Modernity is back with a vengeance. People are reflecting anew on the protean meanings of the modern, on its ambiguous legacies and current realities. . . . Yet this return is also a beginning, as scholars tackle well-worn ideas and calcified debates from new angles. As a result, our view of modernity is changing dramatically. The modern is not what it used to be.

—Rita Felski, “New Cultural Theories of Modernity”

It is so important, if one is to have a bit of freedom from the constraints of the field, to attempt to explore the limits of the theoretical culture: to provide the means for knowing what one is doing and for freeing oneself from the naiveté associated with the lack of consciousness of one’s bounds.

—Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production

The twenty-first century opens with a sense of urgency. Once again, “things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” Once again, modernity is “at large.” The forms of globalization closing off the old century and opening the new have expanded global networks and accelerated mobilities of all kinds—from money to people, from drones to popular culture. It is by now a truism but true nonetheless that 9/11 shook the foundations of the world in ways that will continue to unfold for decades, spawning new modernities in an ever-more interconnected world. Once again, the rise of
new global conflicts and new world orders has unsettled familiar modes of thinking and reconstituted the world along new lines of power, new modes of resistance, and new modes of meaning making that collide and blend with the old. New technologies of transnationalism both serve and bypass the nation-state as the new cosmopolitanism contests the new communalism. The modernities of today—from China to Iran, Brazil to Nigeria, from Turkey to the nations of the Arab Spring—compel a rethinking of the modernities of the past. The digital revolution has ruptured old ways of knowing, transformed everyday life, and ushered in an age of big data with staggering potentials for panoptical surveillance, instantaneous communication, and virtual communities from the local to the global. “Modernity is now (and has been for some time) everywhere, and the discourse of postmodernity seems only an episode (if a significant one) within a certain transformation of Western modernity itself,” Andreas Huyssen wrote at the opening of the twenty-first century.3 “The modern is not what it used to be,” Rita Felski suggests; it “is back with a vengeance.”4 Once again, modernity is reinvented. The New is Now. Once again.

Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time is about expanding the frameworks of modernist studies, about freeing ourselves from the assumptions that govern the field and opening our work to a radical rethinking of modernity and modernism suitable for the new modernities of the twenty-first century. In this sense, the book is a series of provocations that bring to modernist studies the spirit of epistemological rupture long associated with modernism itself. The book challenges the tendency of all new fields to institutionalize knowledge, to settle down into a fixed terrain of questions and approaches, to close off new ideas beyond the “limits of the theoretical culture” (to echo Pierre Bourdieu). The intent is to provoke questions, not to settle them—to map new ways of thinking rather than to set new boundaries of thought.

Planetary Modernisms is not a manifesto. It does not assert axioms to work within and live by as scholars, students, and readers. Instead, it asks that we shake the ground upon which we stand, that we circle around the questions of modernism/modernity, seeing them from multiple perspectives, examining their different effects, opening up possibilities for new ways of thinking. Its aim is to keep alive the contradictions in the field, affirming that this tension is dynamic and open to productive interrogation.
The meanings of modernity and modernism are perpetually unsettled, unsettling. And herein lies the potential of the field. To provoke means to unsettle, also possibly to annoy. It is my hope that *Planetary Modernisms* unsettles settled ways of thinking and that any annoyance it produces can become productive for new kinds of work in the field that go well beyond what I can myself produce or even imagine. *Planetary Modernisms* intends to open doors others may go through.

Why? What’s wrong with the doors we already have, the frameworks within which we work? Too much provocation can turn into an end in itself, a stance of perpetual critique that does not endear the humanities to a wider public. Yet *Planetary Modernisms* does emerge from a strongly ethical standpoint that begins in critique but moves beyond the gadfly position to offer new ways of thinking about modernity and modernism. Its aim is to open up the possibility for new knowledge that matters—not only for our understanding of the past but also for how we shape our futures. As a field in general, modernist studies is insufficiently planetary to fulfill the promise of what Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have termed “the transnational turn” in the field. Whether adhering to a canonical modernism, a Jamesonian “singular modernity,” the modernity of a Wallersteinian “world-system,” or a Deleuzian “minor” or “alternative” modernity, the field has insufficiently challenged the prevailing “Western” framework within which studies of modernity and modernism are conducted. By “the West” and “Western” here and throughout *Planetary Modernisms*, I refer not to a fixed geographical area of the earth but rather to an idea that places certain peoples and cultures at the center of a diffusionist, linear human history, whether for praise as the signifier of civilization or for condemnation as the sign of oppression. *Planetary Modernisms* argues that this idea of the West—what Shu-me Shih calls a “symbolic construct”—is thoroughly entangled with the idea of modernity as an invention of the West, as a product of the West’s exceptionalism, and as the kind of nonconscious ideology to which Ella Shohat and Robert Stam allude in the resonant pun of their title: *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. *Planetary Modernisms* aims to “unthink” the West’s idea of itself as the Ur-modernity by rethinking modernity on a planetary scale.

