Introduction: Worlding Realisms Now

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Realist fiction has been an object of fascinated suspicion ever since Henry James saw fit to brand George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) a "treasure-house of details" that "makes an indifferent whole" (*Middlemarch* 425). From George Moore to Virginia Woolf, Roland Barthes to Catherine Belsey, and Fredric Jameson to Terry Eagleton, modernists, structuralists, poststructuralists, and Marxists have indicted the realist novel as the "kind of art most congenial to the ascendant bourgeoisie" (Eagleton) in doing "the work of ideology" (Belsey 60). But realist fiction—in dialogue with the realisms of photography, film, television, and other media—has lived to tell another tale.[1] In the last decade or so a new generation of artists, historians, and literary scholars has seemed to anticipate Thomas Piketty in affirming the realist novel as an indispensable feature in the ongoing story he tells in *Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century* (2014). The sociologist Giovanni Arrighi has provided a compelling frame for studying the recurrence of realisms in and across *longues durées.* Literary criticism such as Matthew Beaumont's *Adventures in Realism* (2007); Jed Esty and Colleen Lye's *Peripheral Realisms* (2012); Ulka Anjaria's *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel* (2012); Jane Elliott and Gillian Harkins's special issue of *Social Text*, "The Genres of Neoliberalism" (2013); Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge's *Reading Capitalist Realism* (2014); and my own *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (2015) have, in various ways, challenged the perception of realism as a bourgeois concoction programmed "to avoid recognition of deep structural social change" (Jameson, "A Note" 261). Cognizant of realism's centuries-long plurality and vitality, scholars in various fields now hold that realist fiction, which responds to capitalist permutations across space and time, is a transnational medium shot through with aesthetic possibility. Realisms thus conceived are more radically worlded than the autarkic creatures of London and Paris that Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova theorize in their respective models of "world literature."

The essays in this special issue firmly reject the reflex to prejudge realist art as formal underachiever, discursive ruse, or nation-centric Western export. What is more, these essays question whether a realism so resurgent is the singular privilege

The germ of the special issue was a Spring 2014 reading group and symposium organized by the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois, Urbana, in which several contributors took part. Among those participants whose work does not appear in these pages, I thank Eleanor Courtemanche, Vicki Mahaffey, Harriet Murav, Safiya Noble, Sean O'Sullivan, Francois Proulx, Robert A. Rushing, Miriam Thaggert, and Gary Xu as well as the various sponsors of the event. I am also grateful to the contributors as well as to Nancy Armstrong and the editorial board at *Novel.*

[1] Realism, however, signifies differently in the discourse surrounding nonliterary media than in the history of the novel. In film criticism, for example, realism is often a valorized category against which nonrealist genres such as melodrama have required recuperation. On this point, see Rushing, for example.

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of the European novel. In doing so they take on board the realisms of late Victorian theater, the fiction of postcolonial Africa, Egypt, and India, as well as the photo-journalistic experiments of revolutionary Latin America. To explore the "worlding" of these diverse realisms is to follow them across media, centuries, hemispheres, and political crises. What remains constant throughout is the sense of realism's aesthetic flexibility, historical variability, and irreducibility to any single genre, period, technique, or national project. Although realism enunciates itself as a mode of representation conducive to epistemological work—what Jameson, in a more auspicious formulation, has called the task of "seeing things, [and] finding out things, that have not been registered before" ("Realism" 361–62)—there is, we contend, no reason to suppose that this representational affinity shuts down the creation of compellingly innovative forms, styles, or techniques. To the contrary, realism's penchant for registering the unregistered has prompted centuries of aesthetic experimentation along two primary axes of world-making poiesis. Realist art, that is to say, is both constitutively *worlded* (in taking the material world for its premise) and *worlding* (in making new ways of seeing, knowing, thinking, and being palpable to those worlds).

Each of the contributors to this special issue takes up a distinctive case study in the project of "worlding realisms," a task that has as much to do with locating the spatiotemporal coordinates of particular realist innovations as it does with documenting a set of formal conventions that recur across time and place. As Eagleton notes, realism "can be a technical, formal, epistemological or ontological affair." And while the term is also invoked taxonomically—as in the "high" realism attributed to mid-Victorian novelists like George Eliot and William Makepeace Thackeray—it is worth noting that even sophisticated contemporaries lacked the terminological fixity that scholarship on realism has often tried to enforce. In France, where realism was invoked to describe the controversial naturalism of *Madame Bovary* (1856), Charles Baudelaire repudiated it as "a vague and over-flexible term applied by indiscriminate minds to the minute description of detail rather than to a new method of literary creation" (406). A few years later, David Masson's study *British Novelists and Their Styles* (1859) put forward Thackeray as the arbiter of an influential metropolitan realism marked by bracing "Anti-Snobbism" and the "luminous metonymy" of characters such as Becky Sharpe (251, 258). Turning to painting for an analogy, Masson described the "spirit of conscious Pre-Raphaelitism" (263) prompting novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Dinah Mulock Craik, and the author of (the then in-progress) *Adam Bede* to seek out new localities, situations, and personalities for wide-ranging portraiture.

