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# Preface

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## Editor's Note

The essays in this issue are divided into two parts, the first, entitled "*Post-ing Modernism*," form a unit in which there are obvious overlapping concerns. This section was edited by Kathyryne V. Lindberg, to whom I am grateful for soliciting the contributions and helping to bring them to final form. The second part contains two other essays that, while dealing with some related material, highlight other cultural issues. The two book reviews add studies with obvious theoretical affiliations with the articles in both parts of this number.

## PART I

*Post-ing* Modernism  
edited by  
Kathryne V. Lindberg

## Preface

These three essays bundled together as "*Post-ing Modernism*" analyze and variously enter or resist a postal system of sorts: a textual economy rife with puns, elusive allusions, missing signatures, dead letters, and radical interrogations of meaning and identity through strategic quotation and (mis-)appropriation. Each in its own way comments on the uncertain past of tense issues; which is to say, the urgent prefixing of modernism into a post-modernism that marks a departure from the bad old days and ways of the likes of Ezra Pound and yet remains implicated in or parasitic upon the powerful experiments and innovations of High Modernism and its first brood of poet-critics. We might recall that Charles Olson was not only Maximus or "homo-postmodernist," but he also slapped the post- onto modernism and productively introduced such modern tropes and tics as "feedback" into an entropic poetic revolution. Likewise, if Marcel Duchamp did not coin the term, crisis, condition, period affectionately abbreviated as PoMo, that tag might imitate the seriously playful and hands-on critique of that erstwhile painter's notions and categories of artistic value. Duchamp is a dangerously readymade growth industry for post-structuralist critics and artistic counterfeiterers. Such gestures are contagious; but Duchamp nearly corners that market, turning us into plagiarists of "the lowest form of humor." Is ripping off puns Po-Mo or a more criminal No-No? Here at the *fin* of another *siècle*, we seem subject to the rhetoric of the objects we analyze; subject, too, to certain repetitions and reassessments.

In part of necessity, in part willfully, I have already adopted the codes and encrypted the titles or themes of the essays I mean to introduce, the exchange the reader is invited to enter. If this seems unfair, it can serve as a warning. These essays expose their writers and readers to contagions of language and anxieties about foreclosing old and initiating new directions in art and criticism—or art that shades into criticism.

Marjorie Perloff's "*Postmodernism/Fin de Siècle: The Prospects of Openness in a Decade of Closure*" celebrates the now two-decades-old annunciation of the opening of the fields of poetics and literary theory to each other and to a range or collage of discourses: David Antin's performance art and performative art criticism, Jerome Rothenberg's ethnopoeitics, *boundary 2*'s fostering of poetic and critical counterculture(s) against the prevailing norms of confessional verse

and impressionistic readings. While insisting that the best poetry must "**matter**" for "calling into question mimetic speech and normal syntax" as well as authorial identity and other fixtures or closures they imply, Perloff chides recent critics who have made postmodernism into a chant of shibboleths that ironically relegate or re-margin-alize previously excluded (women, immigrant, gay, experimental, post-colonial and/or variously hyphenated) poets into the backwater of a Romantic authenticity grounded in history and subjectivity that *difference(s)* should interrogate. Provocatively insisting on the rights and obligations of poets and critics to evaluate their own enterprise, Perloff offers a tour—and tour de force—of contemporary addresses to (post-)modernity.

