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Afterword: Realism's Futures

COLLEEN LYE

At one point, during the bygone age of postmodernism, nothing was real. Now, everything is—or at least claims to be. To make matters even more confusing, it is increasingly unclear whether postmodernism intensified itself to the point where it made a qualitative leap into realism or whether what we formerly called postmodernism was really realism all along.

Jed Esty gives us a historicizing view. His intriguing contribution to this collection of articles proposes that periods of imperial crises are accompanied by crises of representation that take the form of “realism wars.” It is a nice twist on Fredric Jameson’s directive to view modernism as the aesthetic form that most eloquently captures the spatial disconnection unconsciously registered by subjects of European empires in crisis (Jameson, “Cognitive”; “Modernism”). With the help of Giovanni Arrighi, Esty elevates Jameson’s means of contextualizing early twentieth-century literature to a model that extends across the whole time frame of Arrighi’s “long twentieth century,” which stretches from the Genoese to the American hegemony. The fact that realism was once denigrated by the literary trends of the early twentieth century and is touted at the present moment of US imperial crisis might have an explanation in the differences between American and British operational forms of global hegemony—which is what Esty invites us to ponder. It does seem to be the case that moments of imperial crisis see a rise in questions of realism, whether they are accompanied by more or less realist trends in literary production itself.

If “more or less realist” hardly suffices to capture the uncertainty that surrounds what is happening with literature itself, that is because there is so little agreement as to what we mean by *realist*. Within literary critical discourse alone, the term is used in very different, even contradictory, ways. What is to be learned from critical use of this term in the collection of articles that make up this special issue of *Novel*?

To begin with, the fact that they deal with texts old and new, from across different continents and representing a range of media (from print literature to performance to photography and film), underscores the extent to which realism well may not be a genre or even a type of literature. Given the range of examples under consideration here, the question arises as to whether realism strictly refers to a method of interpretation and not at all to any attribute of the object—a question that seems particularly paradoxical when we are grappling with a method that by definition subscribes to the existence of a reality independent of (and therefore only partially graspable by) human cognition. For all the contributors here, that reality is socially made. To have to say this is to acknowledge how far we have come from the 1980s and ’90s when various partisans in the debates between deconstruction, New Historicism, and cultural materialism could take for granted that to speak of form

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and object, structure and world, was to refer to matter and things of human origin. In the current critical context in which “materialism” can also refer to physical matter both natural and synthetic and “realism” can denote the scholar’s aspiration to an extra-anthropocentric standpoint, one can make no such assumption. For the sake of clarity and at the risk of reduction, let us say that today historical materialism/Marxism represents the strong form of a socially based realism that the “new materialisms” and speculative realism challenge. The articles in “Worlding Realisms” undoubtedly hew more closely to the basic assumptions of historical materialism. Yet to the extent they are idiosyncratic in their objects and applications, it will be useful, in pinpointing their respective interventions, to compare these arguments to more committed Marxist endeavors.

We might start by considering the project of “Worlding Realisms” in relation to a recent volume with a comparable goal: the Warwick Research Collective’s (WReC) *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (2015).¹ Cued by Franco Moretti’s “conjunctural” use of Trotsky’s theory of combined and uneven development to reflect on “world literature,” the WReC conceptualizes the literary category as something that, like the world capitalist system itself, is composed of dynamically interrelated and necessarily unequal components (core, periphery, and semiperiphery). While Moretti has built upon this conjecture by going broad (through “distant reading”), the WReC makes use of it by sticking with a more familiar practice of going deep, thus concentrating on a few authorial case studies from the semiperiphery to exemplify “world literature.” In that sense, its literary methodological practice is closer to that of Roberto Schwarz than to Moretti’s, with the goal being to generalize beyond the Brazilian case. The WReC’s project might be understood as an attempt to provide a general theory of world literature that corrects for the account of Pascale Casanova, whose Bourdieuvian orientation to institutions reconfirms the Eurocentrism of the category. In the WReC’s focus on capitalist dynamics, the contradictory conditions of combined and uneven development, felt most acutely in the semiperiphery, are generative of what deserves to be called “world literature.” In a sense, if the WReC has some influential interlocutors in world literature studies whose historical materialist investments are relatively proximate, the more fundamental intervention of *Combined and Uneven Development* is in the field of postcolonial studies.