Yet almost a decade before the moment of Gustave Flaubert and George Eliot, the German poet Otto Ludvig had already coined the term *poetischer Realismus* in reference to tales of peasant life inspired partly by the works of the young Charles Dickens (Hollington 7–8). Whereas Masson struggled to maintain the stylistic distinction between the "Natural History" (265) of prominent realists and the more poetic and fantastic features of Dickens's "Romantic school" (253), Ludvig discerned the dialectical relation that José Ortega y Gasset described a century later as

"poetic realism" (144).[2] Precisely because "reality is anti-poetic," Ortega wrote in 1961, "esthetics must sharpen its vision." A character like Don Quixote is, thus, neither wholly real nor wholly poetic but, rather, pitched at "the beveled edge" where "both worlds meet" (136). Masson himself comes close to this perception when he contrasts the figurative power of the Dickensian trope of "The Circumlocution Office" to the plodding labors of real-life administrative reformers (253). Like "the Real artist," he concludes, "the Romantic artist must be true to nature," but "he may be true in a different fashion" (255).

Masson's taxonomic efforts notwithstanding, during much of the nineteenth century, "realism" was an ambiguous term that could imply either pejoration or praise. As René Wellek noted in an important 1961 essay, it was not until the Zola-influenced late-Victorian naturalism of George Moore and George Gissing that any self-identified realist movement arose in Britain. Thus, in 1870, one finds James upholding Benjamin Disraeli's *Lothair* as a "work . . . abounding in the romantic element" and a welcome contrast to the "dreary realism" of Anthony Trollope and Wilkie Collins (*Lothair* 251). Though James eventually devoted himself to a far more artistically self-conscious mode of fiction, his call for "the romantic element" anticipated the case that Robert Louis Stevenson and H. Rider Haggard put forward for a robust adventure fiction in the 1880s.[3] Yet what is even more remarkable is James's association between Trollope and Collins. While Trollope has often been singled out as the most conventionally realist of mid-Victorian authors,[4] Collins, a novelist renowned for bizarre sensation plots and multivocal narratives, is hardly considered a pillar of realism.

In 1898, when Gissing published his critical study of Dickens, the author of naturalistic novels such as *New Grub Street* (1891) and *The Whirlpool* (1897) was hailed as the writer in whom "the realistic movement in English fiction" had perhaps "reached its goal" (White 361). Yet in *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, Gissing distanced his views from "that very idle word 'realism.'" To be sure, Gissing noted, Dickens did not write "remorseless studies" in the mode of Balzac (216). But as Gissing made clear, the creator of *Bleak House* (1852–53) was remarkable for moments of astonishing articulation such as minor characters "exhibited so briefly yet so completely" that "the thing becomes a miracle" (98). Gissing's turn to Dickens was all the more noteworthy in demonstrating the extent to which "realism," by the fin de siècle, denoted a French achievement that eluded the same British novelists whom Masson had called realists forty years before. According to Moore, Honoré de Balzac's "criticism of life" was "as profound as Thackeray's is trivial and insignificant, and as beautifully sincere and virile as Eliot's is canting and pedantic"

[2] One imagines that in describing the localized realisms of Gaskell and Eliot as "Natural History," Masson may have had in mind Eliot's own (anonymous) essay in the *Westminster Review*, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), which articulates a theory of social realism.

[3] See Stevenson's "A Note on Realism" (1883) and Haggard's "About Fiction" (1887).

[4] On Trollope's conventionality, see Levine ("Literary"). For very different readings, see, for example, Bigelow on Trollope's Irish novels, Dames on Trollope's chapters, Dever on Trollope's multiplots, Goodlad on the quasi-Scottean form of the Barsetshire series as against the restless formal heterogeneity of the Pallisers (*Victorian*, chapters 4 and 5), and Jarvis on Trollope's style.

(492). Of course, not everyone judged such alleged nonrealism to be lamentable. Looking back on the midcentury as a golden age for British fiction, Mrs. Humphry Ward affirmed the divergence from the "scientific" methods of Émile Zola's France. From Walter Scott, through Eliot, Gaskell, Brontë, and beyond, Ward declared, "our novel-tradition" has been "essentially romantic and idealist" (250). As this short survey suggests, realism in the nineteenth century could be upheld as alternately French, British, or German; poetic or antipoetic; artful or dreary. Realism in Britain, meanwhile, was put forward as both prevalent in and absent from the nation's literature—an absence alternately ascribed to the romantic genius of Britain's writers or to their moral pedantry.

Yet, for the purposes of this special issue, we must consider the potency of another turn-of-the-century movement—an aestheticist stance, with James at its vanguard and modernism and New Criticism at its crest, which eventually diminished the stature not only of midcentury realism, but also of Zolaesque naturalism and Stevensonian adventure. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), a kind of opening salvo for this ascendant creed, James declared that the English novel lacked "a consciousness of itself" as "the expression of an artistic faith" (502). Midcentury novelists, prone to writing the "large, loose, baggy monsters" he condemned in a 1909 preface, had not yet discerned that the key to "true representation" was the purely artistic question of the novelist's "form" ("Preface"; "Art" 505). James's enthusiasm for a particular style was trumpeted, in effect, as the launch of an art that had yet to be born. As Wayne Booth argued in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), what began as an invigorating embrace of modernist innovation soon hardened into a stylistic orthodoxy. Or as W. J. Harvey put it in *The Art of George Eliot*, also published in 1961, James's preference for Flaubertian "form" over Victorianesque "life" was taken up by later critics as though it were an absolute doxa.[5] The result, Harvey believed, was "a fundamental distortion" of the mid-nineteenth-century art of fiction (30–31).

