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## The Scale of Global Modernisms: Imperial, National, Regional, Local

HARSHA RAM

### Center, Periphery, and Beyond

ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES FACING THE STUDY OF GLOBAL MODERNISMS, AS OF ANY TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL PHENOMENON, is the question of scale. In declaring the contemporary world to be “*one, and unequal*,” several recent theorizations of world literature rest on the foundational assumption of a unified—albeit uneven—planetary scale (Moretti, “Conjectures” 56; see also Casanova 62–74; WREC 6–12). As such they model the dynamic of literary circulation across world regions according to the geographic distances, as well as the disproportionate access to socioeconomic and cultural resources, that separate and distinguish the world’s centers from their peripheries. These distances, and the inequalities they generate, are perceived as the necessary by-products of two spatial logics, that of the expanding world market and that of the modern Westphalian system of sovereign and competing nation-states. To posit the modern world as a singular system has the undoubted merit of acknowledging the structural connectedness of its operative inequalities, arising from the territorial partition of the globe by the imperial powers during the final decades of the nineteenth century and from its simultaneous unification in the wake of accelerating trade and new infrastructures of transport and communication. Nevertheless, the premise of a singular modernity (Jameson 142) has been repeatedly challenged (Chakrabarty 6–16; Mitchell; Scott 113–15; Orsini). It has been faulted for its developmentalist logic, involving an implied or explicit adherence to the related assumptions of linear or stadial historicism and spatial diffusionism, which together reduce the negotiated impact of modernity on the world’s far-flung regions to a process of top-down modernization originating in and imposed by the West. The force of this critique is blunted once the world system (Wallerstein; Hopkins et al.) is grasped as a profoundly uneven totality, allowing us to view the multiply differentiated space-times that coexist in the global present as produced by the imbalances

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constituting the world system as such (in literary scholarship, see Anderson, “Modernity”; Moretti, *Modern Epic* 50–52; Wollaeger 13–14; Lazarus 232–41, WREC 1–95; for corresponding debates in historiography and the social sciences, see Harootunian 62–63; Cooper 113–49; Chibber).

But questions remain. Positing a singular modernity, however internally differentiated by the dynamics of uneven development, risks relegating noncapitalist modes of production and exchange, as well as premodern cultural formations, to the status of archaic remnants, anachronisms whose survival is little more than the outcome of regressive modernization, which combines the underdevelopment of the periphery with progress at the core. Ignored are the vitality and longevity of genres such as poetry and oral performance in the realm of cultural production: the easy marriage of world-systems analysis to the study of the novel betrays a widespread indifference in contemporary literary studies to modes of transmission proper to bardic or folk culture (Beecroft 90). More generally, the dominant narrative of globalizing capital all too often brackets the rival path to modernity offered by state socialism to many parts of the world, from the Soviet Union to China, throughout much of the twentieth century. The explanatory power, no less than the intellectual limits, of systemic theories of world literature, then, derives in large part from three related spatial dynamics whose global reach is assumed to have been definitively achieved in the twentieth century: the territorial logic of the nation-state, the deterritorializing logic of market exchange and its concomitant division of labor, and the rise of differentiated structures of knowledge in which the humanities, as the privileged realm of cultural specificity (vouchsafed in our field by close reading), contrast with the universalizing sweep of the social sciences (Lee 32).

The only widespread alternative to world-systems theory currently practiced in the

study of global modernisms is the networks model of literary production, most prominently advanced by David Damrosch, for whom world literature is “less a set of works than a network”—in other words, not a fixed canon of texts but whatever is gained, culturally speaking, when texts undergo translation and transnational circulation (3). The networks model advances a set of assumptions about global space, as highlighted by Susan Stanford Friedman:

As a reading practice, the circulation approach to world modernisms focuses on the nature and politics of interconnection and relationality on a global landscape. It differs from the center/periphery model by stressing the interactive and the dynamic; it assumes multiple agencies and centers across the globe, different nodal points of modernist cultural production and the contact zones and networks among them. It presumes as well a polycentric model of global modernities and modernisms based on circular or multidirectional rather than linear flows. (511)

In distinguishing between cultural modernism and societal modernization and in asserting the possibility of multiple local or regional articulations of the modern, the networks model of world literature converges with the social science debate on “local” or “alternative” modernities (Sahlins; Appadurai; Gaonkar; Taylor), of which it might well be seen as a literary-theoretical correlative.