The culmination of efforts by various of the individual authors of the collective over the years to reorient postcolonial studies from linguistic materialism toward a historical materialism, *Combined and Uneven Development* is a bid to synthesize two critical fields—postcolonial studies and world literature criticism—that have historically represented two disjointed and antagonistic conversations. From the perspective of a prominent member of the WReC, Neil Lazarus, the postcolonial studies of the 1980s and ’90s needed to become both more genuinely political (by engaging with real social questions afflicting the Third World) and more responsible to the literature itself (by expanding its archive beyond a few textual

¹ The WReC’s members are Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry, and Stephen Shapiro.

examples).² For our purposes here, it is important to note that central to this Marxist critique of postcolonial studies was the argument that the latter had internalized an aesthetics of transgression borrowed from modernism that rendered it unable to appreciate or even *see* the vast amount of postcolonial literature that was realistic. Thus, it is of particular interest that when we come to *Combined and Uneven Development*, “varieties of numinous narration—including magical realism, irrealism, gothic and fantasy” (57) should turn out to be at the center of attention. This is because, the WReC concludes, an “elective affinity exists between general situation(s) of peripherality and irrealist aesthetics” (68). Where is the realism? It hasn’t disappeared, although it is “easier to explore questions about ‘(semi-) peripherality’ in the world-literary system through reference to ‘modernist’ and ‘experimental’ modes than through reference to ‘realist or ‘naturalist’ ones” (57). As the WReC argues, reading “modernist” or “experimental” modes in light of combined and uneven development is to read it “with one eye to its realism” (67).

Realism thus persists within and even defines the WReC’s method of reading modernist or experimental forms that are “irrealist” in appearance. In proceeding thus, the Warwick Collective takes its cue from Jameson’s account of the relation between modernism and realism. The WReC writes: “It is not only, as Jameson observes, that ‘each genuinely new realism denounces its predecessors as unrealistic.’ It is also that ‘genuine realism, taken at the moment of its emergence, is a discovery process, which with its emphasis on the new and the hitherto unreported, unrepresented, and unseen, and its notorious subversion of inherited ideas and genres (the *Quijote!*), is in fact itself a kind of modernism, if not the latter’s first form’ (Jameson 2012: 476)” (66). In the WReC’s uptake of Jameson—which, as we will see, is broadly representative—realism is either a hand-me-down, historically stale form or an aspiration toward totality housed within a form that looks anything but realist. In a 2006 essay “History, Narrative and Realism: Jameson’s Search for a Method,” Carolyn Lesjak argues that Jameson’s famous model of “cognitive mapping” is his version of a new realism: it retains the originality of the concept of realism, which is its “claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status”; but unlike its nineteenth-century variants, this form of realism attempts finally to “produce the concept of something we cannot imagine” (28). Lesjak’s analysis of Jameson’s sublation of realism from object to method helps us understand the resulting paradoxical either/or-ness of realism as a form *or* as a way of reading. One can read modernism realistically, but it seems not to be possible to find (genuine) realism in a realistic form. When speaking of realism, method and object are antinomies, as Jameson sees it, and it is in modernism that they are historically reconciled. This helps explain why in looking for a literature that is the most realistic about the contradictory experience of global capitalism, the WReC finds irrealist forms. Does this mean that a realist-appearing realism is impossible to describe?

And yet this is precisely what this special issue of *Novel* tries to do. This makes sense, because the guest editor, Lauren Goodlad, is well aware (and deeply critical)

² See, for example, Lazarus’s “The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism” (2002). “Aspects of Peripheral Modernism” (2009) by Benita Parry, the senior postcolonial scholar in the WReC, is another important ancestral text for *Combined and Uneven Development*.