By 1961—clearly a kind of *annus mirabilis* for realism's critical history—calls for an open-ended reconsideration of the topic had emerged from the fields of narratology, philology, and philosophy as well as the nascent field of Victorian studies. If the "major study of realisms" that Booth felt was "so badly need[ed]" in 1961 turned out to be decades in the making (55), however, this was because the powerful theoretical impulses of structuralism and poststructuralism had begun to read realist novels primarily as instruments of Western ideology. Hence, in a way that has attracted surprisingly little discussion, the reputation for plodding artlessness that attached itself to mid-Victorian fiction at the end of the nineteenth century helped to prepare the ground for the rather different claim at the end of the twentieth century that realist fiction inculcated bourgeois norms and authorized modern power. New historicists of the 1980s and 1990s documented the novel's manifest complicities in hierarchies of gender, class, race, and nationality. In *The Novel and the Police* (1988), D. A. Miller, armed with Michel Foucault's genealogies of discipline, showed how the works of Collins, Dickens, and Trollope installed

[5] As Booth and Harvey both point out, James's followers often simplified the author's complicated and evolving ideas on literary form.

normalizing power in the ostensibly private realms of hearth and home. Jameson, meanwhile, in influential writings such as "The Realist Floor-Plan" (1985) and *Signatures of the Visible* (1992), led the way in defining Marxist literary criticism against the embourgeoisement of realist fiction after Flaubert. In doing so, he eternalized the "crisis of bourgeois realism" that Georg Lukács had seen as the temporary effect of failed revolution in 1848. The result was to narrow the scope of realism's engagements to particular national events in Europe—occluding the often powerfully worlded geopolitical aesthetic of nineteenth-century fiction (Goodlad, *Victorian*). At the same time, critics of postcolonial literature carried their stylistic orthodoxies into the domain of world fiction, urging writers around the globe to adopt the stakes of the "realism/modernism antimony" and, in doing so, commit themselves to the aesthetic experiments of the past (Esty and Lye 269).

Remarkably, few of these diverse critiques of realism have taken pains to define their object thoroughly. As a result, the constitutive features of the realist novel are no more certain now than they were during the nineteenth century—perhaps even less so. As Colleen Lye writes in the afterword to this special issue, it is one thing to agree that realism is back on the critical agenda and another to decide "what we mean by the term 'realist.'" At a moment when latter-day genres like "reality television" cultivate mass cultures of pseudo-realism (McCarthy), and digital technologies create new forms of lived reality, mapping the future of realisms will be an ongoing project for some time to come. Such challenging plurality doubtless helps to explain why scholars have finally taken up the serious study of realisms for which Booth called in 1961. Given a field that crosses periods, media, cultures, and hemispheres as a matter of course, we may disagree as to whether Miguel de Cervantes, the Brontës, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fyodor Dostoevsky, or E. M. Forster should be classified as realists; whether naturalism is a subset of realism or a significant departure; whether a television series like *Mad Men* (2007–15) is neorealist or postmodern; and whether photography can be understood as a narrative form. But as twenty-first-century scholars, we seem nevertheless to agree that the time has come to move beyond those commonplace critiques of realism that originated in the aesthetic creeds of Flaubert and James, and that a hundred years later were reinvented through selective interpretations of Marx, Lukács, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Foucault.

Of the many luminaries to whom we owe these influential ways of reading, Jameson is perhaps the most generative. His recent *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) provides a touchstone for several essays in this special issue. Nonetheless, despite a new interest in the affective dimensions of realism, as well as some striking insights into Eliot, Tolstoy, and others, Jameson remains committed to a set of quasi-Lukácsian postulates that predetermine realism's formal impoverishment and political impotence after the mid-nineteenth century. According to this formulation, realism is what happens when "an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerades as an aesthetic ideal with fatal consequences for both" (*Antinomies* 6). In this vicious cycle, the crisis of bourgeois realism produces overweening truth claims that lead to artistic failure and, thus, exacerbate the crisis of bourgeois realism. Or as Jameson himself puts it, what remains of realism in the postmodern era is a "shriveled posterity" in which "an odd assortment of random

tools and techniques . . . still carry its name on into an era of mass culture and rival media" (11). From this theoretical standpoint, it matters little that the materiality of late capitalism has changed dramatically in the decades since Jameson first articulated this position. As capitalism has intensified and expanded its hold over the material structures of lived reality, a variety of millennial realisms have begun to flourish (see Shonkwiler and La Berge).

It is thus all the more noteworthy that the allegedly irresolvable antinomies of realism rest on a number of underelaborated propositions. Jameson never makes clear, for example, how works of literary fiction manage to tender such stifling epistemological claims. He simply assumes that the same authors chastised for clumsy narrative asides, flaccid organization, and sanitized plots were (and remain) anxious to disguise the fictionality of their works in order to "validate" their "claims to being . . . correct or true" (Jameson, *Signatures* 158). By contrast, Catherine Gallagher and Harry Shaw question realism's supposed epistemological naïveté. As Shaw puts it, the particular strength of realist aesthetics rests on a "dynamic metonymy" that, without ever representing "the world 'directly,'" conveys some sense of what it is "really like" (94–95). In fact, Jameson himself has made comparable claims in discussions of realist media that bypass the antinomies thesis and, in doing so, set aside the intense opposition between realism and modernism. His 2010 essay on the television series *The Wire* (2002–8) credits realism with the potential for "seeing things, finding out things, that have not been registered before"—the same millennial aesthetic that interests Shonkwiler, La Berge, and many others.[6]