The networks model and the world-systems model clearly make different assumptions as to how power relations find expression in the cultural-aesthetic realm. The efficacy of world-systems theory derives from its ability to account for the dramatic asymmetries of power that sustained the world order during the heyday of literary-artistic modernism and to show the abiding pertinence of socioeconomic relations to cultural production. The networks model, by contrast, acknowledges the force of creative

agency and historical contingency, as well as the interactive dynamism of cross-cultural dialogue in contradistinction to political and economic power. The question thus arises, Are we obliged to choose between these models, thereby dramatizing the epistemological divide between the articulation of universal systems proper to the social sciences and the humanist exploration of cultural particularity (Robbins 46)? Or might we suppose that both models acquire their relative purchase from an orientation of scale? And if we were to make these scalar orientations theoretically explicit, might they also be reconciled as two moments of a necessarily multiscalar and cross-scalar method of analysis?

Rejecting any notion of space as a natural given, the empty container of human activity, recent debates in the field of geography assume that scale, like space, is socially produced. This assumption has led to a critique of normative models of scale, which perceive the “conventional scalar units of political geography: neighborhood, city, region, nation and supranational blocs, and the globe” as “hierarchically nested territories with well-defined boundaries” (McMaster and Sheppard 19), each lodged in the other like “so many Russian dolls” (Brenner et al. 1). In place of the “traditional, hierarchical conception of political space as a scaffolding of scales stretching vertically from the global and the national downward to the regional and the local” (14), contemporary geographers invite us to explore the dynamics of scale as the outcome of the historical “contradiction between expansion and centralization” proper to the contemporary world system, which is able to continuously “construct and dismantle scales” as a means to facilitate the circulation and restructuring of capital (Smith, “Scale Bending” 194; Harvey, *Spaces*). Pertinent here is the theoretical distinction between various kinds of scale, of which the geographer Neil Smith distinguishes at least three: cartographic, which “refers to the level of abstrac-

tion at which a map is constructed” and also offers the conceptual grid on which such territorial entities as empires and nations can be designated; methodological, involving some kind of “compromise between the research problem . . . and the availability of data”; and geographic, which “follows specific processes in the physical and human landscape” (“Scale” 724–25; see also WREC 131–54 and Tanoukhi 604). Related to geographic scale are what Henri Lefebvre somewhat obscurely called “spaces of representation” (“les espaces de représentation”; 43), by which he meant the sites of embodied ritual, leisure, and creative or celebratory practice whose imaginative projections are experienced “through images and symbols” (48–49, 53). Taken in isolation, cartographic scale tends to assume its epistemological constraints as an operational given—with the simultaneous use of mapping as a conceptual frame—whereas methodological scale risks becoming a self-limiting reflex to the empirical challenge posed by a potentially infinite quantity of data. The center-periphery model would appear conceptually related to cartographic scale, whereas the networks model, with its affinity for rhizomatic, or horizontal, linkages, seeks to render space as a series of distinct geographic locales or transregional itineraries. This essay seeks to test the usefulness of both models by jumping between cartographic and geographic scales and by drawing on multiple archives and regions that stretch the self-imposed limitations of methodological scale. The procedure of scale jumping, it is hoped, will make scalar hierarchy analytically and politically visible as a dynamically unstable system.

The remainder of this essay falls naturally into three parts that enact a broader movement from the cartographic to the geographic. The first explores the efficacy of cartographic scale by tracing the emergence of modernism as a programmatic term designating a literary movement in two world regions habitually called peripheral or semiperipheral

but seldom if ever discussed together: Latin America, on the one hand, and the Russian empire—differentiated into its metropole and vast hinterlands—on the other. The precocious embrace of modernism by artists in Latin America and the South Caucasus appears to confirm the operative force of the center-periphery opposition, even as it inverts the temporal logic that prioritizes the center. The second and third parts turn to the geographic scale of local space as an essential means by which to study the concrete forms of modernist cultural practice. The city I have been working on for over a decade is Tbilisi, formerly Tiflis, the colonial administrative center of Russian Transcaucasia until the revolutions of 1917 and the former and current capital of Georgia. Tiflis—as it was widely known throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—is of interest above all because of the sheer richness of the cultural production it witnessed during the czarist and revolutionary eras, a richness that confirms the pertinence of imperial and ethnonational formations, even as it points to hybrid cultural forms rooted in vernacular practices that were at once local and transregional (AlSayyad). Indebted to the goals of political emancipation and cultural modernization unleashed by the revolutionary era, the cultural production of Tiflis, like that of many other cities and regions of the far-flung Russian empire, anticipated by several decades the postcolonial predicament triggered by the decolonization of Asia and Africa. In this sense, the modernist production that arose in Tiflis yields readily to aspects of world-systems analysis based on the opposition of the metropole—whether Europe or Russia—to its margins. At the same time, Tiflis was no mere periphery of Russia or Europe. A long-standing conduit for commerce, conquest, and cultural flows between Europe, Russia, and the Islamic Near East, colonial and revolutionary Tiflis was equally a crossroads city linking multiple regions, long before they became culturally reified into the