What drives *Planetary Modernisms* is a commitment to a planetary modernist studies, by which I mean the imperative to develop a framework
for the field that encompasses the world across time, in the *longue durée* of human history. Positing “other,” “alternative,” or “minor” modernities have been important for unthinking Euro/American centrisms, cracking open the door to the West’s exclusivity, but such categories are insufficient because they leave the West as the measure by which all other modernities are understood. It is not enough to add alternative modernities to the Western instance of modernity. In Kuhnian terms, the various notions of other modernities are the anomalies to a Weberian concept of modernity that have begun to pile up, the exceptions that taken together are harbingers of a major paradigm shift that will supplant the Western idea of modernity. The shift that *Planetary Modernisms* asks for is a fundamental rethinking of modernity that posits it as a geohistorical condition that is multiple, contradictory, interconnected, polycentric, and recurrent for millennia and across the globe. Modernity, I argue, takes various forms—thus, the plural; it happens again and again—thus, recurrence; it is constituted through many interconnected centers—thus, global, relational. In all its various forms in geohistory, modernity produces heightened, often extreme and accelerating change that spreads through the various domains of society—from the technological and commercial to the political and philosophical; from the aesthetic and cultural to the epistemological and linguistic. Modernity can signal rebellion or capitulation—thus, contradictory. Modernity can enslave or free, shatter or exhilarate, displace or replace, dismantle or reassemble—thus, utopian and dystopian at once. Modernity is itself rupture: a paradigm shift, a geohistorical transformation on a large scale.

Like the modernity of which it is a part, modernism is also multiple, polycentric, relational, and recurrent. Modernism, as I use the term in *Planetary Modernisms*, is not a single aesthetic period, a movement, or a style. Instead, the creative expressivities in all media constitute the modernisms of given modernities—on a planetary scale, across time, in the *longue durée*. *Planetary Modernisms* treats modernism as the aesthetic domain of modernity—it helps create that modernity; it reflects it; it responds to it; it challenges it; it reformulates it. We need no longer debate, I suggest, whether modernism starts with Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal*, Picasso’s *Les demoiselles d’Avignon*, Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, Marinetti’s futurism, H.D.’s imagism, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, or Joyce’s *Ulysses*; whether Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, or New York is the
generative center of modernism. Instead, we ought first turn to the specific-
ties of a given modernity and then ask what creative forms it produced—
in the Tang Dynasty, for example, or the Abbasid Caliphate, Al-Andalus,
the Songhay Empire, Renaissance Florence, Enlightenment Paris, colonial
Calcutta, or imperial London.

To constitute modernism—even pluralized modernisms—so broadly
goes against the prevailing views of the field. It opens an institutional can
of worms. Across the disciplines in the humanities as they have become
institutionalized in the past century, periodization has been foundational
for the study of literature, the arts, history, and philosophy. Modernism
as a distinctive “period” and aesthetic style following romanticism, real-
ism, and naturalism “makes sense”; it’s teachable and allows for an orderly
curriculum, recognizable hiring and promotion practices, and professional
societies and publications. Yet Planetary Modernisms challenges such peri-
odization, as practical as it may seem. It argues that such limitations in the
field shut the door on effective globalization of modernist studies by institu-
tionally reifying the West as the center, the Rest as periphery, a structure
of knowledge that is misleading and potentially pernicious in its long-term
effects. Planetary Modernisms does not resolve the institutional problems
that an expanding modernist studies engenders. Instead, the book attempts
to open up the field of debate about what constitutes modernity and mod-
ernism, to raise the issues that ought to drive the institutional changes
that are bound to come as knowledge production and higher education
undergo dramatic transformations in the future. Nonetheless, the burden
is on me to provide a compelling case for such an expansion of modern-
ism’s commonly accepted, even if a bit porous and contentious, boundaries.
Fortunately, I am not alone.