of the consequences of Jameson's influential privileging of modernism's realism (30–35).³ In having cordoned off the contradictory experience of British imperialism at its height, Goodlad argues, Jameson's account of modernism and imperialism has made it easy for critics—and, ironically, particularly those most committed to historical materialism—to overlook the impact of geopolitics on nineteenth-century realism. If Goodlad's *Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* argues for the engaged transnationalism of mid-Victorian novels, the articles on contemporary novels in the present issue show that literary realism has contemporary homes well outside of its nineteenth-century British and French strongholds. Ulka Anjaria, Noha Radwan, and Eleni Coundouriotis describe the existence or emergence of literary realisms in contemporary India and Nigeria, Egypt under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, and across the continent of Africa. Curiously, their efforts are facilitated by a lack of prior commitment to a theory of capitalist modernity. A more systematic theorizing of the material conditions of their literary objects may well have led them to confirm the seemingly inevitable disjuncture between realism as a method of reading or as a literary form. What they *are* committed to is the recoverability of history, reflecting an impatience with a postcolonial melancholy long resigned to history's arrest. Terri Weissman's discussion of the "lens-based realism" of American photographer Susan Meiselas, in which revolutionary longing is preserved in the face of Sandinista disillusion and defeat, and even Esty's decision to take a longer view of today's "realism wars," might be seen in light of this longing for history—more specifically, a longing for the ongoingness of history behind our backs, despite our present-day overwhelming sense of catastrophe and political stagnation.

Given the range of ideas among the contributors about what counts as historical motion, though, it is important to put a finer point on what is accomplished here by comparing the contribution of this special issue of *Novel* to the field of postcolonial studies with the contribution of WReC: what is "worlding realism" as compared to the "realism of world literature"? While similarly discontented with postcolonial studies' melancholic historicism, Anjaria, Radwan, and Coundouriotis end up in a different place. They are more wont to consider the forms of realism they identify as an aspect of—and incipient within—the object itself, which amounts to the emergence of a new type of writing. One worries that the loosening of formal requirements for what counts as a realist object makes it too easy to find realism everywhere. Abrupt switchbacks between points of view and narrative styles; the eruption of blogs, e-mails, text messaging, and other digital media on the printed page; absurdist situations; the use of metafiction; fabulist plots and improbably happy endings—can all these really be taken up as new signs of realism? What *is* consistent is the contributors' investment in the criticality of novels that range widely in quality and mode of address, from the pulpy Indian bestsellers of Chetan Bhagat and 1990s Egyptian novels usually characterized by their nihilism and stylistic poverty to Uwem Akpan's Oprah-featured African short story collection

³ Her references are to Jameson's "Cognitive Mapping" (1988) and "Modernism and Imperialism" (1990). But she sees Jameson's "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate" (2012) and *Antinomies of Realism* (2013) as, in large part, continuous with the views of those earlier essays.

and prestigious prizewinners in global fiction by cosmopolitans such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Naruddin Farah. If many of these novels might once as easily have been described as making a pastiche of history, perhaps the surprise is just how much the *post* in postcolonial has turned out to be the same as the *post* in postmodernism. What do we make of this?

Recourse to Lesjak's account of realism's centrality to Jameson's thinking is again useful here. In the essay I referred to earlier, Lesjak examines the evolution in Jameson's thinking on realism from his 1977 essay "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate" to his 1998 book *Brecht and Method*.⁴ In 1977, before he had the language of "postmodernity," Jameson speculated whether, in the context of "post-industrial society," it was Lukács who had the "provisional last word" (Jameson, "Reflections" 146; qtd. in Lesjak 31). However, in his 1998 work, the practice of realism at the heart of Bertolt Brecht's conceptualization of didactic art emerged as Jameson's focus. Putting this together with Jameson's reflections on Third World cinema for its "Brechtian" mapping of First World/Third World relations, Lesjak writes: "Where classical nineteenth-century realism saw (imperialist) history as a developmental narrative unfolding in time and premised on a notion of historical continuity, this form of postmodern realism develops instead from a fully global history of uneven development and the layerings of social time produced by it" (35). Perhaps then what the articles in "Worlding Realisms" do is confirm the existence of what Lesjak adduces from Jameson to be a "postmodern realism."⁵ Radwan's emphasis on the pedagogical dimension of what makes Muhammad al-Fakharani's *An Interval for Bewilderment* realism and not, say, naturalism seems to bear out Jameson's claim of where one should look for the reinvention of Brecht's "practice of realism," namely, in Third World texts. Of all the essays, it is Radwan's that, though least interested in striving after a formal definition of realism, would most agree with Jameson that the "fundamental structure of the social 'totality' is a set of class relations" (Jameson, "Reflections" 146; qtd. in Lesjak 37). Yet to try to square the essays with Lesjak's Jameson is, in the end, only to clarify the distance between them. In Jameson, Filipino filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik's exemplary figure of the *jeepney* (both vehicle and tenor of his film, so to speak), involves reenvisioning "a 'realist' aesthetic as a matter now of space rather than time" (Lesjak 35). By contrast, our authors are intensely concerned with how literature is renewing our sense of temporal motion, or as Coundouriotis puts it, is providing an "opening to the future" in spite of catastrophe.