binary opposition of “East” and “West” (Rapp; Garsoïan). Moreover, the political economy and cultural life of nineteenth-century Tiflis, largely devoid of many of the distinguishing features of capitalist development, raise important questions about the persistence of premodern cultural forms and noncapitalist social relations in the related evolution of aesthetic modernism and historical modernity, questions that the premise of a singular modernity has not definitively resolved. My hypothesis, in essence, is that both cartographic and geographic scales are pertinent, as well as mutually corrective, to the study of global modernism. A city of revolutionary agitation and bohemian excess, Tiflis witnessed at one and the same time the collision of nation and empire and the persistence of shifting older legacies, local and transregional. By reading the local and the transregional scales into the more familiar cartography of empire and nation, I offer elements of a cross-scalar and multiscale account of global modernism.

### Mapping Modernism: From Latin America to the Caucasus

It is a curious but significant fact, only seldom acknowledged outside Latin American studies, that the first positive literary-critical affirmation of modernism as a term, an affirmation that embraced its wider epochal and specifically aesthetic traits, emerged not in France but in Central America. In 1890 the renowned Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío hailed the “new spirit that today animates a small but triumphant and proud group of writers and poets of Spanish America: the spirit of modernism [*el modernismo*]” (19; cf. Rama; Craven; De Castro 17–32).<sup>1</sup> Profoundly inspired by the French nineteenth-century lyric, Darío gave a name to a process of literary innovation achieved through an optic of contraction, assimilation, and creative adaptation. From a Latin American perspective, recent French poetry, from Victor Hugo to the symbolists,

appeared as one continuum of radical innovation. In Matei Calinescu's words:

Although Hispanic modernism is often regarded as a variant of French *symbolisme*, it would be much more correct to say that it constitutes a *synthesis* of all the major innovative tendencies that manifested themselves in late nineteenth-century France. The fact is that the French literary life of the period was divided up into a variety of conflicting schools, movements, and even sects . . . which failed to realize what they had in common. (70)

The term *modernism*, it seems, first emerged to designate a programmatic poetics of innovation out of a geographically peripheral generalization and local reelaboration of recent metropolitan literary currents, currents viewed as distinct in the European metropolis but conflated and repurposed by intellectuals from the periphery to meet local needs. The Latin American avant-garde movements that succeeded *modernismo* strove to elaborate their own spatial location beyond the familiar challenge of temporal belatedness. The Brazilian Oswald de Andrade's playful "Cannibalist Manifesto" of 1928, like the concept of "transculturation" proposed in 1940 by the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz (97–102), suggests a self-primitivizing embrace of the local or the native and a radical openness to the foreign. Taken together, these cultural strategies allowed for a more critical negotiation of the place of Latin America in global modernity: not different temporalities, belated or advanced, but a hybrid synchronicity of disparate elements reconstituted into new forms (cf. Canclini 76; Franco; Schwarz; Yúdice; Rosenberg; Aching).

To what extent did this dynamic find an analogue in the Russian empire? As in Latin America, Russian literary modernism began with a sweeping but critical assimilation of recent French poetry—but in a domestic context defined by the didactic social concerns of the populist intelligentsia (Vengerova). In 1893

Dmitry Merezhkovsky, widely considered one of Russian modernism's founding figures, invoked the term "modernist" ("модернист") as a gallicism designating any "fashionable" writer who addressed the "pressing questions of the day" (175; see also Verret). In keeping with French and British usage until the twentieth century, the term denoted little for Merezhkovsky beyond modish topicality. In his notorious essay "What Is Art?" ("Что такое искусство?"; 1897–98), Lev Tolstoy displayed a firm if hostile grasp of French symbolism and decadence, phenomena he nevertheless labeled "modern" ("искусство нового времени") rather than "modernist" (87, 91). By 1905, however, without losing its sense of artistically denoting a diffuse but pervasive spirit of the times, the Russian term модернизм had become more widespread. Andrei Belyi, a central protagonist of Russian symbolism, complained that by modernism, which was frequently "conflated with symbolism," people meant "a multiplicity of literary schools that have nothing in common" beyond their shared contemporaneity (29). Like their French counterparts, the Russian modernists largely eschewed or criticized the term by which we designate them today, preferring narrower sectarian self-designations even as they welcomed the broader achievements of the new or contemporary art.

