

Afromodernism Six Turning Points **Kobena Mercer**



Afromodernism



THE VISUAL ARTS OF AFRICA AND ITS DIASPORAS
A Series Edited by Kellie Jones and Steven Nelson



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Afromodernism Six Turning Points **Kobena Mercer**

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for Araba and Sarah

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Preface

Critique of reality was always modernism's core concern. Among African Americans, the post-Emancipation struggle for self-representation that led W. E. B. Du Bois to exhibit hundreds of photographs of young Black faces in 1900 was not just a prideful assertion of identity. It was an intervention in representational structures that had made the mythic fiction of race socially real. Modernism is mostly a matter of style when the 1920s Harlem Renaissance is our starting point. Indeed, in Aaron Douglas's Afro-deco paintings, the swirling masks depicted by Loïs Mailou Jones, or Richard Bruce Nugent's queer line drawings, we see a turning point in which white America for the first time had to acknowledge Black culture's aesthetic distinctiveness. But when we begin in the 1890s, we gain a more far-reaching definition of modernism—art that calls into question the material and symbolic conditions of modernity.

Through six historical studies, I set out in this book to reframe the twentieth-century arc of modernism in the Black Atlantic world. Covering a broad time period, like a survey, I aim to show how aesthetic form is dynamically responsive to social context. But the book is more of a contra-survey in that instead of encyclopedic coverage it takes a highly selective approach so as to lay out the

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dialogical moves through which Afromodern artists intervened in key moments up to 1970 to alter the meaning of Blackness in twentieth-century art. Examining art and culture through a dialogic lens originated with Mikhail Bakhtin's study of multiple voices that quarrel and clash in the modern novel.¹ As I adapt such a framework to reveal how Black artists talked back to dominant discourses of race—thereby contesting realities put into place by representation—my principal goal is to argue for a method that encompasses *artworks* in all their one-of-a-kind uniqueness, *artists* whose identities are subject to change, and *art worlds* whose institutions also undergo historical change, despite official claims to permanent authority.

Unlike the salons in which European artists met their audience, world's fairs provided the exhibition context in which sculptor Meta Warrick Fuller subverted imperial-era paternalism by mobilizing the counterdiscourse of Ethiopianist iconography like a Trojan horse. Tracking the interventions that, from 1895 to 1921, converted such fairs into a Black counterpublic sphere, chapter 1 sets the scene for understanding highly camouflaged modes of Afromodern dissent. Europe's encounter with African sculpture was the big bang from which modernism's entire universe was born; on that, scholars and curators have long agreed. But from a dialogical point of view, the African American uptake of tribal artifacts within the still-life genre chosen by Malvin Johnson and James Lesesne Wells, among others, reveals the work of mourning for stolen lives—a necessary prelude to the rebirth of New Negro identities, which chapter 2 investigates through the prism of Alain Locke's art criticism. Given that African Americans shared semiotic resources, such as African art, with their Euro-American counterparts, yet directed materials toward divergent semantic ends, chapter 3 shows how the folk art category in the 1930s New Deal era acquired volatile accentuations. Romare Bearden's gouaches, Elizabeth Catlett's prints, Jacob Lawrence's serial narratives, and Richard Wright's incendiary photo book interrupted "national-popular" definitions of folk culture to articulate Black vernacular counterdefinitions that synchronized with anticolonial upsurges in the 1940s. The Caribbean folk religions of Santeria and Vodun led Afro-Cuban artist Wifredo Lam into the ecstatic realm of becoming extolled by surrealists, even though, as we see in chapter 4, his cross-cultural aesthetics of hybridization went unrecognized during the reign of primitivist ideologies, whose either-or dichotomy of tribal versus modern was dethroned only decades later in the 1980s.

Turning points are moments of crisis that irrevocably alter relations among dominant and subordinate identities. Yet so steep were the walls of the art world's racialized asymmetry in the age of West-centric modernity, circa 1860 to 1960, that only in our contemporary era have we come to recognize how deeply our perception of time is shaped by value-loaded narratives that hide behind the

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facade of chronology. Dark tonalities of utmost importance to painter Norman Lewis and photographer Roy DeCarava fell under the radar of formalist criticism, but with the recent turn to Blackness as a matter of ontology—a distinct mode of being—we see in chapter 5 how Afromodern abstraction engaged light and shadow to register the fraught conditions of the atomic age. As the 1960s witnessed the epochal shift from industrial modernity to consumer capitalism, modernism was itself thrown into the multiple crises that shaped the condition of contemporaneity we experience today.² The US Black Arts Movement brought insurgent practices of Black dialogism out into the open that were previously encoded in camouflage; but was the visual secondary to Black literary and performing arts? Interrogating this discrepancy, chapter 6 maps out the exit routes Afromodernists took from the commodity-driven spectacle of consumer society via dialogic operations of collage (Romare Bearden), assemblage (David Hammons, Betye Saar), abstraction (Frank Bowling, Melvin Edwards), and performance (Adrian Piper).

My selection may seem all too selective, I'm sure, although in pushing back against chronological pressures to come fully up to date, my 1970 cutoff point leaves the contemporary open-ended as a site of further inquiry. "Modern and contemporary" is a label seen across museum floor plans, college curricula, and numerous institutional settings. But it is not always a neutral marker of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art since the two terms are sometimes paired and sometimes opposed. Once we acknowledge Black Art History as a unique field of inquiry within the discipline of art history we should recognize that it has flourished in tandem with new artistic practices over the past thirty years. However, modernism remains understudied when the now is our privileged focus, leaving us with no in-depth account of the long twentieth century from which the contemporary arose out of quarrelsome friction among multiply entangled modernities.

Does Black Art History have a problem with the past? Has presentism prevented us from fully perceiving the through lines that make Afromodern aesthetics and politics a distinctive field in modern and contemporary art? In *Afromodernism: Six Turning Points* the prime concern of art history—how the act of giving form to material such as oil and canvas, plaster and bronze, moves us with potent meanings and feelings—meets the epic story of formerly enslaved peoples who created a modernity of their own through cultural practices that transformed a social order dominated by Euro-American whiteness. Understanding the world's reality as human-made and not given by nature, modernists across the globe—in India, Brazil, and Mexico as much as the Afro-Atlantic diaspora—knew that art making no longer meant producing a true likeness or passive reflection of what the eye sees, as in premodern times, but that shape,

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line, and color, among art's elementary building blocks, are active agents in bringing forth new possibilities for our world. As Bearden put it, "Art, it must be remembered, is artifice . . . a creative undertaking, the primary function of which is to add to our existing conception of reality."³

Not every twentieth-century artist thought of themselves as modernist. For some, art was a refuge from the terrors of modernity—with exploitation, war, and endless uncertainty alongside material abundance—while for others the whole point of making art was to transform such iniquitous conditions. As my six studies identify dialogic strategies of ambiguation, hyphenation, and transcoding across practices by African American, Caribbean, and Black British artists, it is the very selectiveness of my individual take on the 1890 to 1970 period that strives for a holistic picture of Afromodernism's world-making interventions as they have shaped our present in all its predicaments and potentialities.

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Robert Farris Thompson coined the term *Afromodernism* in a review essay that responded to the 1991 exhibition *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*. In the face of Euro-America's monopoly on the modern art story, he argued against ideological partitions that set Black artists apart. For Thompson, Black culture's omnipresent influence in twentieth-century art called for a "retelling of Modernism to show how it . . . reveals that 'the Other' is your neighbor—that black and Modernist cultures were inseparable long ago."¹ Over three decades later, as fresh waves of artistic production from Africa, African America, Afro-Brazil, the Caribbean, and Black Europe—all spaces of the Afromodern—have transformed global contemporary art, it is understandable that the present has been the privileged site of inquiry. Examining not just painting and sculpture but the entire realm of visual culture in which representations produce positions from which subjects act on the world, the New Black Art History—so to speak—has made inroads into one of the humanities' most West-centric disciplines.² But do the claims of the present necessarily preclude attention to the past? A brief literature review that reveals the interplay between exhibition making and knowledge production also provides an opportunity to untangle three aspects of art

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historical inquiry, namely, as one scholar puts it, “criticism (that is, saying what art is good or bad, and why), theory (that is, mobilizing ‘first principles’ about the nature of the world, and how it may be understood), and history (that is, accounting for change and development in culture and society).”³

As postcolonial criticism inaugurated the break with monoculturalism, Linda Nochlin responded to a 1982 exhibition with visual analysis that followed Edward Said’s lead in his study of Orientalism.⁴ The formalist valuation of African art that had held sway since the 1920s breathed its last gasp in the 1984 exhibition “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Highlighting the disavowal that refused to see the violence of the decontextualization that brought tribal artifacts into museum collections, Hal Foster drew on Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic insights to explain how primitivist discourse fetishizes otherness.⁵ Thompson objected to the language of self and other, although the poststructuralist theory that introduced these terms understood them not as unchanging identity attributes but as relational positions constructed by discursive and cultural practices of representation. Today the language of “postmodernism” is long gone, yet in Anthony Appiah’s sense that its vociferous debates led to a “ground-clearing” across the arts and humanities, the exhibitions *The Other Story* (1989) in London and *The Decade Show* (1990) in New York marked the moment in which artists hitherto marginalized by othering broke through institutional gatekeeping to set forth art historical agendas of their own.⁶ As political events precipitated a neoliberal world order, *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) at Center Pompidou in Paris was both a megashow of neo-primitivist spectacle and a harbinger of the *biennale* model through which the art world came to be globalized.⁷

Locked out of art’s history by ideologies that consigned it to the timelessly tribal, Africa was brought back into the modern and contemporary by Okwui Enwezor’s curatorial practice. In *Trade Routes: History and Geography*, the second Johannesburg Biennale (1997), African art was reintegrated into global circulation by way of Enwezor’s selection of artists and by virtue of the exhibition’s site in postapartheid South Africa, where it had a rocky reception. Just as the African studio portrait tradition shown in *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (1996) generated new lines of research into modern Africa’s self-fashioning, one observes that Enwezor’s interdisciplinary outlook—featuring art, architecture, photography, literature, and cinema in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* (1999)—demonstrated that in the shift from colonial to postcolonial, art did not passively reflect changing times but actively contributed to a forward-looking sense of future possibility as rapid social transformation made history jump from one plateau to another.⁸

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As the normalization of diversity continued, from Documenta 11 in 2002 to the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, to cite two more of Enwezor's exhibitions, inclusion has become a good norm. Yet precisely because of the strong contrast between today's multiculturalism and the monoculture of the 1860–1960 era when art was modernist (in the chronological sense at least), it is clear that *contemporary* cannot be a value-free designation for where we happen to be “right now.” Indeed, throughout the late twentieth century the ubiquitous *post-* prefix signaled a major change in the way we evaluate relations of past, present, and future. And *post-Black* was no exception. Introduced by curator Thelma Golden in her *Freestyle* (2001) exhibition—which was followed by *Frequency* (2005) and *Flow* (2008)—“post-Black art” addressed a new cohort in painting (Mark Bradford, Rashid Johnson, Julie Mehretu), sculpture (Nick Cave), photography (Leslie Hewitt), collage (Mickalene Thomas), and performance (Dave McKenzie), who all added to the installation, photo-text, and film and video art of the 1990s. Often conflated with *postracial* during the President Barack Obama era, *post-Black* was widely taken up to imply that Black identity was a thing of the past, a move that flattened Golden's nuance when she said her twenty-first-century cohort was “adamant about not being labeled as ‘black’ artists, even though their work was steeped . . . in redefining complex notions of blackness.”⁹

Philosopher Paul C. Taylor underlined such complexity. Observing that in the “post-soul” era of Black popular culture, “prescriptions about respectable black identity give way to diverse forms of acceptable black identity,” he nonetheless noted that the temporal rhetoric of the *post-* distances itself from the recent past yet gives no new name or “independent specification” to the present. Given that “soul culture insisted on the seriousness of authenticity [and] post-soul culture revels in the contingency and diversity of blackness,” studies such as Derek Conrad Murray's *Queering Post-Black Art: Transforming African-American Identity After Civil Rights* (2015) and Nana Adusei-Poku's *Taking Stakes in the Unknown: Tracing Post-Black Art* (2022), which introduces an Afro-German point of view, are valuable works of criticism that demonstrate the capacious conditions that loosened up previously monolithic definitions of Blackness.¹⁰ But registering such change without an in-depth account of its causes leaves us with presentism—a strong valuation of contemporary art that has been shaped by changed circumstances, yet no historical explanation of what caused the change itself. To the extent that we experience the present as an interregnum—a state of affairs Taylor describes comparatively as “neither colonial nor wholly not-colonial, but *post-colonial*”—the term *post-civil rights* would be a better fit than *post-Black* to account for the profound shifts in US society from the long civil rights movement that began in the 1940s, crested in the 1960s, and was subject