The purportedly totalizing claims of realist narration is another common charge that seems, in recent years, to have relaxed its grip on scholarship. According to Elizabeth Ermarth's *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (1983), the realist narrator's limited perspective "homogenizes the medium of experience" (x). Daniel Cottom's *Social Figures* (1987) similarly alleges that Eliot's use of omniscient narration in multiplot fiction evokes a plurality that ultimately "puts a certain order of subjectivity in its place" (69). Yet, as Jonathan Culler has recently argued, realist consensus is a debatable proposition, and the notion of narrative omniscience is premised on insupportable analogies "between God and the author" (23). New scholarship on nineteenth-century realism has articulated a flexible space for thinking about the narrative methods and effects subsumed under the term *omniscience*. Richard Menke's *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (2008), for example, explains how the new technology of the electric telegraph, in altering the prevailing modes of disseminating information, stimulated novelists with "a new subject for fiction." Pondering the formal implications of such shifting materiality, Menke asks, "What if telegraphers, with their special access to information, became semi-omniscient narrators?" (100).[7] In Tanya Agathocleous's 2011 study of urban realism, omniscience is not a technical feature of realist form through which novels totalize but instead a modern concern that

[6] See Coundouriotis in this special issue for Jameson's work on realist war narratives.

[7] See also West for a discussion of telegraphy and mass information culture in nineteenth-century US authors such as Hawthorne and Herman Melville.

can be thematized. Thus, Inspector Bucket's "Asmodean" command over London in *Bleak House* leads the homicidal Hortense to cast him as a "devil" (82). Patrick Bray's 2013 study of first-person narratives in French fiction challenges any simple notion of realist omniscience by taking up the *dossiers préparatoires* on which Zola drew for his *Rougon-Macquart* series. According to Bray, the "crack" between Zola's fictional narrators and his "first-person journal of artistic creation" protects the authorial subject by "producing the *illusion* of a godly remove" from the "play of language" (165; emphasis added).

Realist mimesis is yet another contested ground. As Terri Weissman's contribution to this special issue suggests, debates over literary mimesis are illuminated by parallel discussions of lens-based media. Nineteenth-century critics reflexively took up the camera as a metaphor for realist fiction, as when Masson praised Dickens's ability to "photograph the interior of a hut, or . . . drawing-room" (247). Since that time, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) has become the locus classicus for this topic—a work of criticism that Edward Said aligned with the stance of the secular intellectual in exile. More recently, Shaw has emphasized the fundamentally metonymic logic of Auerbach's "figural realism" in relation to Scott's historical novels (93); Dorrit Cohn has argued that the experience of individual consciousness that novels evoke has no reference in natural speech for fiction to imitate; and Thomas Pavel has noted that the social norms fiction observes "do not belong to the actual world in the same way as factual realities do" and, thus, "cannot be represented by straightforward" mimesis (6). In sum, literary criticism has distinguished the novel's representation of reality from the indexical relationship to the real typically attributed to lens-based media.

That said, it takes just another turn of the critical screw to consider photography's presumably unmediated reality as another fiction. Thus, as Elizabeth Edwards has recently argued in *The Camera as Historian* (2012), the amateur historical survey photographers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cultivated the evidentiary authority of their medium by devising "material, aesthetic and taxonomic practices" saturated with "the moral values of science, community, and duty" (79). If Edwards's analysis brings to mind a critique that commentators have leveled at realist novels, however, it does not, for all that, return us to the questionable commonplaces of realism's epistemological triage or totalizing perspective. An alternative takeaway would be to investigate how a given fictional work might resemble Edwards's historical surveys—formally, morally, or otherwise. What needs to be asked, in other words, is how the constructed reality of the photographic surveys that trumpet their historical authenticity differs (or not) from the constructions put forward, say, in Scott's Waverley novels, Balzac's *Les Chouans*, or AMC's *Mad Men*. The idea is not that realisms should hereafter be absolved from the charge of endorsing the status quo. Instead, the questions of whether a given work upholds the prevailing morality, papers over social contradiction, or reproduces simplistic teleologies of progress or race will depend on the kinds of variables that also bear on its artistic qualities.

In rethinking realisms from a critical position that strives to move beyond the realism/modernism antitheses of the past, readers might bear in mind three simple postulates. First, we need to pay attention to the fact that the references to "classic"

realism that crop up in our critical discourse often serve as placeholders for a set of stable generic or formal conventions that have never existed. Moreover, since "classic" realism is usually invoked in the service of some contrast or opposition, we need to question the taxonomic work such terms perform.[8] The mere fact that Lukács's primary examples of nineteenth-century realism—Scott's historical romances and Balzac's urbane social fiction—differ so markedly should give us pause to consider the usefulness of a term such as "classic" realism. Though many novels associated with realism feature third-person narrators, probable scenarios, detailed descriptions, linear narratives, present-day settings, urban milieus, domestic interiors, ordinary psychologies, everyday language, marriage plots, naturalistic objects, free indirect style, and a maturing protagonist, the fact is that many do not. It is even harder to name many admired "classic" novels that share all of these features in common. Thus, in a lamentably under-read essay from 1977, "Forms of English Fiction in 1848," Raymond Williams rejects the idea that Europe's failed revolutions ushered in "a characteristic bourgeois realism" (150–51). Among the several problems Williams finds with that thesis is that 1848 novels such as Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* "can be characterized as bourgeois realism only by an extraordinary flattening" that hides "the complex formation of the real forms." By contrast to the fixity that some scholars associate with a specific date, Williams urges, history itself is perpetually moving: "At any particular point there are complex relations between what can be called dominant, residual, and emergent institutions and practices," including those that inform the novel (150–51).