Things, however, were quite different beyond the Caucasus Mountains. By 1915 T'itsian T'abidze, a young Georgian modernist poet well versed in contemporary French and Russian letters, was able to overcome the reservations of his Russian counterparts and hail "modernist art" ("მოდერნული ხელოვნება") as the "native child of the city" and "modernism" ("მოდერნიზმი") as the expression of "visionary poets" such as the Frenchman Paul Verlaine, the Belgian Emile Verhaeren, and the Russian Aleksandr Blok (28). Similarly, the Georgian *maître à penser* Grigol Robakidze did not hesitate to title his programmatic 1918 Russian-language ac-

count of the school of poetry he championed “Georgian Modernism” (“Грузинский модернизм”): the earliest attempt at articulating the phenomenon of Georgian modernism to a wider (pan-Russian) audience thus embraced a term still controversial in Russia. In their telescoping of recent literary history and in their linking of the local (and protonational) to a global modernist tendency, T’abidze and Robakidze were essentially updating the peripheral generalization of *el modernismo* offered by Darío. To what extent can these precocious (if causally unrelated) validations of *modernism* be seen as the productive outcome of geographic distance from the metropolitan centers of modernity?

In the United States modernism came to be defined by the formalism of Clement Greenberg and the postwar New Critical consolidation of the twentieth-century Anglo-American literary canon, a process begun decades after the peripheral formulations of Darío and T’abidze. In this sense, the Latin American and Eurasian peripheries anticipated the conclusions formulated in hindsight by Anglo-American critics. In discussing Latin American *modernismo*, Perry Anderson has called this phenomenon a “prodrome,” the precocious or early symptom of a condition diagnosed only subsequently in the centers of world power (*Origins* 3). In Georgia, *modernism* served as a catchall term subject to internal differentiation, an amalgam of heterogeneous artistic models and literary movements imported, often anachronistically, from Europe, ranging from *fin de siècle* decadence to the futurist avant-garde. For the Georgians, the high-modernist canon came to embrace the recent trajectory of European poetry from Charles Baudelaire to F. T. Marinetti and Vladimir Mayakovsky and that of European painting from the impressionists to Pablo Picasso. These retroactive conflation explain the contracted and accelerated way in which Georgian art and literature evolved during this period, ultimately generating

patterns of cultural development that were *synchronous rather than sequential*. The first Petrarchan sonnets were composed in Georgian even as local poets were contemplating the crisis of lyric form associated in European literature with Stéphane Mallarmé. Symbolism as a literary movement was introduced in Georgia while the futurist avant-garde was contesting and dismantling it in Russia and Italy. These ironies were not lost on the Georgians. Indeed, they were fully aware of the advantages as well as the burdens of an unevenly modernized cultural field, a predicament Leon Trotsky would later theorize as the “law of uneven and combined development” (103).

From Darío to T’abidze, the positive program of what might be called peripheral modernism was twofold, involving the coordination of artistic practices between the center and the margins (aesthetic or cultural modernization, generally inflected by an amalgam of formal artistic innovations), as well as a heightened sense of regional specificity or local difference. These two elements, implicating the apparently irreconcilable goals of centripetal homogenization and centrifugal self-differentiation, could not readily be fused or reconciled. In Latin America as well as in the Caucasus, the bipolar opposition of center and periphery was considerably attenuated to the extent that each region was able to rearticulate its place in relation to multiple centers, whose resources were polemically contrasted. As Pascale Casanova has written of Latin American *modernismo*: “In availing himself of the literary prestige and power of France, Rubén Darío succeeded in overturning the terms of Hispanic aesthetic debate and in imposing the imported evidence of French modernity upon Latin America and then, reversing the terms of colonial subjugation, upon Spain as well” (146–47). While Georgia lacked the size as well as the linguistic commonality that paradoxically allowed Latin America to permanently overturn Iberian cultural domination, a triadic spatial model, involving a

decolonizing periphery (the Caucasus), an imperial metropole (Russia), and a rival cosmopolitan center (Paris) apparently removed from the exigencies of politics, reflects the cultural aspirations of the modern Georgian elites as much as those of Latin America.