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to neoconservative backlash from the 1970s onward, yet such deep historicizing is precisely what was not on offer in the discourse on post-Black art.¹¹

With today's global expansion of art-world infrastructure, from museums and markets to graduate courses and social media, the evaluative function of criticism has largely been folded into "contemporary art history," which treats art of recent times through a theoretical lens. Two highly impactful studies, by Darby English in 2007 and Huey Copeland in 2013, exemplify this development with detailed analyses of 1990s artworks by Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, Fred Wilson, and others, even though these two scholars' methods diverge significantly. English offers a searing critique of "black representational space," taking inventory of the prescriptive demands of Black intellectuals, whether racial uplift in the 1920s or solidarity in the 1960s, from which, he argues, 1990s Black artists broke loose. He then brings close looking front and center in acts of descriptive interpretation that give sustained attention to aesthetic form. Whether situating Walker's silhouettes in relation to nineteenth-century landscape or tracking bodily vulnerability in William Pope.L's performance art, English's "social phenomenology" expands the parameters of Black Art History by restoring aesthetic specificity to works of art previously overshadowed by sociological determinism and biographical reductionism.¹²

To get a measure of how far such an approach reorients first principles, we need to step back to the very origins of the subfield inaugurated by James Porter's *Modern Negro Art* (1943), the first historical survey of African American art. As well as being the groundwork of comprehensive documentation, such scholarship articulated an evaluative voice—explaining why Black art matters—that we also hear in subsequent survey texts such as Cedric Dover's *American Negro Art* (1960) and Elsa Honig Fine's *The Afro-American Artist* (1973). But the discourse in African American art history was embedded in two lines of commonsense thinking we would call *reflectionism*, on the one hand, and *expressivism*, on the other. In the view that Black artists "reflect" racial realities in ways felt to be more accurate and authentic than an outsider's point of view, social context took precedence over formal choices, which thus reduced artworks to mere illustrations of sociohistorical conditions. A converse logic of psychological overemphasis arose when Black art was valued primarily as the outward expression of inner spirit or the sensibility shaped by an artist's life story, which renders the art itself secondary to an ineffable *Geist* assumed to exist prior to its expressive manifestation. To observe axioms like these in Samella Lewis's *Art: African American* (1978) survey text, which followed David C. Driskell's survey exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (1976), is not to detract from field-building interventions that helped overturn art history's monocultural exclusions. Rather, by adjusting first principles to prioritize the artwork's aesthetic agency, English

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deepens our understanding of how inventive formal strategies in Black visual arts practice generate affective and cognitive responses capable of altering the way we see the world.

Equally attentive to form, Copeland takes a different investigative tack. With key artworks in his sights, such as Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992–93) and Renée Green's *Sites of Genealogy* (1991), he asks why such artists turned from image making to address the archive of US slavery through postconceptual strategies in installation art. Copeland's closely argued thesis showed that just as conceptual art registered doubts about the limits of the visual, so the choices of this 1990s cohort reveal that the very existence of enslaved Black beings collapses ontological distinctions between persons and property as something resistant to representational conventions. Recontextualizing the questioning of representation in late 1960s conceptualism, by putting art history into conversation with what political theorist Cedric Robinson called the "Black radical tradition," Copeland has transformed an old set of questions—Did visual images distort the reality of slavery? Which artworks portray the slave's humanity?—to examine instead how "Blackness functions . . . as a concrete index of power relations that reveal the deep structure of modernity's modes of visualization, the despotism on which they rely, and the ways they might be contested in the present."¹³

Responding to urgent questions articulated in art produced within the past thirty years, Copeland's "contemporary art history" reveals the present not as a neutral chronological moment but as a turning point: a time of reckoning in which art institutions can no longer carry on with ideologies of liberal humanism built on the violence of racialized exclusion. Yet our moment is also a time in which modern ideas of progress—a first principle for social movements seeking freedom from oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality—no longer seem available in today's struggles for social justice, even as inequalities worsen worldwide. Taking a cue from questions in contemporary art, I see Kerry James Marshall's *Untitled (Underpainting)* (2018) as a work that casts fresh light on this fraught moment in ways that illuminate what is at stake for the New Black Art History in grasping changing relations of past, present, and future (figure 1.1).

Pictures at an Exhibition

What makes this picture about pictures striking is not that it depicts an observable scene but that it critiques the whiteness of the Western art museum by evoking its opposite—galleries full of Black kids listening with rapt attention to Black adults who gesture animatedly toward paintings. In its maze of pictorial doubling, the slightly off-center symmetry of the two rooms filled with mirroring Black crowds is split down the middle by two vertical strips bearing wall

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Figure 1.1. Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Underpainting)*, 2018. Acrylic and collage on PVC in artist's frame, 83 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 120 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 in. (212.7 x 305.4 x 10.6 cm). © Kerry James Marshall. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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texts. At once figurative and abstract, the modernist abstraction of these Barnett Newman–like “zips” overlays the Old Master technique of preparing a painting in brown wash before color is applied. Where the children embody futurity—upholding Marshall’s bold claim that “nothing can change our expectations of art more than museums loaded with unruly representations of ‘black’ figures”—the archival shell of the beaux arts museum speaks to its eighteenth-century past, in which the encyclopedic museum, aiming to represent the art and culture of all humanity, was built on the violence of colonial plunder.¹⁴ Napoleon founded the Louvre in 1793 with art looted from the church and aristocracy, and such expropriation became merely routine with the wholesale theft of artifacts from colonized peoples.¹⁵ Abolition is the only answer to such imperial legacies, some argue today.¹⁶ But attending closely, noticing how figures in Marshall’s tableau are “listening” to the gesturing protagonists, we begin to see how it stages a *parlement*, a scene of critical dialogue in which to talk about what we see is inextricable from our ability to look carefully at what is in front of our eyes.

Like a parliament in which a nation’s representatives deliberate issues of the day, the space of art’s exhibition can serve as a site of civic virtue—which is to say that in its scene of Black assembly, *Untitled (Underpainting)* does not argue for the museum’s abolition so much as it submits the institution to double voicing. The futurity embodied by the kids speaks to what art might yet become, while their Blackness contests the authority of what art once was. In Bakhtin’s sense that double voicing interrupts authoritative monologic discourse by ambiguating signifiers that now carry more than one meaning, the Enlightenment ideal that saw exhibitions as a public sphere in which citizens deliberate shared concerns has not undergone total negation in Marshall’s hands but has opened instead into a diasporic space of dialogical reconstellation.

“Double consciousness” plays its part. Often the “twoness” W. E. B. Du Bois attributed to “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others” has been emphasized as a split in Black subjectivity without fully heeding Du Bois’s follow-through point. That is, for those (subalterns) behind the “veil”—the system of representational forms that, analogous to Karl Marx’s concept of ideology, mystifies the real relations by which society is constituted—twoness, the pain of not being whole, is offset by the gift of “second sight,” the ability to see and know what remains invisible to the white majority.¹⁷ With its multiple splits and doublings, what is formally distinctive about Marshall’s metapicture is its construction of pictorial space from two points of view, from front and side together. In this work that is *both* abstract and figurative, evoking *both* past and future, it is crucial to notice that we, Marshall’s viewers, cannot see what the gesturing figures point toward. Hidden by ornate frames, what those in the galleries behold remains unseen to us. Like its condition of unfinishedness, the unseen

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is all-important: It urges us to envisage what is yet to come, what new possibilities may yet arise when our encounter with art interrupts commonplace ways of seeing. To which I would add that Marshall's sidelong angle has another resonance as well—it calls to mind Krista Thompson's argument that "the sidelong glance . . . characterizes a reoriented perception" on the part of Black diaspora subjects whose distinctive ways of seeing counter the ocular-centric privilege of vision in the West, where art gained philosophical standing on the basis of equations of seeing and knowing.¹⁸

Defining diaspora not just as the spaces into which enslaved Africans were forcibly dispersed by involuntary migration but as the network of cultural practices whereby "people of African descent came to see, understand, and represent themselves as connected to each other," Krista Thompson reviews six decades of scholarship to highlight two distinctive features of our field.¹⁹ Studying not just studio art but sacred and performing arts in Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean settings, the ethnographic model established by Robert Farris Thompson, Sidney Mintz, and Richard and Sally Price, among others, foregrounded visual evidence of Fon, Kongo, Yoruba, and other African retentions that survived the Middle Passage and combined with elements of European origin in the diasporic aesthetics of creolization and syncretism.²⁰ Whereas postcolonial studies approached such cross-cultural formations textually, the concept of transculturation put forward by Fernando Ortiz in 1940s Cuba was grounded in Caribbean histories of plantation slavery.²¹ With the performative turn in contemporary studies that builds on phenomenology to examine affective interaction in art, Krista Thompson also shows how the study of visibility has transformed ethnographic approaches. As the New Black Art History attends to the role of sight in producing racialized social relations, Fanon's first-person account of the oppressive experience of being constantly judged under the colonial gaze has led scholars to uncover resistance to such surveillance in practices such as "the right to opacity," discussed by Martinican writer Édouard Glissant.²²

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) was the catalyst that made the study of diaspora central to today's critical humanities.²³ With his postessentialist conception of Black identity as not given by birth nor imposed by the powerful but made and remade through journeys of travel and migration unbounded by nation-state borders, Gilroy took the image of the ship as emblematic of Black diaspora culture's circulatory mobility. Yet in the three decades since this model catalyzed new lines of inquiry, a paradigm shift has pivoted from culture to ontology.²⁴ Dwelling in the slave ship's hold, Fred Moten probes the "fugitivity" by which Black life resists capture by systems of domination.²⁵ Showing that the legal emancipation of African Americans in 1863 did not abolish racialized domination, for the hold and plantation led

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to the ghetto, then the prison-industrial complex, as further sites of captivity, Saidiya Hartman plumbs the archive to examine liminal conditions in which Black being can be said to “exist between the ‘no longer’ enslaved and the ‘not yet’ free.”²⁶

When we are faced with these life-and-death questions, modernism seems beside the point. But there is a revealing cleft in today’s time of reckoning to which Marshall’s painting also speaks. Where the coloniality of the museum glorifies what Jamaican cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter called the “over-representation of Man”—the liberal humanist worldview built not just on the slave’s representational othering but on the “social death” that transmitted such a dishonored condition across time—does the equation between slaveness and Blackness have historicity, or is it an ontological condition that will never change?²⁷ The pessimism in Afro-pessimism inclines toward the latter. Afro-pessimism’s core concept of anti-Blackness importantly shows how value (economic, political, libidinal) is produced through processes of racialized exclusion, yet futurity is rendered moot when the long-range continuum between past and present leads only to the eternal now in which moments of Black freedom will inevitably be snatched away by the unending violence of an anti-Black world.²⁸ Scholarship such as Simon Gikandi’s *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011) confirms that art indeed became modern—that is to say, autonomous from church and state—as a result, in part, of the wealth that eighteenth-century slave owners put into art patronage.²⁹ But where slavery and colonialism are today recognized as foundational to Western modernity, which takes us to the *longue durée* of the 1490s to 1800s, it must be said that modernism in art circa 1860 to 1960 is exactly what has gone missing from critical inquiry when contemporary art history has eyes only for super-recent art that is interpreted through an Afro-pessimist lens in which, so often, what we find is theory chasing theory.

Activists, scholars, and curators calling for the decolonization of the museum have, like the unruly figures in *Untitled (Underpainting)*, shaken up our expectations by “undisciplining” hitherto-siloed institutional fields.³⁰ Yet even as Euro-American narratives have been decentered and provincialized, the depth of scholarly attention given to Afro-contemporaneity far outweighs that given to Afromodernity. To be sure, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black artists are well represented in studies by Renée Ater, Kirsten Pai Buick, Celeste-Marie Bernier, and Anna Arabindan-Kesson.³¹ Mid-twentieth-century Black modernism is examined in monographs by Jacqueline Francis, Patricia Hills, and Lowery Stokes Sims.³² And one could not ask for a better guide than the field’s most eminent scholar, Richard J. Powell, whose indispensable survey texts and monographs, like his curation of *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism* (1989), *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (1997), and *Archibald*

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Motley: Jazz Age Modernist (2014), span the twentieth century. Leaning heavily into these works in the chapters that follow, which synthesize insights I have drawn on throughout my own scholarly journey, I nonetheless want to touch on one last feature of the New Black Art History to further underline my question of why modernism in the Afro-Atlantic world remains understudied relative to the theoretically sophisticated scholarship bestowed on the “now.”