Goodlad's turn to Ferdinand Braudel's notion of a "longue durée" in *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* to link the "serialized realism" of midcentury Victorian novels and that of early twenty-first-century cable television suggests the appeal of Braudel's non-Marxian uncoupling of capitalism from modernity, backdating the latter to the beginnings of market exchange that long predated the rise of industrial

⁴ The original 1977 version of "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate," titled "Reflections in Conclusion," is available in the Verso reprint of the original New Left Books dossier, *Aesthetics and Politics* (2007).

⁵ Paik Nak-Chung also tries out the term "postmodern realism" with Jameson in a conversation with him about contemporary Korean literature. See *Jameson on Jameson* 85–86.

production and “free wage labor.” Braudel’s concept of a *longue durée* is a major influence on Arrighi’s temporally distended period concept of “the long twentieth century,” and so Esty’s turn to Arrighi for a perennial rather than a developmental account of “realism wars” provides a further hint of the perceived need for a longer temporal perspective than perhaps even the “dialectic of enlightenment” can any longer deliver. The standpoint of this realism—let us call it Arrighian—is still historical, in the sense that it grounds itself in a materialism defined by human activity. It is thus by no means the transcendental view of speculative realism (although the latter’s “infinity discourse” might be seen to be an alternative way of responding to the sense that our planetary crisis is caused by humans).⁶ The latent influence of Arrighi, whose *Long Twentieth Century* was published in 1994, might even be detected in the difference between Jameson’s earlier sequential account of realism and modernism (whose third act was postmodernism) and the emphasis on a repeating oscillation between realism and modernism in his more recent thinking, such as in the 2012 “Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate.”⁷ Arrighi’s belated rise to prominence might be traced to the broader interest in critical finance studies after the bursting of the 1990s US bubble economy. Arrighi’s contribution to world systems theory is to suggest that a focus on periods of financialization allows us to understand the interaction between capitalism and imperialism so as to render imaginable a world hegemony centered somewhere other than in the “West.” A significant aspect of the intra-Marxist debate around Arrighi—whose stakes center on how to interpret our “long downturn” as a crisis that has nevertheless not (yet?) brought capitalism to an end⁸—lies in the methodological challenge posed to us by the invention and rampant use of new, complex financial instruments after 1973 to our everyday experience of time and our intellectual capacity to periodize. Arrighi’s adaptation of Braudel’s *longue durée* to an account of serially repeating imperialisms whose hegemonic transfers over several centuries are signaled by financialization is an example of how present-day financialization is stretching historical materialist approaches to periodization. Dilating a smaller unit of time than Arrighi’s version of a century, Leigh Claire La Berge’s extraordinary theorization of “the long 1980s” in *Scandals and Abstractions* (2015) is arguably another. Dilation of the temporal dimension does not simply mean entertaining the elongation of our period concepts; it also means, as Stephen Shapiro writes, attending to “what Marx calls periodicity, the recurring features of

⁶ For the political modesty of the “infinity discourse” as it is manifesting within a critical-theoretical wing of the humanities, see Nealon, “Infinity.” Relatedly, for a historicization of Quentin Meillassoux’s notion of the “transfinite,” see Nealon, “Value.”

⁷ “Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate” does not directly reference Arrighi. Jameson’s direct reckoning with Arrighi can be found in two earlier contexts. In “Culture and Finance Capital,” he writes: “Finance capital has to be something like a stage in the way it distinguishes itself from other moments of the development of capitalism. Arrighi’s luminous insight was that this peculiar kind of telos need not lie in a straight line but might well organize itself in a spiral (a figure that also avoids the mythical overtones of the various cyclical visions)” (248). Jameson also discusses Arrighi in “The Brick and the Balloon.”

⁸ The more canonical Marxist account is Robert Brenner’s, who has devoted many articles and books to this topic (e.g., 1998’s “The Economics of Global Turbulence”).

capitalism throughout multiple cycles of social reproduction and value refluxes" (1250). Jameson in the 1980s showed the influence of Ernest Mandel's approach to periodizing history. Present-day Jameson—more perennial, and therefore appearing more formalist, as in *Antinomies of Realism*—reflects the new, if not necessarily stated, influence of Arrighi.