Planetary Modernisms, many years in the making, is part of the work of
a community of scholars challenging canonical modernist studies, pushing
the field in new directions by focusing on other modernisms in non-
Western parts of the world, engaging in what I regard as the planetary turn,
echoing with a difference Paul Jay’s Global Matters: The Transnational Turn
in Literary Studies. Affected by the new globalization of the late twenti-
eth century and general calls for transnationalizing literary studies, studies
of non-Western modernisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries have provided in-depth examinations of how these modernisms
wrestle with and maintain considerable independence from Euro/Ameri-
can modernisms—to name an influential few, Simon Gikandi’s *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*, Priya Joshi’s *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*, Fernando J. Rosenberg’s *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America*, and Shu-

11 Edited collections and special journal issues—Geomod-
ernisms, Geographies of Modernism, Translocal Modernisms, Modern-

12 Comparative books like Jessica Berman’s *Modernist Commitments*, Christopher GoGwilt’s *The Passage of Literature*, Charles W. Pollard’s *New World Modernisms*, Jahan Ramazani’s *Transnational Poetics*, and Gayle Rogers’s *Modernism and the New Spain* recast modernism’s internationalism on a transcontinental landscape of multiply located agencies in the long twen-
tieth century.

13 Underlying these studies of global modernisms, including *Planetary Modernisms*, is the pervasive influence of postcolonial studies, the new world literature studies, and the anthropology of traveling cultures. The rise of postcolonial studies after the publication of Edward W. Said’s formative *Orientalism* in 1978, the recovery of such earlier postcolonial thinkers as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, and the blend of postcolonial issues with poststructuralist, race, and feminist theories in the work of people like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Anne McClintock, and R. Radhakrishnan profoundly affected the transnational-
izing of modernist studies, developing a framework for new examinations of Western imperial power on a global terrain and the cultural produc-
tions of emergent nation-states and their colonial pasts in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean in the wake of World War II. The revitalization of world literature studies challenged comparative literature’s Europeanist origins, insisting on attention to literatures produced outside of or in relation to “the West,” to be read either in the original or in translation. Comparat-
ists such as Emily Apter, David Damrosch, Wai Chee Dimock, Eric Hayot, Djelal Kadir, Françoise Lionnet, Haun Saussy, and Shu-mei Shih (among
many others) have dramatically changed the literary archives of comparative studies, influencing the global expansion of modernist studies. Anthropologists of circulating peoples and cultures such as Arjun Appadurai, James Clifford, Renato Resaldo, and Anna L. Tsing provided modernist studies with theoretical frameworks for thinking through the global migrations, hybridizations, and indigenizations of ideas and people confronting the dislocations and relocations of modernity in their art. The new transnational modernist studies in no sense displaces these fields, each of which retains its own particular emphases, concerns, and methods. But in drawing on them, a globalized modernist studies blends in a new way the issues of postcolonialism, world literature, and hybridized cultures on mobile, global landscapes of interchange. *Planetary Modernisms* is unthinkable without this expansive, interdisciplinary arena of transformative thought.