Late 1960s and early 1970s abstraction by Frank Bowling, Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, Senga Nengudi, Howardena Pindell, and Alma Thomas, among others, has become a focal point in ways that reveal that art history is itself susceptible to historical transformation. Where Kellie Jones’s trajectory encapsulates the dialectic between exhibition making and knowledge production that has been so generative to the growth of our field, her recovery of practices that were illegible under Euro-American eyes began with her exhibition *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (2006) and led to the West Coast focus of her subsequent exhibition *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980* (2011) as well as her study *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (2017).³³ Such scholarship has completely reframed the postwar break with the high-modernist ideal of the transcendent art object. Instead of merely aiming to vindicate previously overlooked artists, or supplement the canonical story of abstraction, once regarded as modernism’s ultimate achievement, Jones has single-handedly opened new research horizons on art of the 1960s by tracking a distinct formation in African American modernism. We can now more clearly see how the participatory ethos of postminimalist sculpture, for instance, synchronized with Black performance traditions such as dance in the multidirectional abstraction of Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger, to take just one example.

Susan Cahan’s granular attention to decision-making in 1960s art museum responses to Black Power examines the same archival material as Darby English, even as the contextual depth of the former tends to highlight limitations in the latter’s “strategic formalism.”³⁴ If historical survey exhibitions such as *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the 1960s* (2014), cocurated by Jones, and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power, 1963–1983* (2017) have done more than confirm that the upheavals of the 1960s brought the institutional authority of monocultural modernism to a breaking point—activating ruptures that have opened spaces of global Afro-contemporaneity—then it is precisely the decentering of the old master narratives by the New Black Art History that has made the past sixty-odd years freshly available for inquiry.³⁵ My outline of the growth of our field over the past three decades is far from definitive but surely qualifies “the problem of the visual” pinpointed in 1990 by Michele Wallace, who noted the priority accorded to literature and sociology in Black cultural criticism, since

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today it is visual arts research that now leads the way in Black studies.³⁶ But for this very reason shouldn't first principles take us farther than the 1960s so as to examine the world-making forces and pressures that gave rise to modernism as a worldwide phenomenon from the 1860s onward?

In chapter 6, I argue that the 1960s saw the collapse of "solid modernity" and the emergence of "liquid modernity," to borrow from social theorist Zygmunt Bauman.³⁷ But the key issue at this point is historiography. For those who adhere to progress narratives that favor linear models of time, the past is "behind" us, whereas historian Sheila Rowbotham says the past is "before" us in the sense that when critical research actively changes the way the past is understood, it also alters our perception of future possibilities, bringing new options for action and imagination into the present.³⁸ Such unruly interruption was amplified in *Blackness in Abstraction* (2016), in which curator Adrienne Edwards took the phenomenology of black color as a starting point to rewrite the entire story of the monochrome in twentieth-century abstraction. Assembled in the very moment when, in 2015, X-rays revealed racist graffiti beneath Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915), Edwards's exhibition confirms Blackness as inherent to the global modernist story even as its impact in shaking up established narratives of abstraction also casts doubt on ahistoricisms that view Black life as enduring only as an unchanging ontology.³⁹

Rather than understudied per se, then, it may be more apt to say deeper research on Black modernism is yet to come. Studying art over large chunks of time is foundational to art history since only with the *longue durée* do we come to see how aesthetic form acquires a life of its own, which is what enables works of art to outlive the moment in which they were created. Surveys undertake such work, whether Tate Liverpool's exhibition *Afro-Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* (2010) or the three editions of Richard Powell's survey text *Black Art* (2021, 2002, and 1997).⁴⁰ But with the need for comprehensive coverage of hitherto-neglected histories, we find that modernism tends to be subsumed into an overall effort to redress previous omissions. Survey exhibitions such as *Caribbean Art at the Crossroads of the World* (2012); *Fragments of Epic Memory* (2021), mapping the Caribbean diaspora from an Afro-Canadian vantage; and *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (2021) in Brazil are game-changing interventions but mix modern and contemporary rather than distinguishing them.⁴¹ Indeed, the narrative template built into the survey genre remains inherently problematic: Whereas the present was regarded as a moment of decline in eighteenth-century texts that urged a restoration of glorious antiquity, the teleological drive toward a fixed end point is inverted when the present-day visibility won by twentieth-century Black artists is narrated as the inexorable overcoming of prejudicial barriers.⁴²

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In the form of a contra-survey, my project addresses the long arc of Afromodernism's overall formation by showing how period-specific aesthetic strategies served to interrupt the asymmetrical balance of forces among dominant and subordinate identities in the racialized formation of modern life. Such a dialogic approach fits well with Stuart Hall's cultural studies account of the interplay between modernism and modernity. As the following section describes how African American artists formulated their intentions to contest the relations of race and representation dominant in each era, I contrast the ways in which Hall and T. J. Clark account for change in culture and society in order to reframe Afromodernism's emergence in the Black Atlantic diaspora across the long twentieth century.

Contesting Representation: What Makes Art Modern?

"It is the privilege of the oppressor to depict the oppressed," wrote Romare Bearden in 1946. Addressing the conditions of racialized asymmetry under which African American art developed, Bearden implicitly pointed toward its dialogic character. He argued that the nineteenth-century "picture of the Negro [as] a shiftless, dim-witted buffoon" was "one of the means of keeping the Negro in his dark corner"; his point that "the portrayal of the Negro in visual art was but another manifestation of the main cultural pattern," which was "disseminated . . . by the minstrel shows," meant that *countering someone else's prior representation of Black life* was where Black artists had to begin as they formulated critical intentions for their practice.⁴³

Where artistic intentionality is traditionally thought of in terms of a lone individual who stands in front of a blank canvas, answering to inner sources of inspiration or else observing the world as if through a window, such a view is deeply rooted in the classical theory of art that posited an observing subject who stands over against an observed world with the aim of creating mimesis—a one-to-one correspondence between representation and reality. In contrast, Bearden stood full square with the twentieth-century break from mimesis when, in his 1969 monograph *The Painter's Mind: A Study of the Relations Between Structure and Space in Painting*, coauthored with fellow artist Carl Holty, the artists stated, "When we think of an artist's earliest days, Andre Malraux's comments seem to come the closest to the truth: the young artist, he said, is attracted to art through art—that is, he is inspired by seeing pictures, good or bad. It is doubtful that he is inspired at first by some attractive aspect in nature—the ubiquitous sunset, for example—until he has seen a painted picture of it by some artist."⁴⁴ Bearden summed up his view in a 1967 interview: "As Malraux says, 'Art is made from art.'"⁴⁵ His outlook thus encapsulated Malraux's claim that "what makes an

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artist is that in his youth he was more deeply moved by his visual experience of works of art than by that of the things they represent—and perhaps of Nature as a whole,” which itself echoed the shift from classical to modern understandings of art proposed by Heinrich Wölfflin when he stated, “The effect of picture on picture . . . is much more important than what comes directly from the imitation of nature.”⁴⁶

Few have doubted that Édouard Manet produced a likeness of the white female model who looks out directly at the viewer in *Olympia* (1863). But what shocked the audience at the 1865 Paris Salon was the subversive act of differentiation whereby Manet knowingly referred to highly esteemed antecedents, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1534) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’s *Odalisque with a Slave* (1839–40) among them, while substituting the demure female nude with an insolently staring prostitute defiantly withholding her sex as she looks back at the viewer. In the substitution and differentiation whereby Manet “produced works in a self-conscious relationship to earlier paintings,” as Michel Foucault observed, his modernism announced an epistemological break with mimesis.⁴⁷ Moving toward a relational model of signification in which marks, lines, and colors drawn or painted on a surface, or shapes sculpted in wood or bronze, are signifiers that construct meaning and value—that is, signifieds—not because they correspond to real-world referents in one-to-one likeness or verisimilitude but because signifying practices produce *differentiation* from antecedents in art and culture, modernism went hand in hand with the structuralist approach introduced to linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure. Against reflectionist models of language that, like the window or mirror analogy in classical theories of art, assumed a dualistic ontology in which reality and representation exist on two separate planes, Saussure emphasized that the generative process of differentiation—semiosis—is unending: New meanings are constantly being created in the sphere of cultural production. But what brings the signifying chain to the point of closure—thereby fixing signifier and signified into signs that carry agreed-on meaning—is the shared system of social conventions that puts language into action, which is discourse.⁴⁸

With his notion of *heteroglossia*, or the many-voiced-ness of language—“the inner stratification of a single national language into social dialects, group mannerisms, professional jargons [and] the languages of authorities”—Bakhtin countered formalist interpretations of Saussure by stressing the “situatedness of speech,” whereby “every concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it is directed always, so to speak, already spoken about, argued over.”⁴⁹ As Jean-Michel Basquiat’s *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)* (1982) takes aim at Manet’s foundational modernism, it confirms the view that “art is made from art,” while it is exactly the friction of its directedness toward an antecedent that

Figure 1.2. Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)*, 1982. Acrylic and crayon on canvas and paper, 48¼ x 30 in. (122.5 x 76 cm). Private collection. © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York.



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Figure 1.3. Édouard Manet, *La négresse* (Portrait of Laure), 1863. Oil on canvas, 24 × 19½ in. (61 × 50 cm). Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin. © Pinacoteca Angelli, Turin.



drives the furious expressive power Basquiat imparts to line, shape, and color on a canvas mounted on a cruciform stretcher (figure 1.2). Scribbled in oil stick crayon, the figure, enveloped in a “blaze of red paint that drips like blood,” as critic bell hooks wrote, is an Afromodern parody whose highly charged affect directs its differentiation toward someone else’s prior depiction of Black life in a way that subjects the authoritative status of that antecedent to mockery as well as revision.⁵⁰ As this image is one half of a two-part artwork—with *Three Quarters of Olympia Minus the Servant* (1982) as its complement—Basquiat’s separation of the two figures in Manet’s composition questions the dichotomous encoding of racial difference.⁵¹ Unlike pastiche, which pays homage to an

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antecedent, as the academic doctrine of *imitatio* taught artists to do in the eighteenth century, parody is up front in the antagonism with which its directedness produces repetition-with-a-difference. *Olympia*'s canonical standing in narratives of European modernism made it the target of many twentieth-century parodies, yet what distinguishes Basquiat's neo-expressionist fury is that "the relation of signification itself has been critiqued by a black act of (re)doubling," as Henry Louis Gates Jr. says of *signifyin'*—a dialogic practice deeply embedded in African American and Afro-diasporic societies in which expressive cultural resistance often takes the form of aesthetic doubling.⁵²

Addressing the figure of the Black servant, Basquiat's critique was directed specifically at the sustained indifference on the part of generations of critics and scholars who glorified the "shock of the new" in Manet's art, yet consistently ignored the Blackness that is doubly present in *Olympia* as a color that heightens white flesh and that signifies race in the social reality of the 1860s. Interpreting the prostitute's nudity as a sign of class subordination, T. J. Clark's 1984 study concluded that "the Negress . . . meant nothing" since "the naked body . . . did its own narrating."⁵³ While feminist scholars identified Victorine Meurent as the model for Manet's nude, not until the 1990s was Laure, the West Indian maid-servant, identified in archival research by Griselda Pollock.⁵⁴ Clark's social history of art, attentive to the unequal social relationships in which aesthetic form is embedded, has been highly influential, yet when he acknowledged his "blindness" to race in a subsequent edition, he dug an even deeper hole for himself by reading Laure's Blackness as "the sign of servitude still imagined as existing outside the circuit of money—a 'natural' subjection, in other words, as opposed to *Olympia*'s 'unnatural' one."⁵⁵ Intervening two decades later, African American scholar and curator Denise Murrell uncovered three dedicated portrayals of Laure, which reveals that she held more than a passing interest for Manet. Loose brushwork in *La négresse (Portrait of Laure)* (1863) suggests an unfinished sketch (figure 1.3). Contrary to Clark's comments, Laure's status as a paid worker is indicated by her madras head wrap and her white cotton dress, elements of attire seen in mid-nineteenth-century depictions of Antillean women servants, who were often glimpsed in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. As Murrell's research makes clear, their presence in the imperial metropolis served to signify the colonial origins of the wealth enjoyed by many bourgeois families.⁵⁶

Images behave differently from words, but when Bakhtin defines double-voiced discourse as directed "both toward the referential object . . . and . . . toward someone else's speech," we gain a handle on the real-world likeness of *La négresse* even as the individuality in Manet's portrait of Laure also depends on the "differencing," as Pollock calls it, whereby stock-in-trade signifiers of racial subordination, such as the Black servant's contented smile, are notably absent.⁵⁷

Double voicing is of a different order in Basquiat's clapback. Yet in signifying on Manet through a dialogic act that produces a "relation of difference inscribed within a relation of identity," as Gates puts it, *Untitled (Maid from Olympia)* clearly does not "reflect" a reality Basquiat observed in front of his canvas.⁵⁸ "Art from art" makes us aware that when we use "reflection" to discuss opaque painted surfaces, it is really shorthand for the reality effect created by signifying practices.⁵⁹ Relatedly, and to clarify my earlier point about expressivism in historiography, one should say that Basquiat's style indeed activates potent emotions, but instead of the psychological depth model in which expression emanates only from the artist's inner feeling, it is more accurate to say that in the exchange between feelings intended and feelings received, we are dealing with a two-part interaction, a dialogical relation between artist and viewer.