Indeed, in *Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic* Goodlad's notion of a "serialized realism" as a formal structure shared by nineteenth-century print media and twenty-first-century cable television might be understood to reflect a similarly necessary formalism summoned by the quest for a realism that can tap "the submerged historicity of any lifeworld that blends continuous transformation with the simultaneous perception of having reached an epochal, if nonetheless crisis-prone, 'end of history'" (284). As such, though Goodlad in her 2015 book does not thematize the historical problematic in terms of the specifically financial aspects of global capitalism, surely at stake in her idea for this special issue is a project that converges with Hamilton Carroll and Annie McClanahan's search for a fiction that can limn the "complex ontology" of our extended global financial crisis, whose temporality has proceeded in "spirals and oscillations, and through repetitions and difference" (657–58). In the case of Carroll and McClanahan's recent special issue of the *Journal of American Studies*, titled "Fictions of Speculation," interest in the form of finance's proleptic and analeptic reorganizations of temporal experience leads to a focus on the close fit between financial speculation and speculative fiction's expertise in "what-wasn't, what-isn't, what-might-be, what-could-have-been-if" (658). Carroll and McClanahan do not use the term "cognitive mapping" as a way of describing that fit. Based on my earlier discussion of Jameson's influence on historical materialist approaches to realism, however, we should be unsurprised to find that they define speculative fiction's modes of "mimetic certainty" against realism's (658).

But my point here is not to persevere on the seemingly intractable either/or-ness of realism as object or realism as method. Evoking *Fictions of Speculation* in this context helps us make sense of the disparate responses to the call for "worlding realisms," where *realism* can refer to diverse textual forms from the nineteenth century to the present and *worlding* both invites cognitive mapping and emphasizes its impossibility. At first glance, methodologically speaking, besides Esty's intellectual history contribution, only Weissman's recovery of a "durational aesthetics" latent within Meiselas's documentary photography and film seems to fit Goodlad's idea of a serializing realism. If we see these essays through the lens of financialization's nonlinear renarrativizations of time, however, we can put yet a finer point on what the articles in "Worlding Realisms" accomplish as a group—even across the divide between the formalist elaborations of realism (Ben-Yishai and Lavery) and the articles for which realism's general commitment to history is essential (Anjaria, Radwan, and Coundouriotis). (Weissman straddles that divide, which places her closest to Goodlad herself in this respect.) What "Worlding Realisms" shows is that there is no longer an antimony between formalism and historicism in present-day efforts to tackle the representation of reality.

Elsewhere, in an essay titled "The Rules of Abstraction," La Berge helps us historicize why this might be so when she observes that financialization and its crises have brought the question of abstraction and the challenge of representing it to the

fore. La Berge's line of approach to critical finance studies, together with the work of Albert Toscano, draws out the richness of the Marxian argument that reading capitalist reality is necessarily to formulate a "realism of the abstract." This phrase, Toscano's, recalls Althusser's description of Leonardo Cremonini as a painter of relations (rather than objects), which made him a painter of the "real abstract" ("Materialism," 1234–35). Toscano's argument that the historically specific context of capitalism makes realism no simple matter of transparent reflection helps contextualize why it is that the contributors to "Worlding Realism"—regardless of whether the representation of capitalist social relations is the stated goal—in seeking a *critical* realism must divorce realism from verisimilitude. Toscano's return to Althusser via Alfred Sohn-Rethel's notion of "real abstraction" emphasizes Marx's fundamental break with a generic, humanist, or anthropological concept of abstraction ("Open Secret" 274). And thus Toscano's turn to Althusser for a "complex reflection theory" also helps us understand the broken appearance of Lukács within this special issue of *Novel*, whose contributors both turn to Lukács and away from him. Radwan slims down Lukács's definition of a critical realist novel to the criterion of whether "the more profound *how* of an event is articulated or remains silent" (quoted on 266). Condouriotis redraws Lukács's notion of a typical character into an improbable character in whom the movement of history is no less crystallized—but only by substituting Lukács's dialectical revolutionary standard for authentic historical motion with a minimalist one that rests on chance and contingency. Anjaria openly registers the discontinuity of her project with Lukács's by contrasting what she calls a new realism of particulars to Lukács's dialectic of part and whole.