The second useful postulate to consider is the fact that the ideologies that bear on realist fiction are not unique to realist aesthetics. The idea that nonrealist forms such as modernism are also subject to ideology may seem obvious.[9] And yet, for Jameson, modernism is to some degree inoculated against reactionary politics because it rejects the mimetic premise that "representation can somehow fully reproduce its original" and instead "designates its grandiose project" as "an autoreferentiality of the aesthetic" (Jameson, *Antinomies* 292). The corresponding implication that realist novels *are* premised on the belief that fiction reproduces the original, as we have seen, tells us less about what realist novels actually do than about the strong modernist bias through which they are sometimes perceived. It follows that no work, in simply being singled out for its "realism," should be assumed to inscribe particular doctrines or political effects. We should, in other

[8] Probably the most doctrinaire account of the "classic realist novel" is MacCabe's, which offers *Middlemarch* and, to some extent, film as cases in point; the mark of classic realism for MacCabe is a fundamental inability to grasp social contradiction premised on a naive claim of "direct access to a final reality" (10). Notably, when Jameson uses the term *classical*, his purpose is to align literary form with a stage of capitalism; hence his persistent tendency to oppose the realist novel's nation-centrism during "the classical stage of national or market capitalism" to the modernist text's wrestling with imperialism ("Modernism" 51). This formulation ignores the centuries of imperialism before the late nineteenth century.

[9] For examples of scholarship on this topic, one might look at Hewitt's study of fascist modernism or, more recently, Ziarek's study of the patriarchal and masculinist dimensions of modernist aesthetics.

words, remain open-minded enough to recognize that an artwork's claims to autonomy, originality, autoreferentiality, or metafictionality may sometimes be a less cogent solvent or force for change than an artfully particularized space for "seeing things, finding out things, that have not been registered before" (Jameson, "Realism" 361–62).

Arc of the Special Issue

Countering critics from Henry James to George Levine who have upheld Trollope as a textbook case for conventional realism, recent scholars have begun to demonstrate the surprising formal complexity of this prolific mid-Victorian author.[10] Writing in this special issue, Ayelet Ben-Yishai takes a different tack. She shows how Trollope's realism—and, by implication, realism more generally—foregrounds doubt rather than certainty. *Is He Popenjoy?* (1877–78), one of several Trollope novels that turn on the suspected illegitimacy of a key character, is rooted in the epistemological conundrums of a world prior to genetic testing. The "reality" generated through such realism rests on "a presumption of knowing" that is manifestly fictitious. Trollope's subject, therefore, is not the world as it is, but the world as it purports to be; a reading experience that takes epistemology as a subject to be pondered rather than a discursive regime to enforce. Like Ben-Yishai, Joseph Lavery draws inspiration from Catherine Gallagher's astute dismantling of the commonplace of realist referentiality. As Gallagher notes, it is only "in its generality" that the novel is "true," while "its particulars are merely imaginary" (62). The compelling realism of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885), Lavery argues, is not to be found in the verisimilitude or referentiality of "a line about Japan." Rather, Lavery offers a theory of queer realism in at least two senses: first, a generic queering in which realism's representational powers take on theatrical form, and second, a queer counternarrative to the epistemology of the closet whereby "Japan" assumes the place of a queerness that is "everywhere spoken, and nowhere known." Ben-Yishai and Lavery share the perception that nineteenth-century realisms—far from claiming to reproduce the original—prompt awareness that the truth of the world outside the novel or theater is more elusive than prevailing theories of mimesis would assume.

Eleni Coundouriotis is the first contributor to take the exploration of worlding realisms beyond nineteenth-century conditions and European space. In doing so, she provides the first of two essays premised on the theoretical grounds first laid by Lukács: a Marxist theory that conceives realism's formal purpose as the sociohistorical task of representing "the way society moves" (Lukács 144). In his 1961 essay, René Wellek provided a pragmatic definition of realism as that which generically militates toward "rejection of the improbable, of pure chance, of extraordinary events" (10). By contrast, Masson argued that Dickens's fiction was the stronger for alternating between scenes befitting the work of "Dutch artists" (248) and "semifantastic conditions" that strain "ordinary probability" (254). So, too, Coundouriotis finds improbability serving as a potent device for realist engagement with

[10] See note 5 above.

conditions of extreme insecurity and historical contingency. A social fiction focused on scenes of humanitarian disaster and human rights abuse must find ways of circumventing the inert reportage that Lukács rejected in the naturalistic realisms of Europe. This is the formal gambit of the improbable figures Coundouriotis finds in the works of Zakes Mda, Nuruddin Farah, and Uwem Akpan. As opposed to Balzac's insistence on probability, a refusal to restore or redeem that made sense in the context of French embourgeoisement, the exigencies of postcolonial South Africa, Somalia, and West Africa call forth the improbable figure to introduce "the possibility of breaking through to something new." Such imagining of improbable futures, Coundouriotis holds, retains the realist novel's Lukácsian "commitment to history" insofar as such futurity is rooted in a determination to break away from overdetermination and the political impasse of naturalism.