What *Planetary Modernisms* contributes to this growing body of work on global modernisms and cultural globalism more generally is twofold: first, an articulation in the broadest possible sense of the paradigm shift that undergirds this work and, second, an extension of the logic of that shift to consider modernities and their modernisms over the millennia. I argue that the planetary turn in a modernist studies confined within conventional periodization reinstates the modernisms of the West as the powerful center to the rest’s weak periphery, as the origin point with which all others must engage and through which they must be understood. To fulfill the promise of the planetary turn, I suggest, we must rethink modernity and modernism outside the long twentieth century, outside the post-1500 temporal frame commonly understood as the period of the modern in its stages from early to late. I use the term planetary to invoke this greater expanse of time and space, to signal my attempt to break away from periodization altogether. *Planetarity*, I write in chapter 2, is an epistemology, not an ontology. The planetary contains resonances that are suggestive for the approaches I develop for rethinking modernity throughout *Planetary Modernisms*. Although I continue to use the more common transnational and global, I privilege planetary because it bypasses the overdetermined associations of the other terms: transnational suggests the ongoing tension between nation-states and globalized postnational political formations; global invokes the endlessly debated pros and cons of contemporary globalization. Planetary, on the other hand, echoes the spatial turn in cultural
theory of the twenty-first century. It is cosmic and grounded at the same time, indicating a place and time that can be both expansive and local. *Planetary* also gestures at a world beyond the human, even beyond the Earth, by invoking the systems and networks of inner and outer space that are both patterned and random. *Planetary* suggests the Earth as a place of matter and climate, life and the passage of time, and an array of species of which the human is only one. Although the focus in *Planetary Modernisms* is solidly on the modernity of human societies, I like that *planetary* opens up the possibility of thinking about nonhuman modernities or the interconnections of the human and nonhuman in rethinking modernity and modernism—new directions for others to follow. *Planetary* has an open-ended edge that *transnational* and *global* lack. What could it possibly mean? What doors of thought could it open?

As an epistemology, *planetary* also suggests the importance of scale in rethinking modernity and modernism, especially in unthinking Euro/Americancentrism. *Planetary Modernisms* suggests that the fluidity of scale—from small to large to small—is essential for the revisionist project of the book. To remain locked into the conventional periodizations of modernity (e.g., early, middle, and late modernity) and modernism (e.g., late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries) results in a center/periphery and diffusionist model that undermines transnational or global revisionisms. There is no doubt that the so-called rise of the West happens during this period, with a tremendous (though not exclusive) concentration of global power centered in first Europe and then the United States. To rethink the West’s modernity, however, requires a larger scale of history, one that goes back before the West’s rise and forward into the twenty-first century, when the West’s economic, political, and military hegemonic power shows many signs of cracking up or retreating in the face of new global forces, conflicts, and technologies.

To develop a flexible approach to spatio/temporal scale, I adapt Fernand Braudel’s concept of the *longue durée* in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II* as well as Immanuel Wallerstein’s use of Braudel in his influential book, *The Modern World-System.* Planetary Modernisms argues, however, that Braudel’s and Wallerstein’s *longue durée* going back to about 1500 isn’t nearly long enough and that their spatial reach (which largely ignores Asia) isn’t nearly broad enough.
To rethink modernity, *Planetary Modernisms* zooms out into a longer *durée* and a wider planetary reach and then zooms in on selected instances of rapid, radical, and transformational change from the Tang Dynasty and the Mongol Empire through the twenty-first century. This broad spatio/temporal scale sets the stage for small-scale examinations of specific modernist creativities that are interpreted in the context of their specific modernities. This scope and flexibility of scale is critical to the project of *Planetary Modernisms*.

The work of world historians like Janet Abu-Lughod, J. M. Blaut, André Gunder Frank, John Hobson, Stephen K. Sanderson, and Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper has been inspirational for *Planetary Modernisms*. Once a relative backwater in the discipline of history, world history has emerged as a large-scale approach more suited to a networked and globalized world than the highly focused, national, or local histories that have dominated (and still dominate) the discipline. On large landscapes of time and space, these geohistorians provide a broader context for the “rise of the West,” one that emphasizes the contributions of earlier world systems to Europe’s growing hegemony, challenges theories of European exceptionalism, and supplants the linear diffusionism and center/periphery models with broad-scale concepts of global interculturalism and circulation over the millennia. In the context of their archives, Europe becomes something of a latecomer to the world system, able to dominate by the nineteenth century for a complex of reasons, including its adaptation of knowledge and technology from the Mongol and Islamic empires and its ability to enter the world market as a major player for the first time after the relatively rapid conquest of the Americas and the enslavement of Africans. For Frank, the West’s rise has been a detour in world history, a blip between the earlier dominance of China and its rise in the twenty-first century. William H. McNeill, the author of the influential *The Rise of the West* (1963), recognizes the significance of this longer and more global *durée* in his 1990 critique of his earlier work for exhibiting “residual Eurocentrism,” for not taking into account the dominance and contributions of earlier civilizations. “The fluctuating growth of this sort of world system,” he writes, “with shifting centers and a great multiplicity of peoples and cultures caught within it, seems to me now to be a part of world history that largely escaped my attention when writing *The Rise of the West*” (316). He still agrees with his earlier proposition—that
“reaction to contacts with strangers was the major motor of historical change”—but the new world history with its millennial archives provides the perspective to address the limitations of his earlier Eurocentrism.