Yet even as the articles break ambivalently, but essentially, from Lukács, is there not still an underlying Lukácsian orientation to be detected in the humanist premises of their approach to postcolonial fiction? Condouriotis celebrates the "soft realism of sentiment" in Farah's *Crossbones* (249). Radwan argues that *An Interval for Bewilderment* humanizes slum dwellers for the bourgeois reader. Anjaria provides a consoling account of the diasporic author's or character's return home. In recent rereadings of Lukács elsewhere, David Cunningham's proposal that capital is the true subject of the novel or, alternatively, Timothy Bewes's stress on a novelistic presentation that takes place "in the interval between intelligibility and unintelligibility" (1207) suggests (contra Althusser) that adopting Lukács does not necessarily have to entail a humanism. By contrast to this issue's contributors, however, neither Cunningham nor Bewes is concerned with the restitution of the criticality of an identifiable novelistic *realism* per se.⁹

Coming closer to the investments of the articles in this special issue in identifying critical realism in the literary periphery is Eli Park Sorensen's *Postcolonial Studies and the Literary* (2010). Expressing his restlessness with postcolonial studies'

⁹ Thus, in a way comparable to the WReC's findings of irrealist forms in the semiperiphery, Cunningham sees "hybridities of form engendered by the novel's current wave of internationalization" following from the "socio-economic processes through which the more or less 'concrete' social forms of non-capitalist and previously colonial cultures are progressively integrated into the accumulative structures of a transnational capitalism" (19).

overlong neglect of the “specificity of the literary,” Sorensen returns to Lukács in order to arrive at a usable theory of realism for postcolonial literature. Rejecting Lukács’s explicit statements in favor of his *Theory of the Novel*, Sorensen retrieves from the early Lukács the notion of realism as the “utopian-interpretive” horizon that is constitutively present within the novel form as such. This utopian-interpretive realist ideal “consists of a sequence of events or parts that are always already interpreted as being in relation to each other, which in sum form a narrative totality,” which is also “an ironic totality” (xii). For Sorensen, the “potential of realism within a postcolonial perspective” lies in the fact that it is not tied to any particular period but to the embodiment of a literary ideal that can manifest itself at different levels within different textual modalities (52–53). Thus, we see here too further evidence of a turn toward a formalist accounting of realism in the quest to theorize a realism that might be good for a longer duration. Yet more important for our purposes, the turn to early Lukács for an account that would allow us to see realism as foundational to the novel form also paradoxically ties realism immanently to melancholia. Challenging the melancholic historicism of postcolonial studies that had rendered it blind to literary realism, Sorensen roots melancholic historicism within the form of the novel itself. The novel’s “realist modality” lies in its unending “process of ‘working-through’” the sense of loss of an earlier, absent epic totality and the continuously failed attempts to imitate it (66); the novel’s “need for reflexion” (61), or self-consciousness of its own fictitiousness, creates a deep link between the form’s critical irony and a distinctively melancholic historicism. Sorensen’s dazzling recuperation of Lukács to help us better see the intrinsic realism of postcolonial novels illuminates why perhaps, in seeking after history with a future, the postcolonial articles in “Worlding Realisms” avoid a full confrontation with Lukács’s theory of the novel.

If this special issue’s implication that postcolonial novels are *realistic* in their optimism about the potential for historical motion at the periphery is hard to reconcile in Lukácsian terms, it is perhaps licensed, I have been suggesting, by an “Arrighian realism” that is the unstated influence on many intellectual efforts currently afoot to take different measures of historical time. Given the financialization of daily life (Martin), we should not be surprised that, in Coundouriotis’s account, Naruddin Farah’s is realistic when betting on the improbable or that for Anjara, neoliberalizing India ushers in something new for us to appreciate. In their implicit optimism about marketization or willingness to engage in (metaphoric) speculation, Anjaria and Coundouriotis are perhaps not all that different from Arrighi, whose hope for a genuinely different, possibly even postcapitalist world order arising from the shift of imperial hegemony to East Asia sets him apart from other Marxists. Though Farah and Bhagat could hardly be more dissimilar in their portrayals of humanity’s economic and life changes in the periphery, the contrasting settings of their novels index the decline of US empire, its failed military interventions in Somalia and elsewhere, and its contradictory dependency on outsourced labor to India. Not all the contributors, though, can be characterized as equally optimistic about the future of capitalism in the periphery. Radwan and Weissman would likely concur that the theory of global capitalism’s combined and

uneven development can explain Egypt's neoliberal turn under Sadat, as well as the US counterrevolutionary response to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. Thus it is really in the metacritical boldness with which they depart from accepted measures of properly historical motion that the articles in "Worlding Realisms" can be called united.