Black Art History does not ordinarily start with Manet's Paris of the 1860s. Yet in my dialogic pairing with Basquiat, it is vital for us to notice that the "black act of (re)doubling" with which Gates defines signifying does not disrupt the sign systems of the dominant culture through an oppositional logic. Rather, like the "confrontation between Afro-American culture and American culture," it acts instead through a logic of immanent critique, mobilizing tropes that "luxuriate in the chaos of ambiguity" by playing with *the same signifiers* as the master code but producing entirely different meanings.⁶⁰ Adjacent to Robert Farris Thompson, I focus on Afromodernism as a diasporic phenomenon although my focus is on the dialogic strategies that contested Euro-American antecedents whenever Black artists intervened in the representational space of "someone else's" view of race.⁶¹ Such contestation drew on African antecedents cross-culturally (in creolization, hybridization, syncretism, and other forms of transculturation), but rather than seek ethnic origin as a guarantee of aesthetic value, a Bakhtinian approach is geared toward the *differencing* that takes place on the social, discursive, and cultural terrain that asymmetrical identities share in common—in short, the symbolic order of social life. As political theorist Michael Hanchard puts it, describing racialized asymmetries within the symbolic order, "Afromodernity is at once a part of and apart from the parameters of Western modernities."⁶²

Racial Formations of Modernism and Modernity

Modernity meant "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, that half of art of which the other is the eternal and immutable," said Charles Baudelaire, who championed Manet as an observer of ever-changing urban life.⁶³ Yet as we step back to gain a wider view of this era—when the Civil War (1861–65) tore the United States apart; when slavery flourished in Cuba, Brazil, and Latin America as a whole; and as the Scramble for Africa got underway with the Berlin

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Conference of 1884—the blindness to race in Clark’s Marxist historiography is truly shocking. Like other left and liberal scholars who took their lead from Baudelaire in defining modernism as dissent from the dire realities created by mid-nineteenth-century capitalism, Clark *did not see* the violence of racialization in which slavery and industrialization undergirded a worldwide system of imperial domination, whose hegemonic centers began to fall apart only with decolonization after 1945.

In 1863 Edmonia Lewis watched Colonel Robert Gould Shaw lead the colored Fifty-Fourth Regiment out of Boston to join the Civil War. Having sculpted Shaw’s portrait, she sailed for Rome in 1865, age twenty-one, where she produced *Forever Free* (1867), the first artwork by an African American artist to commemorate the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the 1865 Thirteenth Amendment, which ratified the abolition of slavery. Living in Europe up to her death in 1907, Lewis shared the same planet as Manet, but they inhabited entirely different social worlds. The neoclassical style of her white marble sculpture embodied all that modernists opposed, yet Lewis chose exile precisely because white America’s perception of her worth as an artist was shaped by centuries-long representations in which Black life “meant nothing,” as Clark said of Laure. Just as landscape painter Robert Scott Duncanson escaped the Civil War by traveling through Scotland and England in the 1860s, and Philadelphia-born Henry Ossawa Tanner settled permanently in Paris in 1894, Lewis’s Black Atlantic journey reveals the *racial formation* of modernity among identities asymmetrically positioned in the world of modern art as Black or white.⁶⁴

When Clark begins from the view that “any social order consists primarily of classifications” that are “established most potently by representations or systems of signs,” Stuart Hall would readily agree that representation, far from being a second-order phenomenon that only “reflects” realities already formed by social, political, or economic practices, is constitutive in producing the commonly accepted understanding of reality needed, as Clark says, “to enable the production of material life—to fix an order in which men and women can make their living.”⁶⁵ But to Clark’s point that “society is a battlefield of representations” in which art has the potential to shake up commonplace perceptions of reality, we must add that Black lives were themselves the very battlefield on which America’s mid-nineteenth-century modernization process was built. The violent spectacle of lynching that enabled working-class whites to bond into “imagined community” followed from the demise of plantation slavery’s violent regime of unfree labor.⁶⁶

It is of utmost importance to recognize that Black art was never a self-evident category. The otherness ascribed to Black life meant self-representation was something African American artists had to struggle for. Only in the 1920s did

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Black artists begin to take Black life as their primary subject matter. Discussing the “limited opportunity [that] held the Negro artist back,” Alain Locke said of Duncanson, Lewis, and Tanner that “our pioneer artists could succeed only as exceptional individuals, detached from the group, and, as a result, they eschewed the Negro subject,” adding, “Their only chance either for training or extensive recognition, was to go abroad.” Arguing in his *New Negro* anthology of 1925 that such nineteenth-century artists left the Harlem Renaissance generation without “the guidance of a distinctive tradition to focus and direct their talents,” Locke said that “there have been notably successful Negro artists, but no development of a Negro school of art” because “Negro artists have for too long . . . shared the conventional blindness of the Caucasian eye with respect to the racial material at their immediate disposal.”⁶⁷ He thus stressed the formative role of images in positioning racially subaltern social subjects who initially perceived Blackness through the representational lens of a white gaze.

“Modernism is a tricky word when used in association with the Harlem Renaissance,” remarked Jeffrey C. Stewart in the 1997 survey cocurated by Richard Powell and David A. Bailey. Alerting us to the all-important distinction between modernity and modernism, he stated, “Modernism most often refers to the rebellious artistic and literary movements of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Europeans and white Americans, whose sense of alienation from the rise of the corporate industrialized state was reflected in the breakdown of the representational and the familiar in literature and art. But modernism is also linked to more sociological processes, usually termed modernity: social forces such as industrialization, urbanization, secularization, commodification, and technological innovations such as photography and film that reflect the rise of the machine age.”⁶⁸

With modernity understood as the material and symbolic envelope of economic, political, and social processes to which modernism was culture’s answering response, Hall led the way to the multiple modernities thesis. Breaking with the narrative that Marxists like Clark adhered to, in which Europe’s Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution unfold in a story told from a unitary center that equated modernization with Westernization, Hall and others demonstrated that sociohistorical actors who were indeed subordinated economically and politically nonetheless exerted agency in what they appropriated and what they rejected in the cross-cultural encounter.⁶⁹ As the mutual entanglement of contradictory forces created multiple sites of resistance, antagonism, and negotiation, we find that where modern art took off in India and Mexico, for instance, in tandem with anticolonial nation-building or revolutionary politics, Afromodernism’s emergence as a diasporic formation was conditioned at the turn of the twentieth century by structural inequalities

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between Black and white identities that shared representational space in the symbolic realm of culture but did so asymmetrically.⁷⁰

It would be a case of pseudomorphosis to suggest that the rhombus shape carries equal aesthetic value as it recurs across Pablo Picasso's *Nude with Raised Arms (The Dancer of Avignon)* (1907) (figure 1.4), the Fang reliquary figure that undoubtedly inspired it (figure 1.5), and Josephine Baker's knock-knees as she danced the Charleston at the Folies Bergère in 1926 (figure 1.6). It would be a poor formalist indeed who did not take account of the incommensurable contexts in which these disparate elements of cross-cultural traffic met the twentieth-century public. However, with Hall's understanding of modernity as a *formation process* shaped by interactions among the relatively independent spheres of economic, social, political, and cultural activity, we can grasp aesthetic form as responsive to such material and symbolic conditions without necessarily being determined by them. Furthermore, emphasizing "the construction of cultural and social identities as part of the formation process," Hall shows that representation was indispensable to "the construction of symbolic boundaries which define who does *not* belong or is excluded."⁷¹ Such a cultural studies approach begins to reveal that just as Picasso and other European and American modernists called representation into question, so New Negro artists in 1920s Harlem also problematized representational forms, but "representation" carried a completely different set of meanings for African Americans, whose modernism was questioning social realities of racialization in one of the world's most modernized societies, the United States.

Harlem Modern: Undoing Double Binds of Race and Representation

In the timeline between the 1860s Emancipation and the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, African Americans found very little that was "eternal or immutable" about the conflictual conditions of modernity into which they arrived. Formulating his intention to unfix oppressive images of Black alterity that had spread during the era of Jim Crow segregation, Chicago artist Archibald Motley Jr. declared in his 1929 mission statement, "For many years artists have depicted the Negro as the ignorant, southern 'darky,' to be portrayed on canvas as something humorous." Setting out to refute such antecedent representations of Blackness, Motley announced an Afromodern break with the past when he avowed, "This material is obsolete."⁷²

What distinguished Black modernists from their Euro-American counterparts were asymmetries at the level of both *access* and *contestation*, two terms Hall pairs analytically in his structural account of art's ability to challenge representational forms that sustain the social order. The two principal concerns of

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Black artistic production, he argues, have been, “first, the question of *access* to the rights of representation by black artists [and] secondly, the *contestation* of the marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images of blacks.”⁷³ Unlike social histories of art in which context determines art’s meaning, or formal art histories that detach aesthetics from sociohistorical conditions, Hall’s articulatory model asks us to see how the iconographic choices Black artists made to challenge representational conventions of race were not shaped by individual biography alone but by unequal access to training, patronage, and exhibition opportunities that, along with audience reception, fed back into the formulation of artistic intentions. And here dialogic methods deliver a fresh approach to Darby English’s all-important question: What makes Black artwork Black?⁷⁴

Too seldom have previous studies noted the divergence whereby Euro-American modern art was narrated, by the 1920s, as a freedom story in which the nineteenth-century arrival of the camera liberated painting to inquire into line, shape, and color as the building blocks of art, whereas 1920s New Negro artists were doubly burdened with the responsibility of counteracting stereotypes at the same time as portraying Afro-America anew. Instead of making art with unconditional freedom, Black artists faced competing demands from white patrons, such as the philanthropic Harmon Foundation, which held annual exhibitions in New York from 1925 to 1933, and intellectuals in the Black elite, such as Du Bois, who convened a 1926 symposium in *The Crisis* that asked, “What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted?”⁷⁵ For Euro-American moderns who questioned pictorial conventions, “representation” meant a practice of *depiction*, whereas for Black artists the term doubled up to also imply a practice of *delegation* whenever the Black presence in public life was deemed, whether by Black audiences or white, to be representative of Black life.

In the pre-Emancipation 1850s, Frederick Douglass was referred to as “the representative colored man of the United States.” Such rhetoric acted “in a relation of part for whole,” as Gates explains, and this metonymic relation reappeared when Booker T. Washington was introduced at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition as “a representative of the Negro enterprise and the Negro civilization.”⁷⁶ The *one-who-stands-for-many* metonym had nothing to do with Black people actually choosing delegates but everything to do with the economy of scarcity in race and representation such that Black voices gained access to the public sphere only *one at a time*. Only by virtue of one single voice gaining access to the right to representation was such a voice deemed “representative” of the many whose exclusion from the polity was thereby legitimated, naturalized, and reproduced as a result.

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Figure 1.4. Pablo Picasso, *Nude with Raised Arms (The Dancer of Avignon)*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 39 × 60 in. (100 × 150 cm). Private collection. © 2027 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 1.5. Kota reliquary guardian figure (*Mbulu Ngulu*), late nineteenth century, Gabon. Carved wood, copper, and brass, 20¼ × 8¾ × 2¼ in. (51.4 × 22.2 × 5.7 cm). Brooklyn Museum, New York. 1989.51.2.



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Figure 1.6. Josephine Baker dances the Charleston at the Folies Bergère, Paris, ca. 1926. Silver gelatin print, 10½ × 7¾ in. (27.3 × 20 cm). Photo: Stanislaw Ostrorog. Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC. 2016.135.2.