McNeill’s epistemological journey is one that *Planetary Modernisms* advocates, drawing on the vast archives of the world historians to disturb often unacknowledged assumptions in modernist studies. In doing so, *Planetary Modernisms* addresses questions the world historians themselves seldom explore—namely, the debates about the meanings of the term *modernity*. World history, I suggest, provides a framework for formulating a planetary approach to questions of modernity: where, when, what, why, how. I focus largely on the cultural dimensions of multiple, polycentric, and recurrent modernities, aspects that are largely missing from their more economically, politically, technologically, and demographically oriented approaches. I also bring major tools of my original trade—literary studies—to bear on their archives—namely, an analysis of narrative and figural patterns in the discourses about modernity. What are the prevailing *stories* about modernity, I ask. How are they told, and to what effect? What are the *figures*—images, metonyms, metaphors, symbols—that characterize modernity, and how are they deployed? How might other stories and figures help us retheorize a planetary approach to modernity?

*Planetary Modernisms* has a three-part structure, each part rethinking the meanings of modernity and modernism from a different angle. Part 1, “Rethinking Modernist Studies,” addresses the problems and possibilities of the interdisciplinary field in general. Chapter 1, “Definitional Excursions,” travels the difficult landscape of terminological usage, and chapter 2, “Planetarity,” provides a roadmap for a planetary modernist studies. Moving experimentally through the labyrinthine maze of definitional debate, chapter 1 examines the multiple and often directly opposite meanings that *modernity* and *modernism* have acquired within and across the disciplines. Rather than escape the labyrinth, it asks that we confront the definitional monster head on. Interrogate the dissonance, it suggests, and we find at its center the contradictory core of modernity itself, a bang/clash never to be stilled.

Contradiction by itself, however, is never fully satisfactory—everything is contradictory, in the end; where do we go from there? So chapter 2 moves beyond the definitional problematic, turns to the significance of the slash in
modernity/modernism, and relies upon Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” to propose thirteen ways of developing a planetary epistemology for modernist studies. Defying the conclusion of chapter 1, chapter 2 aphoristically proposes a provisional definition of modernity and axioms of issues that just might have the flexibility and scope to be useful. It does so with no illusions of stilling the debate or quelling the anxiety caused by a newly expansive and still expanding field. To allay this anxiety, the chapter offers four modes for reading modernism planetarily, each strategy with its own particular, manageable focus and archive: re-vision of aesthetic works in the conventional time/space of modernism for traces of the global, recovery of works outside these boundaries in the specificity of their own time and place, tracking the global circulation of aesthetic modernisms on a transnational landscape, and collaging modernisms in different times and places for the insight radical juxtaposition can produce.

Part 2, “Rethinking Modernity, Scaling Space and Time,” draws on narrative theory and the suggestive possibilities of figural language to rethink modernity across large-scale time and space. Chapter 3, “Stories of Modernity: Planetary Scale in the Longue Durée,” argues that the “now” of modernity has a geohistory, has a place in time, through time. It examines different stories of pre-1500 modernity—pairing the sedentary Tang Dynasty and the nomadic Mongol Empire—to break open the ideological metanarrative of Western modernity as originary and singular, then to call for a multiplicity of stories of modernity throughout world history. Chapter 4, “Figures of Modernity: Relational Keywords,” returns to the definitional problematic explored in chapter 1 and suggests an approach based in a combination of metaphorical keywords such as rupture, vortex, mobility, acceleration, system, network, circulation, and heterotopia as ways to construct a relational definition of modernity that can accommodate a planetary longue durée.