In exploring Egyptian fiction over the long twentieth century, Noha Radwan makes a different set of generic distinctions between realism and modernism. Whereas in Britain, modernism supplanted conventions that, by the fin de siècle, had ceased to have a compelling purchase on history, in Egypt the capacious realisms of Naguib Mahfouz flourished during the same decades that saw the entrenchment of modernist orthodoxy in Europe and the United States. When an Egyptian modernism emerged in the 1960s, it was, according to Radwan, as much a response to Nasser-era transformations as a sign of Western influence. What interests Radwan is how realism subsequently reasserted itself in response to the neoliberal reforms of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, not in the sense of a generic return to Mahfouzian conventions but in the Lukácsian sense of a formal reply to "the *direction* of a social tendency" (Lukács 144). Thus, while the hybrid fictions of Sadat-era novelists like Yusuf al-Qa'id fuse modernist, postmodern, and realist techniques, their fictions are realist in representing events in their specificity and in their relation to a "larger historical process." By this definition, Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* (2004) fails as realism, despite the prominence of recognizably realist techniques, and Fasil Lil-dahsha's more iconoclastic *Interlude for Bewilderment* (2007) succeeds. For while Lil-dahsha evokes the absurdity of life under neoliberalism, Al-Aswany turns poverty into an object for a consolatory readerly sympathy.

Although Ulka Anjaria shares Coundouriotis's and Radwan's sense of the realist novel's formal vitality, the theoretical stakes of her argument stand apart. Anjaria is as concerned to renovate postcolonial literary criticism as she is to historicize the "realist impulse" that she finds at play across a range of global examples. Thus, in sympathy with postcolonial theory's skepticism of any claim to historical totality, Anjaria rejects Lukács's Hegelian disdain for the fragmentary and partial in favor of a critical perspective that recognizes the possibilities of a partial realism. Her starting point is Arundhati Roy's abandonment of fiction in 1999. When the celebrated novelist realized that Anglophone readers of Indian fiction were more invested in literary aesthetics than the human costs of economic growth, she began writing nonfiction with a documentary bent. Anjaria follows with two manifestations of the realist impulse in literature that, in combination, turn the realism/modernism antinomy on its head. That is to say, by playing up the generic claim to transparency, Anjaria's latter-day realisms aim to reverse the inert politics of an

"institutionalized" postcolonial aesthetics centered on colonial histories, literary self-consciousness, and cathartic melancholia. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) thus "reinvents the African novel" not only by adopting the frame of a bildungsroman but also by repeatedly interrupting that convention by means of an ongoing blog. Adichie's novel takes up a form of nonliterary discourse that demonstrates the operations of "knowledge production" in the digital age—a defamiliarizing effect amplified by the focus on racial politics in the United States. In a different way, Chetan Bhagat's pulp narratives of life in the burgeoning service economy that employs India's English-speaking lower middle classes assert their reality through the framing device of (supposedly) real-life encounters. Whereas some critics have described Bhagat's formulaic fiction as regrettable Anglophone kitsch, Anjaria perceives a resonant break from the "irretrievable and highly figurative pastness" of elite postcolonial aesthetics.

In a very different way, figurative pastness is the subject of Terri Weissman's account of Susan Meiselas's photojournalistic work on the Nicaraguan Revolution in the 1970s. Weissman explores the underexamined narrative dimensions of photography by pondering the medium's potential to harbor a latent "durational experience." Like realism in general, photographs "look like the world they portray," but as Weissman emphasizes, that does not mean that the social relationships they depict are either static or predetermined. Rather, photographs have the potential to figure something the camera's lens does not reproduce. In thus registering opportunities for historical engagement that exceed what it pictures, photographic realism has the potential to express a more enduring narrativity than more explicitly narrative genres such as the photographic collection and documentary (forms to which Meiselas turned in the effort to do justice to her subject). The durational aesthetic offers "a way to refuse the temporality of defeat, a way to refuse narrative closure while maintaining narrative as the source of causation." Nicaragua, Weissman writes, has come "to signal the end of one kind of politics" and the beginning of "global neoliberalism." When Meiselas's photographs insert the events of the past into present-day space, they create a durational aesthetics that does not privilege "endless spontaneity or continuous disruption." In keeping with Lukács's notion of historical fiction, then, the durational aesthetic animates the "social process that makes solidarity possible."

Jed Esty's ambitious concluding essay locates three hot spots for critical debate within the ebb and flow of realisms, beginning with the millennial present, extending back to the Cold War and still further back to the late-Victorian years of realism's critical decline. What Esty means by "realism wars" are the intellectual debates sparked by hegemonic turnover—especially the long shift from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana. Esty maps this analysis onto an Arrighian paradigm that traces recurrent macroeconomic patterns (from the long fifteenth century of the Genoese to the American long twentieth century that is now in its twilight). According to Arrighi, a long century begins when profits accumulate over and above what can be gainfully reinvested in the expansion of trade and production. As liquidity is stored up for lucrative speculation and lending, trade and production slow down, profits decrease, and financialization begins, redistributing wealth from the broader economy to the financial elite—a phase that continues until a new

productive economy comes into being. By mapping three realism wars onto this scheme, Esty steers us from the dawn of American power in the late Victorian era (during the financial phase of Britain's long nineteenth century); through the maturation of US economic and political hegemony (during the long twentieth century's productive phase); and, finally, to our moment of hyper-financialization at a time when the outlines of a long twenty-first century are as yet uncertain and perhaps even stalled (Arrighi). Moving us back to the future through an analysis that works from present to past, Esty shows us what realism wars can tell us about one another.