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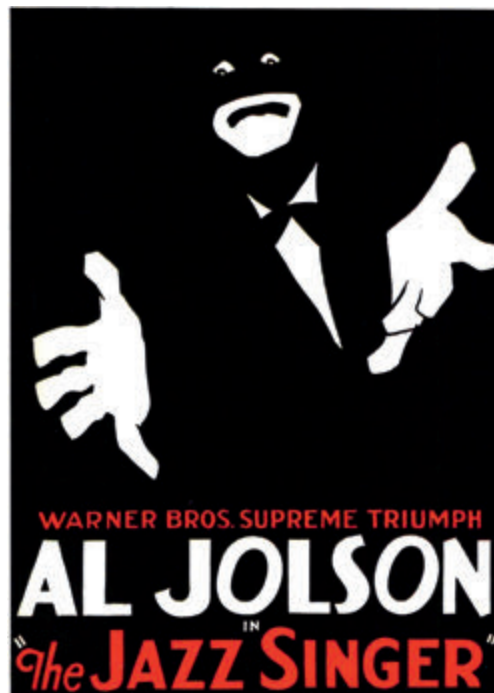
Being judged on the basis of visual type compounded the issue of representativeness. “Some people are fond of passing judgement upon the progress of a race based on their observation of that class of negroes who are found in the police courts,” said Washington in 1908, to which he added, “I ask the American people to judge my race as other races are judged, that is by their best representatives and not by their worst representatives.”⁷⁷ When Locke reiterated such worries—“Ultimately a people is judged by its capacity to contribute to culture,” he said in a 1922 talk to students, adding that “a group that expects to be judged by its best must live up to its best so that it may be truly representative”—class was indeed integral to Black elite anxieties over “the public face of the race,” as Gates calls it.⁷⁸ But in each instance what we need to notice is the trans-individual recurrence of this one-for-the-many metonym—it reveals what Foucault called a “discursive regularity,” a governing convention in structures of race and representation that won consent among dominant and subordinate identities.⁷⁹ As well as disciplining Black representational space, the delegatory equation produced a double bind. On the one hand, since no single voice could possibly speak on behalf of millions, the metonymic conflation of depiction and delegation upheld the white-majority view that typified Black identity as an undifferentiated monolith. On the other hand, choosing not to speak was never an option, since not taking scarce opportunities for a public voice would silence Black interests further still.

As if the struggle for access was not enough, a ghastly surprise lay in wait for 1920s Afromoderns at the level of contestation. As minstrelsy modernized from vaudeville to cinema, Warner Brothers studio produced graphic art to market *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first sync-sound movie, which showed that modernism’s anti-mimetic break had *already been rehearsed* in the visual codes of Jim Crow racism (figure 1.7). Once depiction had been freed from producing a likeness, Euro-American artists plunged into elongation, distortion, and other modes of stylistic disfigurement that upended traditional canons of beauty. Eliminating extraneous details, the 1927 poster pressed such stylistic moves into the service of white supremacist othering—with only four white shapes needed to convey the open mouth of the blackface singer in gloves and tuxedo, plus two white dots to denote the eyes, racial difference was encoded in optical terms as absolute as the alterity of black ink and white paper.

White American artists, however, could employ modernist stylization in an affirmative response to Black vernacular expression without being constrained by expectations that their art should be representative of an entire demographic. In animated strokes, George Luks’s *Cake Walk* (1907) was a monotype print that brought modernist graphic simplification to a “decidedly futurist treatment of a high-stepping black couple,” as Richard Powell notes (figure 1.8). Stridently

Figure 1.7. Movie poster for *The Jazz Singer*, 1927.

Figure 1.8. George Luks, *Cake Walk*, 1907. Monotype on paper, 5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.78 cm). Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware. Gift of Helen Farr Sloan.



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antinaturalistic, Luks accomplished a shared goal with Motley in disrupting stereotypes. His quasi-abstract smudges evoke the “choreographed promenade that mocked the manners of well-to-do whites,” for the cakewalk originated in cross-cultural milieus such as New Orleans where Caribbean dance forms such as the calinda mingled with the banjos played by enslaved African Americans that later gave birth to jazz.⁸⁰ Luks had worked in vaudeville before he joined Robert Henri in the Ashcan school of American realists, but even as the critical differencing of his 1907 print countered minstrelsy’s iconic code, his white identity as the son of German and Polish immigrants meant Luks was never received as representative of his ethnicity. In contrast, when Motley and other Black artists took inspiration from jazz—which evolved in the 1890s as Afro-America’s sonic response to “the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent”—the *social* relations of representation-as-delegation, in which one text, whether painting, print, or poem, was held to stand for all, were in conflict with the *formal* relations of representation-as-depiction, in which shapes and forms in paint or bronze come to be charged with different meanings and feelings. In the dilemma whereby Black artists were expected to speak *against* representational othering, while also expected to speak *for* Black people as if they were delegatory representatives, what made these artists “Black” was the structural double bind of race and representation they faced. In this situation, *Afromodern strategies turned to double voicing to undo such double binds*.

If opportunities come only one at a time, how would you reconcile competing demands in one single image? New Negro artists navigated this dilemma through three strategic choices: realism, idealism, and vernacular expression. Stripping away disfiguring exaggerations, realism was the mainstay in portraiture by Laura Wheeler Waring and Samuel Joseph Brown Jr. and underlay lively street scenes by Allan Rohan Crite. Brown was based in Philadelphia, where he taught art in high schools after initially training at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art between 1926 and 1930. His self-portrait in *Smoking My Pipe* (1934) repudiates typification with calm, self-assertive individuality (figure 1.9). In the unforgiving medium of watercolor, which allows no second chances, Brown’s painterly skill imbues skin tones with clarity and warmth as his handling of light and shadow generates subtle tonal variations whose blue, mauve, and brown colors radiate against the grain of the paper support. The respectability connoted by his suit, bow tie, and pipe combines with the intimacy of a domestic interior and Brown’s forthright facial expression—looking directly out—to refute the paths of poverty-stricken portrayals of African American life. Like the homey ambience that invites empathy in Waring’s portrait of *Anna Washington Derry* (1927), realism and naturalism carried a true-to-life emphasis that imparted dignity to the Black image, even though, in countering the

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stereotypical, realism often seemed to make “dignity” the standardized signified of Black portraiture.

Idealism seemed to offer a way of reconciling conflicting demands by depicting Black life in an elevated—even romanticized—manner. In smoothly contoured white marble, *Untitled (Young Black Man)* (n.d.), by Augusta Savage, depicts a youth whose loosely buttoned plaid shirt suggests a humble background. In setting the bust atop a socle plinth and appropriating the visual language of Greco-Roman classicism, Savage conferred nobility on the boy. *Congolais* (1931), by Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, seems a world away from such European influences in its evocation of Africa, yet similarly idealizes an emblematic solo figure as it responds to the task of producing a representative portrayal in which one stands for many (figure 1.10). The Maasai beaded hair adornment, of East African origin, on a figure named for the Central African nation of the Congo creates an allegorical rather than realistic portrait, even as the cherrywood Prophet chose as her material quietly calls to mind African carving traditions. Prophet’s twelve years in Paris, following her early studies at Rhode Island School of Design and her decade teaching at Spelman College in Atlanta from 1934 to 1944, gave her opportunities to engage with African art, even though *Congolais*’s androgynous face carries a hint of self-portraiture also apparent in the more neoclassical marble bust Prophet sculpted in *Silence* (ca. 1920s). Countering caricatured distortions of Blackness, idealism surfaces among sculptors William Artis and Richmond Barthé, yet as an aesthetic strategy idealism often contested stereotypical Blackness at the cost of creating ideal types, thereby replicating the language of type. Picking out such conundrums in the realist and idealist options of the 1920s and 1930s reveals not any shortcomings on the part of the artists but structural tensions built into the conflictual formation of Black representational space.

Having studied between 1914 and 1918 at the Art Institute of Chicago, Motley painted in a naturalistic style in early works such as *Mending Socks* (1924), an affectionate portrait of his grandmother rendered as a domestic genre scene. After he won prizes at Newark Museum in 1927 and a gold medal for *Octoroon Girl* (1925) at the 1929 Harmon Foundation Awards, Motley arrived at his signature style during his study year in Paris. *Blues* (1929) is best called vernacular expression as it prioritizes experiential feeling over mere reportage—as the artist stated, “I have tried to paint the Negro as I have seen him, and as I feel him, without adding or subtracting” (figure 1.11).⁸¹ In a nightclub crowded cheek by jowl, a light-skinned woman and dark-complexioned man form a double figure spatially compacted by a horizontal shuffle between pink and yellow faces, limbs, and dresses. In rhythmic counterpoint to the dark tones of the orchestra in the rear, the couple’s interlocking intimacy flows into the overall ensemble as the man seems to redouble as a trombone player. The subject matter of *Blues*,

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Figure 1.9. Samuel Joseph Brown Jr., *Smoking My Pipe*, 1934. Watercolor over graphite on cream wove paper, 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (51.4 x 39.1 cm). Public Works of Art Project, on long-term loan to Philadelphia Museum of Art from Fine Arts Collection, US General Services Administration, Washington, DC. 36-1934-6.



Figure 1.10. Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, *Congo-lais*, 1931. Cherrywood, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (42.7 x 20 x 23.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art. © Whitney Museum of American Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, New York.

painted in Paris, evokes Motley's family background, which paralleled the migration of ragtime from New Orleans to the jazz orchestras of Chicago and Harlem, although its title, Denise Murrell points out, "is a misnomer, for the painting was set in a club where French Caribbean and African habitués danced mainly to beguine and creole mazurkas," which itself speaks to the cosmopolitan genesis of Afro-diasporic modernity.⁸²

But was Motley's vernacularism always welcomed? A fellow member of the all-Black Chicago Art League discouraged Motley from exhibiting a dancehall scene, *Syncopation* (1924), on the grounds that "it reiterated racist stereotypes of black 'low life,' dwelling on jazz and sexuality," even though the painting went on to win an award from the Art Institute of Chicago.⁸³ At the level of intent,



Figure 1.11. Archibald Motley Jr., *Blues*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 in. (91.4 x 106.7 cm). Chicago History Museum. Collection of Valerie Gerrard Browne.

Motley's Afromodernism fully aligned with the self-assertive Blackness Langston Hughes expressed in 1925 when he wrote, "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. . . . If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either."⁸⁴ But when Motley later recalled that in the 1920s Black artists "were awfully afraid, years ago, of sending anything Negroid to any of the exhibitions," we need to understand how conflicting expectations among white and Black audiences added to the conditions in which Harlem Renaissance artists were thrown into a double bind.⁸⁵ Dealing with a double audience meant that in a context where one artwork carried the responsibility of representing the many, the reception of vernacular expression was often tinged by the "fear and shame," as Hughes put it, that all Black identities would be judged by what was represented in Black

artworks, especially as paintings and sculpture tended to enter public life only one at a time.

Du Bois's reaction to Motley's vernacular expression is unrecorded. But we should bear in mind his 1928 review of Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* novel, in which a Black army deserter travels the Black Atlantic as he searches for the prostitute he is enamored with, about which Du Bois fumed, "After the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath."⁸⁶ In literary and visual representation alike, the problem vernacularism presented in the eyes of the 1920s Black elite was that it was far more ambiguous than realism or idealism when it came to challenging stereotypical Blackness. Realism, idealism, and vernacularism each *contested* the ruling regime of racial representation, yet every "solution" to the double duty of delegation and depiction rebounded like a ricochet within the narrow spaces of the American art institutions to which Harlem Renaissance artists had gained *access*.

Du Bois's 1926 *Crisis* symposium marked the turning point at which the 1895–1925 New Negro era, when Black self-initiated activity flourished in education, the church, the press, and the professions, crossed over into American national culture at large, marking the 1925–29 Jazz Age.⁸⁷ The anxieties that led the Black elite to prescribe the representativeness they wanted to see in Black art were intensified by the push-pull dynamic whereby the very crossover *desired* as the moment when the value of Black culture would be recognized and respected was tangled up with the *fear* that Black creativity would be exploited and expropriated into fantasies of otherness. Looking more closely at questions of style shows how the aesthetics of ambiguity—at the core of signifyin' for Gates—unlocked the double binds from which Afromodernism emerged.

In *Just Back from Washington* (1938), Palmer Hayden depicted a rather self-satisfied dandy getting his shoes shined (figure 1.12). When this image is placed next to James Van Der Zee's *Portrait of a Couple* (1929), the photograph's indexical mode of signification confirms Hayden's watercolor as true to life, for we see key sartorial items, namely, the man's homburg hat and spats beneath pin-striped trousers, in both images (figure 1.13). But the comparison between Van Der Zee's urbane couple and Hayden's faux-naïf idiom also brings out the fact that Afromodern stylization is at play across the board, differencing multiple surfaces of inscription to give expressive voice to Afromodernity. Instead of meekly emulating the dress codes of bourgeois respectability, Van Der Zee's couple accentuate their clothing with stylized inflections that impart differential emphases to the woman's cloche hat and the man's double-breasted coat. Modern consumer culture made clothes an important medium in which Blacks took control over their everyday self-presentation. Sartorial formality was a key sign of Black self-possession that counteracted preconceived notions of Black impoverishment.

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With a winter scene on a painted backdrop, the couple's diagonal glance owes everything to the added layers of stylized artifice brought into the mise-en-scène by the theatricality of Van Der Zee's directorial flair.