Part 3, “Rethinking Modernism, Reading Modernisms,” turns from modernity as a geohistorical condition to the aesthetic expressivities it spawns: its modernisms. The accelerating ruptures of particular modernities, it argues, encompass particular innovative representational forms, modernisms that engage with and probe the contradictory meanings of their modernities. This section, with its small-scale readings of texts and artifacts, tests the utility of the planetary framework presented in part 2 for producing new insights into aesthetic modernity. Chapter 5, “Modernity’s
Modernisms: Aesthetic Scale and Pre-1500 Modernisms,” makes the general case for linking modernism to modernity in all geohistories and zooms in on three instances of modernist breakthrough: Du Fu as a poet of Tang Dynasty modernity; the story of the cobalt-blue glaze and ceramic painting in the Abbasid Caliphate; and Kabir as an iconoclastic poet-singer in the wake of Tamerlane’s conquest of northern India, initiating an inventive improvisational tradition that continues today.

Chapter 6, “Circulating Modernisms: Collages of Empire in Fictions of the Long Twentieth Century,” reduces the scale of time and text by examining three pairs of writers caught up within the logic and structures of empire, specifically the British Empire in Africa and India—Joseph Conrad and Tayeb Salih; E. M. Forster and Arundhati Roy; Virginia Woolf and the siblings Tagore, brother Rabindranath, and sister Swarnakumari Devi. Demonstrating the centrality of postcolonial studies for modernist studies in the long twentieth century, this collage of pairs shows the mutually constitutive nature of different modernities in the recent colonial and postcolonial eras and also demonstrates a complex pattern of circulation and affiliation among writers that encourages a rethinking of binary approaches to transnational modernity and modernism. Chapter 7, “Diasporic Modernisms: Journeys ‘Home’ in the Long Poems of Aimé Césaire and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha,” juxtaposes two poets typically read in relation to their African/French/Caribbean or Korean/Asian American contexts. This cultural collage reveals a specifically diasporic modernity in which “make it new” involves a return home to the underworld of abjection in the history of their peoples and an aesthetic process of gender-inflected regeneration. In doing so, it places notions of modernist exile and expatriatism within the broader framework of diasporic trauma, travail, and rebirth into a newly constituted homeland of the imagination.

With their focus on the modernities of the long twentieth century, chapters 6 and 7 foreground the centrality of empire for the production of interconnected but distinctive transcontinental modernisms during the period conventionally associated with modernism. In so doing, the chapters argue that a planetary modernist studies necessarily draws upon colonial and postcolonial geohistories—that is, the period of early-twentieth-century imperial power (European, American, Turkish, Russian, Japanese), its dissolution in the context of world war, and the emergence of new nation-states.
in Africa and Asia. At the same time, the readings uncover ways in which gender, sexuality, race, caste, and class often interrupt simple oppositional readings of imperial modernities to create unexpected lines of affiliation across postcolonial difference.

*Planetary Modernisms’s* conclusion, “A Debate with Myself,” resists the standard genre of synthesis and summation by performing a return to the book’s beginnings in the dialogical field of debate in modernist studies about the meanings of *modernity* and *modernism* and what the scope of our inquiry should or can be. As a standalone essay, this staged debate, I insist, not only structures the field but also rages inside my own head, reflecting the anxiety of our own, twenty-first-century modernity and gesturing at the very real difficulties of institutionalizing the new ways of thinking about modernity/modernism that the book promotes. In the end, however, taking into account the challenges such a project engenders, *Planetary Modernisms* takes sides in the debate and affirms the political and epistemological generativity of a planetary modernist studies.

*Planetary Modernisms* is, for the most part, not written in conventional academic prose. It experiments with alternate forms of argumentation—using stories, juxtapositions, metaphors, metonymies, parataxes, aphorisms, oralities, charts, collages, maps, and so forth. Sometimes, chapters don’t look like chapters; paragraphs don’t exhibit the principles of development and evidence; sentences don’t follow the rules. The logical progression of a Ciceronian argument seldom structures an oftentimes more dialogic or associational procession of ideas and examples. To experiment with academic prose in this book was not a deliberate plan: it just happened, it evolved, and it was damnably difficult to do. It began in the late 1990s as I entered the labyrinth of definitional debate. I had just published *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998), in which I mapped the developing intersectional and transnational debates of feminist theory. As I read widely in modernist studies, I thought I could do the same: map the positions of various divisions within the field. But I was caught in the vertigo of the definitional maze, in the often absolute dissonance of meaning in the terms people used. That’s when the experiments began: the stories, the parataxes, the morals, the detours, the figures of binaries and circles, and so forth—all as indirect mechanisms for getting out of the labyrinth, making sense of
its hidden patterns. They helped me think differently; they suggested an alternative to arguing a single thesis by proposing travels through many lines of thought. The result was “Definitional Excursions,” first published in Modernism/Modernity in 2001 and reproduced here with some modification as chapter 1 to capture the early-twenty-first-century moment of its intervention and to serve as the still necessary foundation of the arguments to come in later chapters. Of course I was aware that these experiments mirrored the representational crises of the early-twentieth-century Anglo-American and European modernism about which I had been writing since the 1970s. Citing Yeats in chapter 2, I ask, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?”

