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## Hemi-spheric transnationalism

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## HEMI/SPHERIC TRANSNATIONALISM

In her groundbreaking treatise *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), the late Gloria Anzaldúa wrote '... the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness' (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 80). In describing the existential significance of what she thus calls 'the new *mestiza*,' Anzaldúa traces the jagged edges of hegemonic Western cultural reality, probing the silent (and often silenced) interstices between official cultures, initially revealing just the bare outlines of their unauthorized counterparts, watching them slowly yet steadily and inexorably come into hard focus by the book's end. The 'borderlands' she identifies are not just those heavily policed geographical areas which lie between the boundaries of recognized nation states. More importantly, 'borderlands' is also the name for those liminal cultural spaces where the primary mode of existence is that of in-between, not one nor another but always and inevitably many. In cultural terms this state of perpetual in-betweenness is both a transgression and an aberration: a radical rejection of imposed order that refuses interpolation and assimilation, a defiant insistence on the possibility, existence and right of proliferative identity. In perpetrating such defiance, Anzaldúa also brings into violent being this simultaneously multiple form of life, authorizing, supporting and solidifying it by surrounding it with its own 'mythos'—a new cultural story that serves as both figurative geographical location and metaphorical cultural context. But of what exactly is this new 'mythos' comprised? How does Anzaldúa approach the enormous task of recreating cultural reality while denying that reality as given, creating within it an alternative story, a rehistoricized history? Here interpolation becomes an imperative, part and parcel of re-opening the closed door of history and bringing it face-to-face with its own denial of itself; it is, and must be, an act of rhetorical violence, an interpellation tearing a ragged hole in the linguistic fabric of reality and pointing language outward, toward what she calls '...life in the shadows...' Out there, beyond the safety of known and established boundaries, in what Anzaldúa terms 'uncharted seas,' the act of re-making becomes a sudden and urgent necessity, a striving to capture the moment of reversal both quickly and strongly enough to hold it fast before it can disappear into speculation, fantasy or frustrated desire. Once grasped, it must be fixed again in time—before time, in its endless forward progression, forces it once again into the shadowy nether realm from which it came. Securing the new 'mythos' in a rhetoric of origins, then, Anzaldúa writes:



During the original peopling of the Americas, the first inhabitants migrated across the Bering Straits and walked south across the continent. The oldest evidence of humankind in the US—the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestor—was found in Texas and has been dated to 35,000 B.C. In the Southwest United States archeologists have found 20,000-year-old campsites of the Indians who migrated through, or permanently occupied, the Southwest, Aztlán—land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca... (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 4).

Calculating this new mythos, this alternative origin, in years has a purpose: not hundreds but thousands of years, reflecting a history beyond the shock of Western culture, re-contextualizing that cultural influence as the outside of a broader, vaster, more lengthy and prior reality, yet, in its chronological import, speaking the temporal language of Western culture rather than its own. As such, it is understood and as such, it forcefully seizes an authority forcefully seized.

Deep within this new 'mythos', then, lies the question of modernity and a critique of belatedness, which underscore the theme of this issue of the *Review of International American Studies*, 'Modernity's Modernisms: Hemi/Spheres, "Race", Gender.' This recreated 'mythos' asks two central questions: what is modern, and whose modernity is it? The contributions to this issue think and rethink these questions while considering the tension between modernism and modernity, 'race' and gender, and by approaching the subject from a hemispheric perspective that denies what it conceives of as the artificial boundaries imposed by culture, history and time. While hemispheric studies has been commonly associated with the new American studies, or the shift from a focus on the US alone in the study of American culture to the study of the Americas (consisting of North America, including Canada and Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean) and the interrelationships between these national and geographical locations, this issue of *RIAS* takes a different tack in its exploration of the subject. Through a reconsideration of the 15<sup>th</sup> century moment of contact represented in the encounter of Old World and New as an important founding moment in the development of the idea of modernity with which Anzaldúa's 'mythos' is in conflict, the essays in this issue question the seemingly stable epistemological boundaries that would seem to hold them separate and apart, each in its own temporal and disciplinary space between which, in conventional terms, no productive intellectual interaction can occur. Bringing these essays into hemispheric relation, however, suggests a productive affiliation not immediately discovered, but realized only by digging below the surface, and recognizing the significance of their points of convergence.