Even so, this description still does not fully account for the contribution of the two Victorian articles in the issue. In revisiting realism in its Victorian homeland, Ayelet Ben-Yishai and Joseph Lavery do more than work with objects in ways that newly defamiliarize our expectation of what realism formally looks like, though they certainly do that extremely well. Ben-Yishai takes up an unusual but certainly "classic" example of realism, Anthony Trollope's novel *Is He Popenjoy?* (1877–78), in order to show that "whatever else realism is, it is also always a historically contingent reflection of and on how we choose (knowingly or unknowingly, but always communally) to know our world and . . . to make it known" (204). In this lies the key to explaining "realism's persistence as a world phenomenon" (204). Lavery shows that a light opera by Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado* (1885)—a form of representation famously defined by its anti-referentiality (Orientalism)—makes claims about the real world and discloses the imprint of realpolitik upon its shape. By insisting on the imaginarity of Orientalism's referent, defenders of the opera and its Saidian critics alike have missed the variable and multidirectional functions of Orientalism that attention to its "queer realism" reveals. For Lavery, *The Mikado* is "a transitional text in the history of British Orientalism" that retrained "realism's worlding strategies on the queerer world of the late nineteenth century" (222) and consolidated "Japan" as a placeholder object for queer British men negotiating queer identities at the fin de siècle. The queerness of *The Mikado's* realism resides in Orientalism's inversion of the relation between speaking and knowing that characterizes the epistemology of the closet. In apposite relation to the latter, as Lavery puts it, the queerness of Japan was everywhere spoken and nowhere known.

Reading Ben-Yishai's and Lavery's takes on Victorian realism together, what comes to the fore is how realist forms—conventional and queer alike—are constituted by a relation to unknowing. We learn that the radicalism of Trollope's utterly conventional realism has everything to do with how the unknown becomes known through rhetorical convention. We also learn that inasmuch as *The Mikado* was occasioned by a Japanese modernity it could not picture, the opera is led to ponder the conditions of unknowing that "construct the reality principle of a queer world" (Lavery 227). The joint insight into realism is a profound one. And it returns us to the question of why neither a Lukácsian realism based on the novel form's intrinsic melancholic historicism nor an Althusserian realism based on a complex reflection theory will quite do for what "Worlding Realisms" hopes to accomplish—not, at least, without some retrofitting in light of our present historical moment.

Recent scholarship on the relation between literature/art and capitalism has begun the work of Althusserian rereading that could prove useful for carrying forward the initiative of "worlding realisms," despite the fact that its payoff has been more obvious so far with regard to the realism of nonnarrative forms of literature and art. To move from the insights of this critical rereading of Althusser to the

question of narrative—the formal category that cuts across this collection’s diverse archive—I want to devote the rest of my comment to a discussion of this line of work.

In “Materialism without Matter,” Toscano revisits Althusser’s meditation on the painter Cremonini in order to think the abstraction of art with the increasing abstraction of capital. Here, Toscano reminds us that one of Althusser’s key insights was the specificity of art in making visible but not necessarily in making known (1232). There is hence a relatively straightforward path from Althusser’s Cremonini to Toscano’s discernment in the “panoramic” arts of Allan Sekula and Mark Lombardi a similar “aesthetic of cognitive mapping” (“Seeing” [75–80]; see also Toscano and Kinkle). The lesson to be drawn from Althusser is that in art’s representation of capitalism as an invisible concrete reality, there is *always* a gap between the aesthetic and the cognitive. Deeply influenced by Althusser’s method, Jameson’s long-standing description of the tension between the aesthetic and the epistemological in realism is a cognate conceptualization of realism as a form.¹⁰ In *Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson revised this account of realism’s defining tension by characterizing realism as organized around an antinomy between narrative and what he calls “affect.” Whether *Antinomies of Realism* provides a more generous or grimmer view of realism remains for other scholars and critics to determine. I wish simply to note here that the 2013 book makes time a more central element in the distinction between the two poles of realism’s antinomy.

