate Gallery's reassessment of the art of the Bloomsbury Group evince the fact that Modernism is, now more than ever, subject to the curious eyes of commentators everywhere.

This special issue of *Colloquy* presents a view of Modernism through the gaze of Australian postgraduate students - a view we believe to be distinctive and dynamic. As convenors, shuffling through proposals and papers, we were struck by the fact that the more conventional or canonical figures and themes were paying attention to Modernism's periphery. The very diversity of papers suggested that what could be considered Modernist was no simple question. These papers prove that Modernism is not easily delimited by period, place, style, genre, mode or form. Our publication suggests that, alongside its more traditional manifestations, Modernism still has many scantily explored sites, scenes and - from the Swiss Alps to World War II Japan, from the fin de siecle to aspects of 1920s Harlem. This tendency for diversity is informed by interdisciplinarity, the fruits of our conference demonstrating Modernism's receptivity to postcolonial, racial, spatial and feminist/queer/gendered re-readings.

Daniel Black's *Enma's Eye* investigates the way in which the discourse of racial difference has been mapped onto the Japanese body. Taking the Asian eye as the emblem of difference from a Caucasian norm, he traces the connection between this different, other, eye and the theme of mutual observation in the relationship between Japan and the west. Black explains how the hungry consumption for modernisation by the Japanese introduced problematic ideas in the way they viewed themselves as a race, and the way they were viewed by the west. As the first non-Caucasian society to pursue modernisation, the Japanese found themselves appropriating a discourse which was itself saturated with Modernist ideals of white supremacy.

Clare Corbould's *"What is Modernism to me?" Individual Selves and Collective Identities in African American Women's Writing 1920-35* draws us into a study of the work of black female poets during the Harlem Renaissance. Corbould demonstrates how various themes and strategies of the presentation of the self commonly associated with Modernism coincide and diverge with the cultural production of African Americans during the 1920s. The sheer experimentation in form, for example, in the work of poets such as Countee Cullen presents us with a version of the self which reflects a Modernist-style tension between form and content, an assertion of individuality and a representation of a collective (racial) identity.

Still on the theme of poetry and the self during the Harlem Renaissance, we turn to Pedro Telleria-Teixeira's *Langston Hughes and Pan-Africanism: Folk Music and Racial Identification*, a paper which explores Hughes' writings during the Modernist period and how they reveal Pan-Africanism, primitivism and class. Telleria-Teixeira takes a closer look at how these concepts are reflected in folk music, in particular the music of Blues, Flamenco and Fado. By using images and stereotypes associated with other cultures outside the United States, Hughes explores notions of universal blackness and social injustice.

Hélène Frichot innovatively explores the construction and deconstruction of Modernist subjectivity in her paper *Constructing a Monstrous Offspring: A Few steps Toward the Process of Montage*. Frichot accumulates a string of images, each of which represent a different kind of 'monstrous offspring,' each a picture of a collection of disparate and decaying parts forming a monster. She suggests that their assemblage is like a surrealist game, the game of the Cadavre Exquis, where a gathering of participants forms an arrangement of diverse fragments into a marvellous figure. She likens this to a process of montage, a "putting-together", if you like, of one's subjectivity. Frichot ingeniously applies her 'game' to Jean Genet's novel *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

Melinda Harvey's paper *Moving, Movies and the Sublime: Modernity and the Alpine Scene in Dorothy Richardson's 'Oberland'*, takes us on a journey to Switzerland in the late 1920s. On her journey, Harvey explores the influence of technological innovation in the form of mass transports to the Swiss Alps, as chartered in the novel *Oberland*, by British Modernist, Dorothy Richardson, where these Alps are depicted as similar to a busy Modernist City. Richardson writes about the English tourists who were transported to this "European Playground" by railways, chair lifts and funiculars. Harvey explains how these modes of fun transport gave rise to a new breed of winter sportswomen, and a new kind of female sublime, one governed by the aesthetics of speed.

In *Oscar Wilde and the Politics of Irish Aestheticism*, Gary Pearce presents us with Oscar Wilde as Modernist Rebel, as seen in his anti-bourgeois opposition to concepts of linearity, family, filiation, production, and social improvement. He examines Wilde's engagement with the contradictions and problems experienced by an individual from the colonial periphery of Ireland. According to Pearce, Wilde's Modernism is situated between a strong sense of self and an idea of a fictional self. He explores this in more detail by looking at Wilde's Modernist manifesto, *Intentions*.

In his paper *Toward Visualized Rhythm in the Works of Piet Mondrian*, Eiichi Tosaki attempts to do what few art historians have done before, and that is take a closer, more serious look at Modernist artist Piet Mondrian's complex ideas on rhythm. By moving the focus away from his later work, Tosaki opens up the theoretical options for a Mondrian analysis. By using the notion of cognition of 'metre' in the visual field, Tosaki argues that Wittgenstein's notion of "seeing-as", Kramer's "time-point" and Husserl's "picture-object" are crucial to a further investigation of the theory of visual rhythm in the works of Mondrian.

kylie valentine examines the institutional forces at work behind the formation of Modernism and psychoanalysis in her paper *Interdisciplinarity of Origin: Modernism, Psychoanalysis and Imperialism* and *Modernism*. She argues that the relationship between literary Modernism and psychoanalysis can be understood as interdependent and competitive, and both being formed under the conditions of British imperialism at the site of the metropolitan centre. valentine looks at this relationship in light of the

emerging discipline of psychology, and of anthropology and archaeology.

Margaret Macarthur's paper *Madame Edwarda: The Beloved in the Brothel and on the Streets* concerns itself with the perverse Modernism of Georges Bataille. By reviewing his notions on eroticism and death in *Madame Edwarda*, Macarthur reveals *Madame Edwarda* "as a priceless thing, not as Surrealism's valorised love and mystical union, and not as post-modern public canals of libidinal economies, but as an effective expenditure which gestures towards complete dissolution, where bodies topple at the edge of a radical otherness, and which short-circuits any easy incorporation into capital and rational (re) production."

This collection of papers demonstrates the diverse and overlapping themes current in Modernist Studies in Australia. This Special Issue of *Colloquy* will help disseminate these new ideas, and keep you up-to-date with what postgraduates are doing to reclaim and reinvent Modernism. So for those of you with curious eyes, turn the page...

[Copyright © Monash University 2000. All rights reserved.](#)

[about](#) | [current](#) | [archives](#) | [resources](#) | [acknowledgements](#) | [debate](#) | [papers](#) | [contact](#)

This page has been approved by the [Colloquy Editors](#).

Last Date Modified : 02 October 2000 - [Caution](#) - [Monash Home](#)