In their re-readings of modernity, all of the essays in this issue speak in different ways to Susan Stanford Friedman's consideration of the meaning of the moment of encounter in the Western trajectory of the modern. In two important essays on this topic, 'Definitional Excursions' and 'Periodizing Modernism', Friedman discusses in detail the semantic complexity of the terms modernism and modernity, as well as what she sees as their inherent contradictions, in their simultaneous, problematic and completely inescapable alterity. While acknowledging the insufficiency of what she identifies as the two central ways to approach the concept of the modern, i.e., the nominal and the relational, in discussing that modernity arising in the 15<sup>th</sup> century West she yet leans more toward an understanding of this modern moment as nominal, and,

as such, not particularly useful in seeking to move beyond hegemonic conceptions of modernism and modernity into a more global, diasporic and/or transnational engagement, which she identifies as primarily relational in form. Describing her own 'relational' approach to modernity, Stanford Friedman writes:

I advocate a polycentric, planetary concept of modernity that can be both precise enough to be useful and yet capacious enough to encompass the divergent articulations of modernity in various geo-historical locations I suggest that modernity involves a powerful vortex of historical conditions that coalesce to produce sharp ruptures from the past that range widely across various sectors of a given society. The velocity, acceleration, and dynamism of shattering change across a wide spectrum of societal institutions are key components of modernity as I see it—change that interweaves the cultural, economic, political, religious, familial, sexual, aesthetic, technological, and so forth, and can move in both utopic and dystopic directions. Across the vast reaches of civilizational history, eruptions of different modernities often occur in the context of empires and conquest. This definitional approach recognizes the modernities that have formed not only after the rise of the West but also before the West's post-1500 period of rapid change—the earlier modernities of the Tang Dynasty in China, the Abbasid Dynasty of the Muslim empire, and the Mongol Empire, to cite just a few.

In this view, Stanford Friedman describes such a vast and interrelated network that it can only be understood in terms of a 'planetary' concept of modernity, one that will both encourage and foster the consideration of multiple modernities having their beginnings and their ends throughout an unconstrained time and space. But in naming the Western moment of modernity and then moving beyond it to her much larger planetary understanding, Stanford Friedman also produces a critical juncture in which the nominal surreptitiously camouflages itself in the relational and then quickly recedes, unnoticed, into the background, leaving our understanding of Western modernity for the most part intact.

The essays in this issue return to the modern moment of the post-1500 West, asserting that it **does** become productive especially when considered in relation to race and, by association, gender, to the extent that these may also, like the many modernities that Stanford Friedman describes, be understood as relational, rather than nominal. In its emphasis on a hemispheric articulation of gender and race, this issue returns to that early modern moment in order to consider the myriad ways in which it may in fact be relational, and what the recognition of this relationality might mean for the study of modernism and modernity in the context of the Americas. Considered thus in relational terms, the ostensibly nominal moment of encounter between Old World and New reveals, in its engendering of modernity, a simultaneous and powerful silencing at its core, represented also in what may be identified as the 'underbelly' of modernism, or what has not often been said, written about, considered, or recognized, what others like Simon Gikandi, in his influential study *Writing in Limbo*, have written about at length. Returning in this way to this foundational moment, this issue of *RIAS* identifies, explores and interrogates such neglected 'modernisms', seeking unexpected revelation in their potentially fruitful juxtaposition. Articulated as so many modern 'hemi/spheres', these modernisms form multiple disparate locations of engagement from any number of inter—and multi-disciplinary, multilingual, transnational, trans-cultural, trans-historical and trans-geographical vantage points. Derived from within this consideration, then, these modern 'hemi/



spheres' become not isolated moments in radically separate disciplinary locations, but may be seen to form a complicated and interconnected fabric of cultural, political, historical, economic, geographic, migratory, and transnational experience that is, by nature of its constitutive moment, not actually limited to the Western hemisphere, but in truth, global in its reach. Thus, while at first glance these modern 'hemi/spheres' would seem to be locked in an epistemological consideration that is primarily geographically defined, a deeper investigation reveals that they actually exist in easy relation to the discourses of globalization and transnationalism. That deeper investigation can only take place, however, if the hemispheric approach is defined not by its geography, as a conventional perspective might read it, but rather by its significance in a reconfigured understanding of Western modernity, such as that suggested by Anzaldúa in her insistence on the necessity of a new 'mythos' in seeking understanding of her articulation of multiple identity.