But whereas the photograph was intended for private viewing, the white gloves and wide lips of Hayden's dandy would surely alarm the Black elite when viewed publicly in an art gallery. To put ourselves in Du Bois's shoes, we can see how Hayden's work could be interpreted as reinforcing stereotypical Blackness, yet such a monologic or single-voiced reading loses sight of the double voicing whereby *Just Back from Washington* performs a "relation of difference inscribed within a relation of identity."⁸⁸ Its witty ironies are directed toward white perceptions of Black dandyism as a kind of comedic costume rather than an aesthetically stylized mode of resistance to assimilationist conformity.⁸⁹

In rousing oratory Du Bois made aesthetics integral to Black freedom struggles when he had the last word in the 1926 symposium. Rejecting as philistine the utilitarian view that art is irrelevant to the good life, he further cast aside the art-for-art's-sake purism that separated aesthetics into a transcendent sphere: "That somewhere eternal and perfect Beauty sits above Truth and Right, but here and now in the world in which I work they are for me unseparate and inseparable." Understanding that artistic production is always conditioned by social interests, Du Bois foregrounded questions of access. "There is in New York tonight a black woman molding clay by herself in a little bare room because there is not a single school of sculpture in New York where she is welcome," he said, alluding to the discrimination Augusta Savage faced in 1923 when her acceptance into Fontainebleau summer school near Paris was revoked when administrators claimed her presence would upset white American students. But saying nothing about contestation, offering no constructive criticism of practical support to painters and sculptors, Du Bois elevated the critique of art-world institutions above the art itself, which led him to the disastrous view that "all art is propaganda," to which he objected that the "propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent."⁹⁰

Du Bois's "Criteria of Negro Art" and Locke's 1928 retort, "Art or Propaganda?," are a set piece in the literature. But such a binary obscures how the term *ideology*, rather than Du Bois's loaded word choice, better describes how systems of representation are never neutral but always shot through with agonistic interests. In fact, Du Bois gives deeper insight into the politics of Black representation in a little-studied 1920 *Crisis* editorial in which he begins, "It is not that we are ashamed of our color and blood. We are instinctively and almost unconsciously ashamed of the caricatures done of our darker shades." He presents a startling diagnosis: "We remain *afraid of black pictures* because they are cruel reminders of the crimes of Sunday 'comics' and 'Nigger' minstrels. . . . Off with these thought chains . . . and let us train ourselves to see beauty in black." In saying that being

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Figure 1.12. Palmer Hayden, *Just Back from Washington*, 1938. Watercolor on paper, 15½ × 12¼ in. (39.37 × 31.11 cm). Collection of Russell Goings, New York.

Figure 1.13. James Van Der Zee, *Portrait of a Couple, Man with Walking Stick*, 1929. Gelatin silver print, 6½ × 4½ in. (16.8 × 11.7 cm). James Van Der Zee Archive, Metropolitan Museum of Art; from the shared collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art and Studio Museum in Harlem. © James Van Der Zee Archive, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



“afraid of black pictures”—iconophobia—is at issue in art’s ability to contest the condition of being subject to someone else’s representational othering, we need to notice that Du Bois’s reasoning has moved away from a mimetic model of reflection. With the argument that “Black *is* caricature in our half-conscious thought and we shun in print and paint that which we love in life,” Black identity is addressed not as an inner essence that exists prior to societal conditioning but as a formation of subjectivity *itself constituted* “in print and paint.”⁹¹

“To Be Negro . . . [Is] . . . to Be Distinctively Composite”

Hall’s view that identities are “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” is well established in today’s critical humanities. However, his follow-through point—that “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which . . .



cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”—needs constant emphasis because it provides Black Art History with culturally materialist grounds on which to proceed.⁹² Where identities are constituted *within* representation, it follows that aesthetic practices stand to modify or even alter social identities whenever such practices intervene culturally in such a way as to interrupt representational forms that have dominated our lives by “winning a substantial degree of popular consent,” to borrow Hall’s summary of the Gramscian concept of hegemony.⁹³

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To say identities “undergo constant transformation . . . like everything which is historical” is to say that modernism—in all its multiple manifestations—was not art that just happened to arise in the twentieth century but art driven by the broader quest to transform the conditions of modern life.⁹⁴

Hall aligns with long-standing traditions of Black intellectual inquiry in Afro-diasporic settings, not least with Locke, whose 1942 text “Who and What Is ‘Negro’?” anticipated the cultural studies model in which culture is a composite formation whose signifying elements may well be fixed for a time by the status quo but which can always be potentially unfixed and opened to transformation by virtue of signifying material that can be dis- and rearticulated. Asserting that “to be Negro . . . [is] . . . to be distinctively composite,” Locke held that “neither national nor racial cultural elements are so distinctive as to be mutually exclusive. It is the general composite character of culture which is disregarded by such over-simplifications. . . . Strictly speaking, we should cite this composite character in our culture with hyphenate descriptions, but more practically, we stress the dominant flavor of the blend. It is only in this same limited sense that anything is legitimately styled ‘Negro’; actually it is Afro- or Negro-American, a hybrid product of Negro reaction to American cultural forms and patterns.”⁹⁵ As the following six chapters select aesthetic strategies that in each era altered the meaning of Blackness in twentieth-century art, my claim is neither to arrive at a canon that seeks to last forever nor merely to present case studies in which general laws are supposedly illuminated by interchangeable examples. Rather, in moving from person-centered first principles, which think of identity as something that exists prior to representation, toward the interaction of signifying practices, my dialogic method aims to show that in the structural asymmetries under which Black Atlantic identities were obliged to interact with Euro-American identities, *Blackness* is the name for truly modern cultural forms that did not previously exist either in Europe or in Africa but were historically *pro-duced*—brought forward into existence—by the semiotic friction of differencing under cross-cultural conditions of diaspora.

Over the long twentieth century, as self-representations shifted from Colored in the 1890s to 1910s, through Negro from the 1920s to the 1950s, to Black in the 1960s, we should well ask: Were these different names for the same identity, or, in light of Hall’s view, is identity itself made and remade by the work that culture does? As my chapters track this question in each era, it is fascinating to observe how Afromodern visual culture in the mid-twentieth century activated tropes to resignify antecedents in Western modernity in ways that confirm Hall’s point that it was when “cosmopolitan dispersals [of] migration and displacement” began to spread in the 1940s that critical scholarship shifted “from an anthropological to a signifying conception of culture.”⁹⁶

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Jean and Paulette Nardal, Martinican sisters in Paris, reached out to Locke to translate his *New Negro* anthology when they initiated *La revue du monde noir*, whose six issues from 1931 to 1936 sowed the seeds of Negritude. Following Haitian polymath Jean Price-Mars, who critiqued creole elites who internalized Western norms, poet Léon-Gontran Damas from French Guiana published *Pigments* (1937), whose frontispiece is a woodcut by Belgian artist Frans Masereel featuring a naked figure breaking out of a tuxedo—the European hegemon’s sartorial sign par excellence (figure 1.14). The naked/clothed duality seems to entail an essentialist view of identity when taken to imply that “if only the assimilated black could be liberated from his confining costume . . . the authentic African would finally burst out.”⁹⁷ Yet along with the figure’s arm raised aloft, the dynamic angle of the rear-ground buildings and palms dramatizes the birth of a new Black being. Masereel’s image recalls *Song of the Towers*, the final panel in Aaron Douglas’s four-part mural *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934), whose central figure holds up a saxophone to defy the industrial modernity signified by the skyscrapers around him. And where *Libertas* was personified in female form among the Romans, in an iconographic code shared by the Statue of Liberty, gifted by France to the United States in 1886, this sign system was resignified in the cover art for *Pan-Africa: Journal of African Life and Thought*. Published in London by Ras T. Makonnen, the activist who helped organize the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945, it shows a Black woman who embodies Liberty holding a torch that lights up a world map that anticipates a United States of Africa (figure 1.15). Her left breast is exposed, which repeats elements from Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), but in the anticolonial 1940s, this Afromodern trope also enacted double-voiced differencing. It acknowledged the sexual violation of enslaved and colonized Black women, while also signaling Liberty’s determination to win justice for Black diaspora lives in the Americas, as underlined by the cartography in the other half of her global map.

But doesn’t talking back to Euro-American antecedents put Black creativity on the back foot, in the reactive position of always having to respond to what someone else did first? To this, one must point out that African American culture has never ceased to influence modern popular culture worldwide ever since the late nineteenth century industrialized entertainment in film, music, photography, and print culture.⁹⁸ Reactive moves have no agency of their own, but what distinguishes the dialogics of Black Atlantic signifyin’ is the game-changing process whereby responsiveness to antecedents creates new meanings that add to the rules of the game. As semiotic flows move to and fro across the symbolic boundaries by which identities are socially constructed, culture itself acquires new forms whenever each player’s move influences the next step in the game.

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Figure 1.14. Frans Masereel, frontispiece to Léon-Gontran Damas, *Pigments*, 1937. Woodcut. © 2027 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

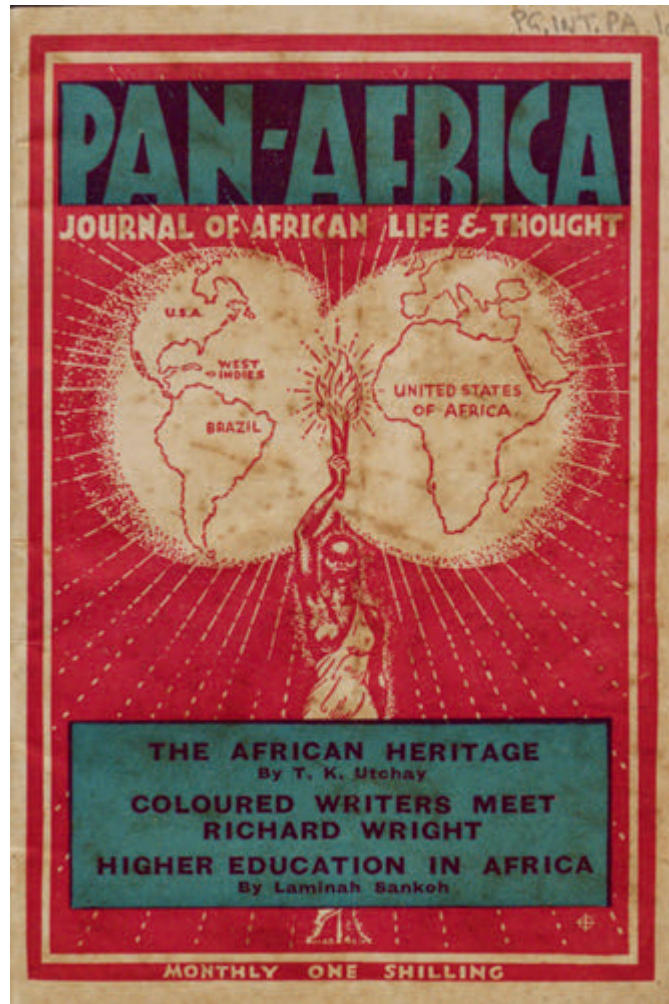
Figure 1.15. Cover of *Pan-Africa: Journal of African Life and Thought* 1, no. 8 (August 1947). Senate House Library, University of London. © University of London.



For Bakhtin, this back-and-forth process is “unfinalizable”; it is the constitutive ground of signification and all meaning-making practices. At the heart of his thinking is the activity of appropriation involved in the struggle whereby social actors actively seize hold of signifying material, taking it out of existing formal structures and creating new meanings by altering the contexts in which resignified material undergoes semiotic transformation: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker . . . appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts,

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serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own."⁹⁹ Having drawn on this passage from the outset of my scholarly journey, I've found that it never ceases to illuminate the transformative agency Black people have consistently exerted across the multiple spaces of diaspora.¹⁰⁰ In today's climate, which tends toward moralistic extremism on matters of identity, "appropriation" is too often a judgment based on proprietorial notions of cultural ownership, whereas for Hall, as for Locke and others, it is not that identity comes first as essence, spirit, or *Geist* that then seeks outward manifestation in human culture but that culture itself takes precedence as the symbolic field that provides the resources from which social actors construct their identities.

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Appropriation, derived from a verb that literally means “to take,” is best contrasted to *expropriation*, an act that alienates legal property so it is no longer available to its original owner. With appropriation understood not as a one-time act but as culture’s ongoing input into the formation process of modernity, one might say that in the long back-and-forth, from the 1920s New Negro to the 1960s Black Arts Movement, Black artists took control of the Black image, only to have the culture industries take it back. Theft and exploitation, in art as in other spheres, are fully part of the twentieth-century story of “black innovation/white imitation,” as I once put it in describing the process Fernando Ortiz named as *transculturation* in 1940s Cuba.¹⁰¹ But have we fully understood this two-way process that unfolds within the asymmetrical conditions that produce hybridization, *créolité*, syncretism, and other variants of Afromodern transculturation in the visual arts? This is the guiding thread among the artworks I have looked at closely in the following pages.