Like “Definitional Excursions,” Planetary Modernisms grew in pieces as the early twenty-first century unfolded in all its own revolutionary modernities. Although I kept trying to come up with a “plan,” I had no clear map of how I could ever put together into a coherent whole the disparate research I was doing—from delving into the manuscripts of Forster’s Passage to India to reading about the Mongol Empire, tracing the circulations of ceramic innovation, uncovering the story of Shakespeare’s sister in the Tagore family, or learning from the large-scale histories of world systems. There were countless opportunities for articles, conference papers, and lectures—each pulling me this way and that. There were detours into other fields I could not resist—migration/diaspora studies, cosmopolitanism, narrative theory, world literature, comparatism, Muslim feminisms, and religious studies. Each of these diversions delayed “the book” but then made its way into its unfolding formulation of a planetary modernist studies. Planetary Modernisms is layered through time, like the skins of an onion, pungent with past meanderings.

How to make it all cohere? (Pace Ezra Pound.) It just happened, organically. In a flash, Stevens’s cubist poem and cubism more generally came to me as a way of organizing my disparate thoughts. The invitation to do a keynote address for the Modernist Studies Association conference in Montréal in 2009 resulted in “Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies,” published in Modernism/Modernity in 2010 as a synthesis of the work I had been doing for ten years. Appearing as chapter 2 in Planetary Modernisms, it represents my recognition that the book as a whole must present the
“object” of modernity/modernism from as many angles as possible, with as many methods as possible, with as many archives as possible: the principle that governs the chapters that follow.

As the chapters took shape, each gradually acquired a different experimental form. Chapter 2 invokes only to resist the manifesto form so important in Anglo/European modernism of the early twentieth century. Its aphoristic style serves as an overture for the more extended arguments to come in later chapters. Chapter 3, engaging diachronically with a millennial longue durée, does so through telling stories of modernity and using narrative theory to unravel the metanarrative of Western modernity. Chapter 4 focuses synchronically on words as a figural rather than narrative epistemology for rethinking modernity. Each section opens with keywords— their denotative definitions, synonyms, and antonyms—then moves into reflections on modernity focalized through its images and metaphors, each illustrated by brief examples taken from different times and continents. Chapter 5 zooms in onto three sharply focused, historically contextualized snapshots of unrelated modernisms before the emergence of European modernities; taken together, they test the usefulness of positing modernism as the aesthetic dimension of any modernity rather than as a specific period, movement, or style tied to a single modernity. Chapter 6 focuses on fictions of modernity read as a form of collage. Its form—a collage of paired collages—borrows from early-twentieth-century European art, where sharp juxtapositions of fragments produce new relational perceptions, where the eye circulates, moving back and forth to read the whole. Chapter 7 turns to poetry, specifically two modernist long poems, reading them as a woven collage whose shuttle back and forth between the two performs a paratactic comparison that produces a new theory of a diasporic modernism. The conclusion takes the form of a stylized debate organized oppositionally around thirteen issues, echoing in form the blackbirds of chapter 2. On the one hand; on the other hand: each side exists inside my head and outside in the field. Resisting the conventions of a conclusion, it reproduces the dialogics of an expansive modernist studies that perpetually questions itself.

The modernities of today’s world remind us that modernity is still Now, everywhere present in our lives, but they also compel us to look beyond
the present to both the past and the future. *Planetary Modernisms* begins with the ethical imperative to get outside a purely Western framework to rethink the modernities of the past. It resists the presentism of our Now to bring the planetary perspectives of world history, of literature, of the arts, of the knowledge produced in the humanities to bear on the meanings of modernity for our future.