The essays in this issue address the notion of modernity's modernisms construed in this way in three registers: the temporal, the spatial and the global. In its reconsideration of the Western moment of modernity, this issue's theme doesn't seek to identify this as the only, or even the most important, modern moment. What it does seek to do is to try to unravel its significance to Western conceptions of modernity. By opening up the historical in this way, it suggests another way to think about the temporal in our considerations of modernism and modernity by decentering the influence of periodization, which would lock cultural discourse in neat 100-year time periods, often precluding productive engagement outside of those contexts by refusing and/or denying any kind of common ground. In its reconsideration of space, by emphasizing a hemispheric over an isolated (and potentially isolating) national geography, the issue provides a productive way to bring the spatial and the temporal into dialogue, so that what others have called multi-directional currents, which are often found in the interstices between national entities, are emphasized over the narrative of pure and authentic national identity. This dialogue also provides the ground for productive interdisciplinary engagement, in that what can be considered common ground need no longer be determined only by discipline, but rather by object of knowledge, which is also often derived thematically. And it speaks in a global register because as a result of these other registers, it becomes possible to think about the global interrelationships, geographical, national, cultural, political, etc. that may exist between silenced or oppressed modernities that we don't know so well in relation to the hegemonic narrative of the modern that we all know **too** well. This is the way by which modernity's modernisms come to be understood or to represent multiple interconnected 'hemi/spheres', in which exist many possible relations of various (though not all) modernities through history, time, and space, across axes of east and west and north and south—linked also, through the shared quest of discovery, to disparate global modernities existing prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century modern moment of the West. Viewed in terms of such multiple 'hemi/spheres', modernity's modernisms thus suggests both a transnational and a transhistorical approach, forming an important nexus between inside/outside, colonial/postcolonial, the West and the Rest.

As representations of just a few of modernity's modernisms, the essays contained in this issue of *RIAS* investigate both the meaning and the significance of modernity in

disparate modern moments brought together in their reconsiderations of hemispheric modern possibility. The Forum essays derive from the International Relations Open Forum Roundtable held at the Modernist Studies Association conference in Nashville, Tennessee in November 2008. Coming from extremely disparate cultural, disciplinary and historical locations, each of the essays included here struggles with the difficulty of re-articulating the modern 'mythos.' In investigating the tensions between the hemispheric and the transnational, Laura Doyle foregrounds the spatial interrelationships between Stephen Yao's exploration of a Pacific Rim modernity and Margaret Mills Harper's analysis of the significance of Cuchulain to a modern Irish mainland and diasporic American sensibility. Limiting the notion of the hemispheric to its geographical manifestation, the coherence of these three projects may not necessarily be immediately obvious. Stretching it beyond those confines, however, and reading it as the imperative to strive toward an alternative articulation of the modern, engenders a hemispheric transnationalism—an understanding of the transnational that shifts the focus of the hemispheric from physical geography to the cultural reconfiguration of the Western moment of modernity. In this context, each of these three perspectives can be seen to tell a different story that is yet in many ways the same story, in their effort to make sense of the new modernity they identify and examine (and the modernities reflected in this endeavor).

A continued analysis of such new modernity/modernities is undertaken in the work of Sonita Sarker, Cyraina Johnson-Roullier and Jeremy Paden, whose essays explore, in vastly different contexts and time periods, a reconfigured modern construction of race and gender that also finds itself expressed in some measure within the first three essays, while at the same time extending far beyond them, seeking to rewrite the parameters of both race and gender in hemispheric perspective. While in their analyses of modernism and modernity, however, all of these texts raise more questions than they answer, in so doing they also lay the groundwork for understanding the modern significance of the issue's feature articles. Giorgio Mariani's exploration of the meaning of the relation between speed and modernity pushes the investigation of the modern into modernization and a concomitant globalization—considering speed, understood as 'mechanical velocity' and 'acceleration', as a primary arbiter in a reconfigured American modernity, focused on the idea of a shift in the 'texture' of that modernity. But it is also through this re-textured modernity that both Tace Hedrick and Kirsten Strom continue the re-figuration of the Western 'primitive', simultaneously creating new understandings of the meaning of modernity in a hemispheric transnationalism—reaching beyond geography and trans-historical in scope—reimagining the West in the dawn of a new modern mythos.

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