Dalia Judovitz, with the bravery of a venture capitalist, reinvests and reappropriates Marcel Duchamp's conceptual, yet readymade, art into a critique of artistic and/or economic transactions. Without recourse to the terminological blockages that might make the premier New York Dadaist into something like a proto-postmodernist/proto-poststructuralist, "Art and Economics: Duchamp's Postmodern Returns" frames her exploration of Duchamp's perpetual revival or hauntings with an exploration of J. S. G. Boggs's felonious revisions of British pounds. A series of "checks" Duchamp drew upon his artistic reputation for gambling debts or services rendered, and signed by the artist with his real or pseudonymous name, exposes and breaches gaps between money and art by promising an increase in value over time of an artist's signature on a masterpiece. Of course, Duchamp's signature gesture of defacing the Mona Lisa would seem to deface the very concept of "masterpiece." Nevertheless, by a risky economy of appropriation, Duchamp's signature makes an ordinary object valuable and valuably begins a disruptive critique of artistic value and other mimetic fallacies. Endorsed by the artist, an everyday urinal becomes "Fountain," an invitation to membership in a Czech mycological society becomes *Czech Check*, and a drain stopper is re-coined as legal tender. If Duchamp's "readymades" are "the 'plastic equivalent of a pun,'" they reveal coincidences of verbal or visual signifiers to the signifying chain which binds words and images to original ideas and authors.

Dalia Judovitz and Marjorie Perloff first delivered their essays as papers at "Reassessing Postmodernism," a conference at the Center for the Humanities, University of Washington in Seattle, May 1992. I, we thank Charles Altieri for the conference. I had the further good fortune to receive Joseph Kronick's essay by post.

Neither written post- nor posted to the other essays, "Resembling Pound: Mimesis, Translation, Ideology" nevertheless covers some of the same ground—however differently. Directed more at the critics of Pound, and Pound as critic, than at the "economimesis" acted out by Duchamp's parody of artistic and economic conventions or the poetic revisers of Poundian modernism, Kronick's essay charts a history of mimesis in treacherous oppositions between nature and art, words and things, languages and nations, economic and artistic representation from Plato to Pound. Whereas Judovitz's Duchamp could transform a drain stopper into an art object that symbolizes the way artists' appropriations and numismatics fix value and block the slippage of art into non-art, Kronick delivers a Pound bothered by "mimetic art as a slavish effort to reproduce the likeness of the original, but his concern is with stoppage or blockage, not with resemblance." Kronick reveals the contradictions in Pound's poetry and ideology, both of which assume that meaning can be fixed yet function through analogy and appropriation and therefore depend upon an economy of resemblance rather than identity, super-positioning rather than substitution. All the while refusing the openness that Perloff's postmoderns find in his work, Kronick's Pound associates himself with the creative and disseminating power of language by adopting such punning aliases as Elijah, Elias, Odysseus, Wanjina, Ouan Jin, Pound. The poet exacts a price for his relatively free-floating yet circular identity; he fixes the problems of language and economy in an Other—the Jew who hoards, the woman who deceives, both of which enable and resist Pound's poetic authority and identity. Kronick finds Pound's hypostatization of the Other, reproduced in his critics' failure to interrogate the mimetic model of language and thus to collaborate in the poet's ideological project.

There are points at which these essays accidentally enter into serious two- or three-way conversations. There is the way that a problematics of modernism and postmodernism emerges in a play of quotations and signatures *compounded* in the styles of Duchamp and Pound. Or is the poet so simply exposed in the pun that haunts his American signature, P=O=U=N=D, which points to Britain's (which is to say *the* poetic tradition's) non-fungible, no-longer-sterling, and no-longer-standard measurement of world currency? This is not to say that Pound prefigures L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in any simple way; such an oversimplification would ignore the critical power of Dalia Judovitz's reading of Duchamp's economical deployment of puns against artistic genealogies. To adumbrate and ab-

breviate the argument, Duchamp does not bank his professional credentials on the Mona Lisa alone. More speculatively, perhaps, one might ask whether and how, despite their author's obvious differences, Marjorie Perloff's "Synecdochic Fallacy," charged against those critics who would represent the under-represented, speaks to Joseph Kronick's charges that critics of Pound "mirror the production of ideology they help expose in Pound's texts."

In any case, I hope that these essays continue post-ing modernism and other critical issues in another sense: that they will encourage more writing and reading, essay-ings as well as conversations about the still urgent issues of post-modernism. Readers of criticism and *Criticism* engaged in various ways with questions of aesthetic value and assessments of our own and previous writers' modernity are herewith presented with a letter of introduction—Ezra Pound would have said "instigation"—to read and enter the important critical exchanges that follow.