As a category of critical discourse, realism today, says Esty, is less prone than twenty years ago to be taken as an object of critique or invidious comparison (though Zadie Smith, writing in 2008, had not yet read the memo). As with Anjaria's "realist impulse," Esty's "worldly realisms" replace tired postcolonial genres with narratives that more directly bear on the morphing neoliberal condition. But Esty also makes a very different point by tying the interest in realist media to newer critical practices whose positivistic tendencies make them arguably "realist methodologies." Here, he writes, may be the thoroughgoing decline of an "older realist-modernist dyad": not only a shift from elite modernisms to popular realisms but also from the high theory of the 1980s and 1990s to methods that, like "surface" or "descriptive" reading, relinquish the hermeneutics of humanist depth that poststructuralism never entirely eradicated.[11]

To be sure, the fusion of romance and realism that emerges from this account was *already* the characteristic feature of mid-Victorian fiction. This is the point of studies such as Raymond Williams's *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1974), George Levine's *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (1983), and Ian Duncan's *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (1992), the very titles of which refuse to oppose nineteenth-century realism to either romance or modernism. Then too, the turn-of-the-century realisms on display in Amy Levy's *Reuben Sachs* (1888), Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892), Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1908), and Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* (1910) are hardly the "stultified literature of explanation" parodied by Gertrude Stein. These novels are "minor" in the sense that (with the exception of Hardy's) they were written in the shadow of their critically celebrated contemporaries, the naturalisms of France and America, the innovations of James's late novels and Joseph Conrad's early ones, as well as other modernist experiments. These relatively highbrow novels were also less appealing to many sectors of the vastly enlarged turn-of-the-century reading public—the first generation of Britons to enjoy mass literacy—than the popular adventure fiction not only of Haggard and Stevenson, but also of Ouida, G. A. Henty, Marie Corelli, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Arthur Machen and Wells himself in his scientific romances. These realisms

[11] See Goodlad and Sartori for a discussion of "surface," "distant," and "descriptive" methods that embrace a turn toward object-oriented ontologies compatible with Latour's "actor network theory."

artfully capture the tensions of a sprawling empire and democracy under the competitive pressures of the unfolding long twentieth century. That said, to dispute the contents of the elite culture wars that Esty maps is to miss his point. For Esty, realism wars are not actually about the realisms of Dickens, Eliot, or Thackeray, nor even about the realisms of their late Victorian successors. Rather, like literature itself, realism wars respond to the "the tectonic shifts" of a dynamic world-system in motion. The collapse of "older critical habits," on this view, may lead us outside the spiral of an exasperated American exceptionalism provoked by intensifying regimes of neoliberal exploitation.

Postscript: "An Entire Society in Movement"

Near the end of her powerfully synthetic afterword, Colleen Lye explains in a note that the stakes for postcolonial theory of laying out "new realist narratives in today's semi-periphery" are "whether it is possible to see peripheral representation of modernization in terms other than as a remix of Western modernist aesthetic innovation." This was also the aim of Esty and Lye's *Peripheral Realisms*, and—though it may be less obvious given the wider address—the attempt to break with Eurocentric models of realism is also at stake in the present special issue. In discussing insights from Alberto Toscano's speculative mode of materialist analysis, Lye opens a debate about the subtleties of Lukácsian theory. The impression that "postcolonial novels are in fact being *realistic* in their optimism about finding historical motion in today's periphery," she writes, is "hard to absorb in Lukácsian terms." While Anjaria rejects Lukács outright, Radwan, according to Lye, has "slimmed down" Lukács's critical realism, and Coundouriotis has downsized his "dialectical revolutionary standard." Lye reads this divergence over Lukács as a debate about Arrighi as well. Arrighi's influence, she speculates, may account for the overconfidence in the "temporal motion" of novels that "might just as easily once have been described as making a pastiche of history." That is to say, as a generation of critics labors under "the financialization of everyday life," they find in Arrighi a means "to take different measures of historical time."[12]

Arrighi's view is embraced openly by Esty, implicitly by my own work (in the Arrighian undertones of my Braudelian theory of recurrent seriality), and by implication in a complementary relation to Weissman's durational aesthetic. Nonetheless the impact of "Arrighian realism" is of greatest interest to Lye with respect to the postcolonial contributors. She writes:

> *we should not be surprised that, on Coundouriotis's account . . . Naruddin Farah's realism lies in betting on the improbable or that for Anjaria neoliberalizing India may be ushering in something new to appreciate. In their implicit optimism about marketization . . . Anjaria and Coundouriotis are perhaps not all that different from Arrighi, whose hopefulness about the prospect of a genuinely different, possibly even postcapitalist, world order arising from the shift of imperial hegemony to East Asia sets him apart from other Marxists.*

[12] On the "financialization of life," see Martin.

Prompted by this observation, I want to offer my own take on Arrighi's relation to Lukács's historical materialism. I do so in part to question the perception of an "implicit optimism" about marketization and neoliberalism. This may have more to do with our understandings of Arrighi and Lukács than our attitudes toward neoliberalism.