To round out this introduction, I briefly show how a Bakhtinian approach reveals cross-cultural dialogism as the enveloping condition of African American art that precedes the 1900s advent of modernism. Looking at Henry Ossawa Tanner’s *The Banjo Lesson* (1893) dialogically means we better see how it contested the meaning of the banjo in US art. But before I get there: Who exactly was this “someone else” from whose mouth words and other signifying material are to be appropriated? Is Bakhtin’s “someone else” the same “someone else” David Hammons had in mind when he pointed to the transformative agency of Black aesthetic acts of cross-cultural appropriation? In 1975 Hammons said, “Old dirty bags, grease, bones, hair . . . it’s about us, it’s about me. . . . It isn’t negative. . . . We should look at these images and see how positive they are, how strong, how powerful. . . . Our hair is positive, it’s powerful, look at what it can do. There’s nothing negative about our images, it all depends on who is seeing it and we’ve been depending on *someone else’s sight*. . . . We need to look again and decide.”¹⁰² When Hammons says, “We need to look again,” he summons the “gift of second sight” Du Bois described in his oft-quoted line—“the Negro . . . is born with a veil and gifted with second sight”—such a gift being the counterpart to the “veil” that hides the reality of racial capitalism behind its spectacular appearances.¹⁰³ Speaking of “our images,” Hammons refers to how we see ourselves, but is he not also touching on constitutive relations between pictures and personhood that, for Du Bois, constructed Black identity “in print and paint”? And isn’t this nexus between pictures and personhood what Hall pointed to when he said, “Identity [is] a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”?

It may well be that this “someone else”—whether someone else’s sight for Hammons or someone else’s intentions for Bakhtin—is the Other that Hall

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refers to when he says, “Every identity . . . must always have a symbolic other.” If what matters is “*the representation . . . of that relationship to others*,” the question Hall asks is whether it is “fixed and degraded, so it becomes the object of symbolic violence, as in the operations of power in Hegel’s master/slave dialectic . . . or whether the discursive inscription of difference is able to establish with others a dialogic relationship to alterity.” Hall adds that “within this more Bakhtinian and Levinasian framework a dialogical relationship can never be fixed and finalized but is always ongoing and in process.” Hall’s conception of representation as a site of struggle over meanings does not present culture or aesthetics as a solution to inequality but understands that the transformation of our living conditions cannot take place without the transformation of consciousness and identity, which are always dependent on meanings that circulate in sign systems that make daily living possible.¹⁰⁴

Dialogism Precedes Modernism

Modernists may have mixed feelings about teaching *The Banjo Lesson* (1893), a staple in any survey class on African American art, although its cross-cultural genesis reveals a dialogic edge. Black imagery rarely featured in Tanner’s oeuvre, as religious subjects were his principal subject, painted in an impressionist style that infused light with spiritual significance. But he was never indifferent to matters of race. Trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts between 1879 and 1885, where Thomas Eakins and Thomas Hovenden were his tutors, Tanner taught art at Clark University in Atlanta. He financed his first voyage to Europe in 1891 when all the works in his first solo exhibition were purchased by a Clark trustee, Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell. Headed for Rome, he enrolled at the Academy Julien in Paris but returned to Philadelphia in 1893 to convalesce from typhoid fever before settling in France in 1894, where he lived until 1937.

Tanner’s views on race shifted. In a 1914 letter to a critic who planned a monograph, he objected, “You say ‘In his personal life, Mr. T has had many things to contend with. Ill-health, poverty, and race prejudice, always strong against a Negro.’ Now am I a Negro. Does not the $\frac{3}{4}$ of English blood in my veins . . . count for anything? Does the $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{8}$ of ‘pure’ Negro blood in my veins count for all?”¹⁰⁵ Yet in 1893 Tanner lectured on “The American Negro in Art” at the World Congress on Africa, a weeklong event within Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exposition. In a later summary written in the third person, Tanner said, “Since his return from Europe, he has painted mostly Negro subjects . . . because of a desire to represent the serious and pathetic side of life among them,” adding, “To his mind, many of the artists who have represented Negro life have

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only seen the comic, the ludicrous side of it, and have lacked sympathy with and appreciation for the warm big heart that dwells within such a rough exterior.”¹⁰⁶

Tanner clearly intended an adversarial edge for *The Thankful Poor* (1894) and *The Banjo Lesson*, and the differencing he brought to bear on one key iconographic element in the latter—the banjo—turned precisely on whether Black life was treated as comic or serious. By the mid-nineteenth century, the banjo-playing minstrel was an unambiguous sign of nostalgia for antebellum life, appearing in fine art as part of a shift toward identifiably American content in genre paintings that featured Blacks prominently, as in William Sidney Mount’s *The Bone Player* (1856). Depicting a decaying slum to reveal a banjo player who serenades a young couple, Eastman Johnson’s 1859 *Negro Life at the South* (aka *Old Kentucky Home*) carried a subtitle named after a popular song; the white woman who steps through a side door cues the viewer’s position as a spectator to be entertained by the entire family of stereotypes on show. Hovenden had portrayed white antislavery activist John Brown, but in *Dem Was Good Times* (1882), his image of an elderly Black man clothed in patches, who stands beside a banjo, led one critic to interpret a “happy go lucky” character who “cherishes memories of the amenities of slavery.”¹⁰⁷ But when another critic referred to Hovenden’s earlier genre scenes with the racist quip that he had “exchanged his Bretons for our darkies,” this actually provides the hermeneutic key for us to understand how Tanner dialogized the signifying chain around the iconic banjo.¹⁰⁸

Painting *en plein air* in Brittany, Tanner produced *The Bagpipe Lesson* (1892–93). Set in an orchard, this genre scene played as gentle comedy: A boy grapples with his instrument, to the amusement of an elderly couple who watch, all figures being white. In the switch from bagpipe to banjo, there is sweet irony in the Afro-diasporic act of translation whereby an African American artist “exchanged *his* Bretons for our darkies.” Tanner employed study photographs to arrive at *The Banjo Lesson*’s high-angle viewing plane, raising the floor to a degree that shows the young boy and seated old man immersed in mutual concentration. The scene is infused with glowing amber tones from rear-ground sources; Tanner’s luminist techniques add to his humanist sympathies. With their interlocking focus on the process of learning, both figures avert their gazes from the viewer. By privileging their inward absorption in the shared activity of music making, this pedagogical scene thus rejects the other-directedness that fixed the banjo as a servile emblem of minstrelsy in which Black culture was performed as entertainment for whites. The gray-haired grandfather is crucial to Tanner’s “serious” but warm tonality: His seniority makes him a living witness to the era of enslavement long before the 1890s, even as the lesson he imparts is oriented toward the future that lies ahead of the boy (figure 1.16).

Unfixing the banjo from the dominant iconography of Mount, Johnson, and Hovenden and transcoding it within an intra-Black scene of domestic interiority—moving the signifier across the semantic field such that it now generated semiosis within a Black cultural context—Tanner accentuated the diasporic origins of the instrument itself. The banjo simply did not exist prior to Atlantic slavery—it is a cross-cultural product of New World creolization. Combining a hollow gourd or calabash topped with a goatskin sound table in what was known as the *akonting* in Gambia and Senegal, with pegs stretching the strings like a European lute, the instrument was documented as a *bonjaw* in Sir Hans Sloane's 1707–25 account of his voyage to Jamaica and is referred to as a *bania* in John Gabriel Stedman's 1796 narrative of his expedition to Surinam. Recorded among Carolina slaves in the 1840s, the calabash resonator was replaced by a hoop made from timber staves ripped away from wooden barrels.¹⁰⁹ In a publicity photograph circa 1900, African American musician Lew Snowden testifies to the banjo's place in Black culture as he stands with instruments played by his Snowden Family Band, based in Ohio, who toured the South widely from the 1850s onward (figure 1.17).

To say the banjo was first taken out of Black hands by white impersonators, whose minstrelsy—as Bearden long ago observed—was the initial act of appropriation, is to say Tanner undertook a *second act of appropriation* by transcoding the sign back into the symbolic field of Afro-diaspora culture. It was not that the ideological fixity seen in Mount's *The Banjo Player* (1856) is derogatory, quite the contrary when we consider the details picked out by Mount's observational realism (figure 1.18).¹¹⁰ Rather, as Tanner contested meaning in an icon that signified Black subordination to whites, *The Banjo Lesson* transformed its signification not by taking an oppositional stance toward the master code but by producing “a relation of difference inscribed within a relation of identity,” as Gates says of signifyin', brought forward through an immanent logic operating in and against the representational space in which it intervened.¹¹¹

By taking back a signifier first *taken out* of its original context by white expropriation, Tanner's dialogism—acting on the back-and-forth dynamics of cross-cultural friction—made the signifier culturally Black *for the first time*. Instead of the proprietorial view that thinks of Blackness as a cultural property intrinsically owned by Black people, dialogics reveal that even as racism subordinated Black life economically, politically, and socially, the agency involved in moving signifying materials across the asymmetrical boundaries of identity shows how African American artists such as Tanner were able to act culturally within the limited spaces of opportunity available to them under Euro-American modernity. Leaping forward in time to the banjo's further resignification in 1970s works by Robert Colescott and Betye Saar, the narrative template

Figure 1.16. Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 49 × 35½ in. (124.4 × 90.1 cm). Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia. Gift of Robert C. Ogden.

Figure 1.17. Lew Snowden of the Snowden Family Band, Ohio, ca. 1870.

of progressivist historiography that promises happy endings clearly does not fit with Afromodernists, who do not necessarily agree that historical change in the twentieth-century United States meant an improvement in the conditions of Black life.

It “just won’t go away,” says Saar of racism in contemporary America. Her perception echoes that of Saidiya Hartman, who, tracing the afterlives of the Atlantic slave trade, wrote in 2006, “I, too, am living in the time of slavery, by which I mean I am living in the future created by it.”¹¹² A vintage banjo case, wedged open by a slice of watermelon in painted wood, has become a coffin in Saar’s assemblage *Sambo’s Banjo* (1971–72) (figure 1.19). Beneath a toy rifle, a plastic skeleton hangs next to a colorized photograph of a lynched Black man, below which a marionette minstrel dressed in stars and stripes is suspended. But



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Figure 1.18. William Sidney Mount, *The Banjo Player*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 37¾ × 28¾ in. (95.8 × 73 cm). Long Island Museum, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ward Melville, 1955.

is it just a coffin? Even as it seeks to bury representational othering from a distant age—*Is Jim Crow Really Dead?* (1972), asked another of Saar's assemblages—the banjo case is double voiced for it is also a shrine. In homage to the dead who had to play along with icons of subordination in order to survive, the work conjures a ritualistic aura in keeping with the altar-like ambience of Saar's *Mti* (1973).

Understatement was surely Colescott's intention when he said, "The art of irony I employ is based on exaggeration."¹¹³ The ironies in his *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American Textbook* (1975) surpass satire to bring full-scale signifyin' to American art history (figure 1.20). A banjo player in top hat sits at the stern, and a kerchief-wearing mammy displays her buttocks, above whom a soldier caresses the US flag. Viewers instantly recognize a spoof of the 1851 Emanuel Leutze painting honoring George Washington



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Figure 1.19. Betye Saar, *Sambo's Banjo*, 1971–72. Wood, fabric, acrylic paint, mirror, and plastic objects, 41 × 14¼ × 4¼ in. (104.1 × 36.8 × 45.7 cm). Collection of California African American Museum; CAAM Foundation Purchase, with funds provided by City of Los Angeles, Cultural Affairs Department; Collection of Friends, the Foundation of the California African American Museum. © Friends, the Foundation of the California African American Museum. © Betye Saar. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles, California.

Figure 1.20. Robert Cole-scott, *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American Textbook*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 78½ × 98½ in. (199.39 × 226.6 cm). Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles. 2021.45.1. © 2027 Robert H. Colecott Separate Property Trust/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



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GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER CROSSING THE DELAWARE



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in the American War of Independence (1775–78). But look more closely at the heroic standing figure whose boots are being shined. One soon realizes that his blackface stems from homonymic substitution—it is not the first US president we see but George Washington Carver, the Black agricultural scientist who taught at Tuskegee Institute. Not only does Colescott’s double-voiced parody reveal what the original left out—the role of Black soldiers in 1776, for instance—but we also see “two points of view [that] are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically,” as Bakhtin says of “intentional semantic hybrids [that] are inevitably internally dialogic.”¹¹⁴ Unlike satire, which is monologic to the extent that the satirist stands above the target being ridiculed, carnivalesque laughter is “a festive laughter . . . of all the people . . . universal in scope: it is directed at all and everyone.”¹¹⁵ Colescott’s Afromodernism activates parodic redoubling to counter hegemonic equations of whiteness and universality in the histories of art and the modern nation-state alike.