Toscano helps us understand the context for this new focus on temporality when he retrieves Althusser’s complex reflection theory. Whereas (in Althusser’s account) Cremonini’s mirror involved “a play of delays, misrecognitions, overidentifications, shaped by a definite space or determinate absence,” Toscano argues that, insofar as the character of invisibility varies, the problem of representing capital is better framed as a “problem of the representation of a metamorphosis (understood as the sequence and syncopation of value forms) rather than an absent structure” (“Materialism,” 1234, 1236). We might describe the difference between Althusser’s mirror and Toscano’s metamorphosis as a shift from representation as a problematic that involves complexly structured space to a problematic that involves transformations in time. More precisely, Toscano’s rereading of Althusser recovers and dilates the temporal element already present in Althusser’s identification of a “play of delays, misrecognitions, overidentifications” that structures the movement between aesthetic perception and cognition. To see the continuity between mirror and metamorphosis is also to see the continuity between Jameson’s earlier antinomy of the aesthetic and the epistemological and his later antinomy of narrative and affect. That continuity, which lies in the principle of the ever-presentness

¹⁰ See, for example, “The Existence of Italy,” in which Jameson writes: “Realism is, however, a peculiarly unstable concept owing to its simultaneous, yet incompatible, aesthetic and epistemological claims, as the two terms of the slogan, ‘representation of reality’ suggest. . . . Thus, where the epistemological claim succeeds, it fails; and if realism validates its claim to being a correct or true representation of the world, it thereby ceases to be an aesthetic mode of representation and falls out of art altogether. . . . Yet no viable conception of realism is possible unless both these demands or claims are honored simultaneously, prolonging and preserving—rather than ‘resolving’—this constitutive tension and incommensurability” (158).

of a dialectic of space *and* time, suggests that we might be wrong to conclude from *Antinomies of Realism* that narrative's increasing surrender to affect—in which the antinomy between narrative and affect is irreducible to an antinomy between time and space—means the death of narrative, that only zombie forms of it presently exist.

Implicit in the present collection's search for realism in places other than novels—including light opera, photography, and film—is the intuition that realism as method is now forcing us to weigh our habits of how we view the relationship between history and narrative, whose close analogical, even organic, relationship we have long taken for granted. Joshua Clover cautions us not to conclude prematurely that the “fundamental problematic of [our] historical moment is necessarily narrative in nature” simply because the problem of imagining what comes next is the “fundamental narrative problem of our time” (“Autumn” 34). Clover proposes that to the extent that financialization indicates the inability of the present hegemon “to forward its accumulation via real expansion,” this leaves nonnarrative poetics “better situated to grasp the transformation of the era” (48–49). This claim throws down the gauntlet to those interested in theorizing contemporary narrative realism.

The potential significance of “Worlding Realisms” lies in an insouciance about not knowing what genuine historical motion looks like from within our current moment—which Clover and Esty after Arrighi call the American “autumn”—when proliferating varieties of narrative (and ways of viewing them) are a truth of capital's quantitative and qualitative metamorphoses of sequential time. “Worlding Realisms” reads backward from a number of forms that were until now not likely to be considered especially realist to the historical conditions of unknowing that might have required them. Financialization's second-degree abstraction is opening our eyes to new realist forms, besides clarifying that all reading of capitalism has all along been realist reading.¹¹ This collection pays attention to new realist narratives active in today's semiperiphery, where an ongoing dynamic of uneven combination with the center may allow for advancement in unprecedented leaps and thus a historical motion that does not follow the path of early industrializers. If poetry is especially suited to make us feel the affects peculiar to value form,¹² “Worlding Realisms” elicits the narrative, potentially revolutionary, dimension of value form's “durational aesthetics.” Whether the logical endpoint of what has been initiated here will be a reinvented Lukácsian realism—that is, humanist but nonmelancholic—good for the “long twentieth century” is open to the future.

¹¹ In the context of finance capital, Jameson writes, “Money becomes in a second sense and to a second degree abstract (it always was abstract in the first and basic sense)” (“Culture” 251). Though Jameson saw in finance capital's second-degree abstraction a correspondence to the “narrativized image fragments of a stereotypical postmodern language” (265), it seems entirely possible today to draw different conclusions. Cf. Shonkwiler and La Berge.

¹² See Ngai. For a sustained examination of capital as the “subject matter” of poetry across the “American century”—repurposed as a period name for crisis rather than any consoling “pax”—see Nealon, *Matter*.

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