For Lye, Coundouriotis's African novels seem to "make a pastiche of history." For Coundouriotis improbability is a temporal opening called forth by specific social conditions. The somewhat gnostic Lukács is an imperfect guide for mediating this debate. Realism is formally revolutionary for Lukács when it evokes deep social connectivity at scale: providing an "immediate impression of an entire society in movement" (139; qtd. in Coundouriotis). But how do we know when what we have read (or viewed) is "an entire society in movement"? Lukács tells us that typical characters help to body forth this crucial dimension of collectivity. Certainly this aspect of Scott's fiction is central to his solving the form-problem of turning a novel about particular characters into a narrative of social transformation. When Radwan cites the sociologist Asef Bayat to speak of "the collective action of non-collective actors" (qtd. in Radwan), she seems to articulate the kind of figure who might play that role in a work of millennial realism—and an improbable one at that.

Arrighi is similarly challenging. The peculiarity of his theory for any observer today is that no one can be sure what the long twenty-first century will become, where it will be centered, or even if it will arrive. What is clear for now is that financialization reigns supreme and capitalism has withstood at least one crisis of world-historical magnitude. Lye brings us in contact with theories in which financialization is not (or not primarily) a marker of transitions to come but, instead, an ostensibly permanent and intensifying condition of life under neoliberalism. Her discussion of Toscano's "realism of the abstract" produces the powerful insight that "a *critical* realism must seek to divorce realism from verisimilitude."

Lye astutely observes that something intrinsic to our millennial condition propels our thinking toward long durations. Though climate change is one salient reason, another is financialization: a condition that evokes, on the one hand, frenetic activity without end, and, on the other, the terrible stasis of reification. One understands that this is not a time to speak lightly of dynamic historical movement, and one understands too that long durations offer the potential to elevate oneself to an imaginary Olympian height. With that in mind, I close this introduction by making a special claim for the contemporary importance of Braudel (whose work also informs Arrighi's).

As Jameson notes in a passage Lye quotes, "Arrighi's luminous insight was that the peculiar telos of finance capital might well organize itself like a spiral." He thus reminds us that Arrighi's long centuries, like the Braudelian *durées* before them, are not cycles but, rather, distinctly different and successively larger formations that may be visualized in the form of a spiral that gets wider with ever-greater iterations of the world-system.[13] In recent years *longue durée* temporalities have come to the

[13] As Immanuel Wallerstein writes, "A world-system is not the system of the world, but a system that is a world and that . . . most often has been, located in an area less than the entire globe" (*World-Systems* 98).

fore in a number of humanistic inquiries.[14] As Braudel made clear in an influential 1958 article, to study the *longue durée* is to set aside the diurnal metric of the chronicler or the journalist in favor of temporalities that may at first seem motionless. Writing about the quantitative social science of his time, Braudel knew that what was not yet called big data could enable history to "be periodized in as yet unknown ways." But he also anticipated multiplicity and surprise. "Mental frameworks," just like technological and political structures, he wrote, have their own "life and growth rhythms" (248–49). The conditions subtending any particular long duration are contingent but, by definition, resistant to rapid change. Moreover, history as such is no more reducible to these slow temporalities than to the dizzying rhythms of new technologies or to midrange cyclical rhythms like, for example, the annual discussion of holidays or seasons. The work of the *longue durée* historian is, thus, above all to cultivate awareness of temporal plurality. History is a dialectic of temporalities that puts forward any particular reality as "the conjoining of movements with different origins and rhythms" (254). To consider the *longue durée* of capitalist globalization from such a view is neither to accede to a vulgar determinism nor to buy in to some utopian telos.

This nuance need not disappear when we think in terms of Arrighi's spiraling long centuries. Bringing Braudel's emphasis to bear on the dialectic of plural temporalities, we can see that there is nothing particularly similar between the world-system of Dutch mercantilism and Britain's empire of industrialization and free trade (so-called), save perhaps that both share a transition from productive to financial phases. As a Victorianist, I am fascinated by the fact that the years following 1870 were decades of marked financialization that in certain respects compare to the present much-protracted phase of financialization at the end of the long nineteenth century. But it is also interesting to contemplate how long centuries overlap: so that while the long twentieth century begins in the 1870s, the long nineteenth century does not completely close until the end of the Second World War. The point might remind us of Jameson's special interest in those turning points that "mak[e] possible moments in which the two kinds of realities overlap, and in which therefore complex or dual possibilities are momentarily available" (*Antinomies* 264). For Jameson, one senses, it is this notion of dual possibilities that helps art to express "an entire society in movement."

Lye ties the special issue's "perception of new realist narratives in today's semiperiphery" to an "ongoing relation of uneven combination with the center [which] may allow for advancement in unprecedented leaps." Here she has in mind the influence of an "Arrighian realism." But as she rightly proposes, the postcolonial realisms at stake in this special issue are "postmodern" in deriving their conditions of possibility from the history of a layered, uneven development.[15] Arrighi's macrosociological theory, with its emphasis on the spiraling world-system and the possible futures it may possibly bring into being, works better for some realisms than others. Although readers of African, Egyptian, and Indian fiction may hope

[14] Arrighi, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Wai Chee Dimock, Moretti, and Rob Nixon are only the best known of those who have been thinking in terms of long temporal durations.

[15] Here, Lye is drawing on the work of Carolyn Lesjak.

for unprecedented leaps, they probably would not imagine them in exactly the same way. For the same reason, the "financialization of everyday life" may mean something different in India's Anglophone service economy than it does to those in Cairo's slums or Mogadishu. To put this a different way, there are things that financialization has not yet managed to abstract. It follows that registering these things and—one hopes—mobilizing them over and across plural temporalities is a task that worlding realisms may help us to achieve.

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