Because “histories *are* narratives . . . a discursive imposition of beginnings, middles, and indeed endings,” as Hall says, we need to constantly bear in mind that “we are not talking about *the* history of art, but about how we have chosen to narrate the identity of the histories of art to ourselves.”¹¹⁶ Where my 1970 cutoff point is relatively arbitrary, the *longue durée* of the overall shape of the story told in the following six chapters invites future discourse on whether art in the Black Atlantic diaspora calls for a strong distinction between modern and contemporary periods, or whether chronology itself must be rethought in light of Afromodern aesthetics.¹¹⁷ Rather than a linear succession of developmental stages, the twists and turns of the banjo’s signifyin’ seem more readily illuminated by George Kubler’s view that art’s histories involve not stages that culminate in one single goal but “series” that can move in multiple directions.¹¹⁸ In any event, the stories that unfold in each of the following six turning points suggest that our understanding of Afro-Atlantic art history, as dialogic approaches move on from previous narratives, certainly has a great deal of future discourse ahead of it.

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Notes

PREFACE

- ¹ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel."
- ² Defined as "the multiplicity of ways of being in time . . . that open us to other, non-modern temporalities," *contemporaneity* describes the post-1945 conditions that Terry Smith contrasts to modernity, in which, from the fifteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, Western imperial powers conceived historical time as uniform and linear. T. Smith, "Defining Contemporaneity," 156. See also T. Smith et al., *Antinomies of Art and Culture*.
- ³ Bearden, "Rectangular Structure," 18.

INTRODUCTION

- ¹ R. Thompson, "Afro-Modernism," 91. For the exhibition catalog, see Vogel, *Africa Explores*.
- ² What qualifies today's Black art historical scholarship as "new" is its critique of the discipline's foundations, which is comparable to the field-turning impact—when I was coming up—of approaches from feminism, the social history of art, and semiotics in *The New Art History*. See Rees and Borzello, *New Art History*.
- ³ Harris, introduction to *Writing Back to Modern Art*, 1.
- ⁴ Nochlin, "Imaginary Orient."
- ⁵ Rubin, "*Primitivism*" in *20th Century Art*; H. Foster, "'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art."

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- 6 Appiah, "Postcolonial and the Postmodern"; Araeen, *Other Story*; Young, *Decade Show*.
- 7 Martin, *Magiciens de la Terre*.
- 8 Enwezor, *Trade Routes*; C. Bell et al., *In/Sight*; Enwezor, *Short Century*. See also Enwezor, *Documenta 11*; Enwezor, *Selected Writings*; and Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art*.
- 9 Golden, introduction, 15; see also Golden and Kim, *Frequency*; Kim, *Flow*.
- 10 Taylor, "Post-Black, Old Black," 631; D. Murray, *Queering Post-Black Art*; Adusei-Poku, *Taking Stakes in the Unknown*.
- 11 Taylor, "Post-Black, Old Black," 631.
- 12 English, *How to See*, 9; Copeland, *Bound to Appear*.
- 13 Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 11. See also C. Robinson, *Black Marxism*.
- 14 Marshall, "Just Because," 245.
- 15 See Joselit, *Art's Properties*.
- 16 See Hicks, *Brutish Museum*; Phillips, *Loot*; and Proctor, *Whole Picture*.
- 17 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 2.
- 18 K. Thompson, "Sidelong Glance," 26.
- 19 K. Thompson, "Sidelong Glance," 9.
- 20 R. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*; R. Thompson, *Aesthetic of the Cool*; Price and Price, *Afro-American Arts*; Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*.
- 21 F. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*.
- 22 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–94. See also Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*.
- 23 See also Gilroy, *Small Acts*.
- 24 A useful summary of this paradigm shift is offered in Brar and Sharma, "What Is This 'Black.'"
- 25 Moten, *In the Break*; Moten, *Black and Blur*; Moten, *Universal Machine*; Moten, *Stolen Life*.
- 26 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, xxxviii.
- 27 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being."
- 28 A useful introduction is provided by Sexton, "Social Life of Social Death." On anti-Blackness, see also Wilderson, *Red, White and Black*; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; and Warren, *Ontological Terror*.
- 29 For coverage of premodern and modern periods, see Bindman and Gates, *Image of the Black*.
- 30 See "Questionnaire on Decolonization."
- 31 Ater, *Remaking Race and History*; Buick, *Child of Fire*; Bernier, *African American Visual Arts*; Arabindan-Kesson, *Black Bodies, White Gold*.
- 32 Francis, *Making Race*; Hills, *Painting Harlem Modern*; Sims, *Wifredo Lam*; and Sims, *Challenge of the Modern*.
- 33 Jones, *Energy/Experimentation*; Jones, *Now Dig This!*; Jones, *South of Pico*.
- 34 Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*; English, *How to See*, 32. See also English, 1971. Conversely, institutional analysis is brought to the fore in English and Barat, *Among Others*.
- 35 Carbone and Jones, *Witness*; Godfrey and Whitely, *Soul of a Nation*.
- 36 See Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism."
- 37 Bauman examines how the durability of centralized patterns in social life circa 1770 to 1970 has given way to a state of permanent rapid change with regard to values of emancipation, individuality, time/space, work, and community. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*.

- 38 Rowbotham, *Past Is Before Us*.
- 39 A. Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction*; on Malevich, see Black, "Fractal Freedoms."
- 40 R. Powell, *Black Art and Culture*, 1st ed.; R. Powell, *Black Art and Cultural History*, 2nd ed.; R. Powell, *Black Art*, 3rd ed.
- 41 Barson and Gorschlüter, *Afro-Modern*; Beauchamp-Byrd and Sirmans, *Transforming the Crown*; Farquharson and Bailey, *Life Between Islands*; D. Cullen and Fuentes, *Caribbean Art at the Crossroads*; Crooks, *Fragments of Epic Memory*; Pedrosa and Toledo, *Afro-Atlantic Histories*.
- 42 See Schwazer, "Art History Survey Text."
- 43 Bearden, "Negro Artist's Dilemma," 17.
- 44 Bearden and Holty, *Painter's Mind*, 12.
- 45 Bearden, quoted in Kennel, "Bearden's Musée Imaginaire," 145.
- 46 Malraux, *Voices of Silence*, 281; Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, 230.
- 47 Foucault, "Fantasia of the Library," 92.
- 48 Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*; see also Hall, "Work of Representation."
- 49 Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 262–63; Dickerman, "Diaspora Modern," 129; Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 276.
- 50 hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice," 38. See also O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid."
- 51 Mirzoeff, "Painting at the Heart."
- 52 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 48. It is vital to bear in mind that although dialogism is up front in pastiche and parody, these are only two among multiple forms of double voicing. My project is thus distinct from the one-to-one pairings explored in A. Childs, *Riffs and Relations*.
- 53 Clark, "Olympia's Choice," 146.
- 54 Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 281–315.
- 55 Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, xxvii–xxviii.
- 56 Murrell, *Posing Modernity*, 62.
- 57 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 185.
- 58 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 59 See J. Bell, *What Is Painting?*
- 60 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 61 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 62 Hanchard, "Afro-modernity," 267.
- 63 Baudelaire, "Painter of Modern Life," 13.
- 64 On Lewis, see Buick, *Child of Fire*; on Duncanson, see Mercer, "Erase and Rewind"; on Tanner, see Marley, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*.
- 65 Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 6.
- 66 See Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*.
- 67 Locke, *Negro in Art*, 9; Locke, "Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," 262, 264.
- 68 Stewart, "Paul Robeson," 92.
- 69 See Hall and Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*; and Featherstone et al., *Global Modernities*.
- 70 See Mitter, *Triumph of Modernism*; Affron, *Paint the Revolution*; D'Alessandro and Pérez-Oramos, *Tarsila Do Amaral*. On the methodological challenges of rewriting modernism's global histories, see Mitter, "Decentering Modernism"; and Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*.

- 71 Hall, introduction to *Formations of Modernity*, 6.
- 72 Archibald J. Motley Jr., "How I Solve My Painting Problems," 1929, Harmon Foundation Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 73 Hall, "New Ethnicities," 27.
- 74 English, *How to See*, 31.
- 75 Responding to questions posed in W. E. B. Du Bois's article "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed," the *Crisis* symposium comprised nineteen short presentations from figures that included Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, Alfred A. Knopf, and Carl Van Vechten, among others; reproduced in Gates and Jarrett, *New Negro*, 190–204. On the Harmon Foundation, see Reynolds and Wright, *Against the Odds*.
- 76 Gates, "Trope of a New Negro," 129; Governor Rufus Bullock, in Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 127.
- 77 Washington, "Negro Education," 112.
- 78 Locke, "Ethics of Culture," 441, 440; Gates, "Face and Voice of Blackness," xxix–xlv.
- 79 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.
- 80 Powell, *Blues Aesthetic*, 24.
- 81 Motley, "How I Solve."
- 82 Murrell, *Harlem Renaissance*, 35.
- 83 William McKnight Farrow, quoted in "Archibald J. Motley Jr.," in Bearden and Henderson, *History of African-American Artists*, 149.
- 84 Hughes, "Negro Artist," 95.
- 85 Motley, quoted in Woodall, "Archibald Motley," 55.
- 86 Du Bois, review.
- 87 See Gates and Jarrett, *New Negro*, 1–20.
- 88 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 89 See Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*.
- 90 Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art."
- 91 Du Bois, editorial, 266.
- 92 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.
- 93 Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance," 15.
- 94 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.
- 95 Locke, "Who and What Is 'Negro'?", 311.
- 96 Hall, "Museums of Modern Art," 18.
- 97 Noland, *Voices of Negritude*, 65. On Jean and Paulette Nardal, see Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*; on Negritude, see B. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 119–86; on Caribbean leadership in Pan-African movements, see James, *Holding Aloft the Banner*.
- 98 See Smethurst, *African American Roots of Modernism*.
- 99 Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 293–94. On "unfinalizability," see Bakhtin, "Towards a Methodology."
- 100 Mercer, "Diaspora Culture."
- 101 Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," 120.
- 102 David Hammons, quoted in Goode-Bryant and Philips, *Contextures*, 41.
- 103 Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 2.
- 104 Hall, *Fateful Triangle*, 128–29.

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- 105 Henry Ossawa Tanner to Eunice Tietjens, May 25, 1914, Henry Ossawa Tanner Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC, quoted in Mosby, "Reflections on Race," 13.
- 106 Henry Ossawa Tanner, handwritten statement, Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, ca. 1894, quoted in Mosby, *Across Continents and Cultures*, 31.
- 107 *Independent*, February 16, 1882, quoted in K. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 91.
- 108 Clarence Cook, *The Art Amateur* 6, no. 4 (March 1882): 73.
- 109 See Dubois, *Banjo*.
- 110 On Black images in Mount and others, see Boime, *Art of Exclusion*.
- 111 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 112 Saar, "Betye Saar Talks"; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 133.
- 113 Colescott, "Cultivating a Subversive Palette," 301.
- 114 Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 360, 358.
- 115 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11–12.
- 116 Hall, "Museums of Modern Art," 14.
- 117 See Nelson and Copeland, *Black Modernisms*.
- 118 Kubler, *Shape of Time*.

CHAPTER 1. BECOMING NEW NEGRO

- 1 Du Bois, "American Negro at Paris," 577.
- 2 Willis, "Sociologist's Eye"; S. Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*.
- 3 Sekula, "Body and the Archive."
- 4 S. Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 54–55.
- 5 E. Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography*, 7.
- 6 Du Bois, *Health and Physique*, 30–31.
- 7 "The range of Du Bois's photographs also betrays a decided preference for African Americans of lighter hue," states David Levering Lewis. D. Lewis, "Small Nation of People," 30.
- 8 Adams, "New Negro Woman," 323–26. See also Adams, "New Negro Man." Adams is discussed in Gates, "Trove of a New Negro," 140–44.
- 9 Honour, "Studies," 18.
- 10 Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science." See also Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*. Morton's craniology is discussed in Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution*.
- 11 Hall, *Fateful Triangle*, 62–63.
- 12 Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.
- 13 Du Bois, *Health and Physique*, 36.
- 14 Battle-Baptiste and Rusert, *W.E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits*, 16.
- 15 See Rothenstein, *Black Lives 1900*.
- 16 D. Lewis, "Small Nation of People," 46.
- 17 Vološinov, *Marxism*, 23.
- 18 Wells, *Why the Colored American*.
- 19 Robert C. Ogden to Mrs. Arthur Gilman, May 12, 1903, box 7, Robert C. Ogden Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in D. Lewis, *W.E. B. Du Bois*, 640.
- 20 Robert C. Ogden to James E. Russell, March 27, 1906, box 9, Ogden Papers/LOC, quoted in D. Lewis, *W.E. B. Du Bois*, 269.
- 21 Hayes, *First Mohonk Conference*, 121.

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