Thus far, it seems clear that center-periphery distinctions, along with a diffusionist model of literary history that situated the origins of innovation in France, were in fact a commonplace of Russian-Eurasian as well as Latin American debates; as such they cannot be ignored or dismissed as a theoretical prejudice retroactively imposed. At the same time, peripheral modernism did not merely transpose metropolitan forms. Their adaptation involved a dynamic of temporal acceleration and local resignification, sometimes resulting in the anticipation of conceptual generalizations achieved only subsequently by the cultures of the metropole. I propose therefore to retain a modified version of the center-periphery model wherever the interaction between center and periphery can effectively be seen to structure the cultural debates, socio-economic dynamics, and artistic practices of the era. Yet center-periphery distinctions were only one constitutive part of a more complex scalar dynamic. The city of Tiflis bore witness to a multiform local modernism and—as we shall see—an uneven modernity in which competing nationalisms and socialisms laid claim to the political arena and where a robust popular culture coexisted alongside high cultural forms. In Tiflis, as in other cities located on Russia's borderlands, high and low, East and West, and self and other flourished or competed in proximity. In contrast to the recuperative strategies of European modernism, which generally relied on the culturally exotic and the physically remote (the most frequently cited example is Picasso's cubist appropriation of the African mask in 1907 [Gikandi]), Tiflis modernism strove for a rearticulation of situational identities in an intimate context of cosmopolitan coexistence.

My argument is that the environs of Tiflis generated their own versions of modernism and modernity, in which the global coexisted and interacted in complex but precise ways with the vernacular and the local. I elaborate this convergence of the global and the local as one of two distinct but equally urban genealogies of modernism: one deriving from the celebrated instance of Baudelairean Paris as theorized by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* and “Paris—Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (and rendered relevant to discussions of geographical scale by David Harvey in *The Spaces of Hope* and “Paris, 1850–1870”), all duly mirrored by Baudelaire's counterparts in the Georgian literary elite; the other exemplified by the popular culture of Tiflis, rooted in the trading and artisanal classes. Both genealogies relate to cultural articulations arising from a social formation known as urban bohemia. The differences arising between the bohemian milieus of Paris and Tiflis—discrepancies of class and geography no less than of literary form—suggest how we might begin to articulate the various bourgeois-cosmopolitan, prototypical, and local-vernacular expressions of modernism, without sacrificing the global perspective vouchsafed by world-systems theory. The site-specific framework of colonial and revolutionary Tiflis, in its local and regional scalar dimensions, thus provides a rich circulatory counterpoint to the cartographic globalism of world literature.

### The Urban Space of Colonial and Revolutionary Tiflis

In hailing modernism as a “child of the city,” T'abidze was echoing his many poetic predecessors since Baudelaire in affirming urban life as the primary theme as well as the enabling condition of modernist cultural production (cf. Alter). For T'abidze, the modern city had realized the definitive separation of nature from culture, since industrial tech-



nology induced fundamental changes in the human sensorium. He breathlessly hailed “London, New York, [and] Hamburg” as cities “where smokestacks are taller than temples, where automobiles rush rabidly about, and rows of zeppelins gather for flight” (28). He was flaunting his up-to-dateness by referring to the Italian futurist avant-garde’s noisy embrace of accelerating speed, the compression of space-time induced by mechanized transportation and industrial commodity production. Both were hallmarks of the modern Western metropolis, but neither was dramatically in evidence in Tiflis or other Georgian towns, which lacked most of the defining features of industrial capitalism (Lenin 594). Indeed, until the end of the nineteenth century, the economy of Tiflis was largely dominated by preindustrial (artisanal and small-scale) manufacturing and the commerce in transit commodities that flourished in the bazaars and caravansaries of the old city.

How then can we speak of a Tiflis modernism? If colonial Tiflis scarcely mirrored the spatial structures of a modern industrial metropolis, it was by no means untouched by the inroads of modernization. Tiflis was a city stratified by ethnicity, legal estate, occupation, and bureaucratic rank, as well as dominated by a colonial administration that sometimes collaborated and sometimes competed with the city’s municipal authorities. In the half century following the Great Reforms of the 1860s, the city’s formalized politics came to be defined by a tug-of-war between the Russian administration and Tiflis’s ethnically divided indigenous elites: an “eminent citizenry” of wealthy Armenian merchants and men of property who controlled most of the levers of economic power and a beleaguered group of urbanized Georgian aristocrats fighting a prolonged and losing battle against economic decline and exclusion from municipal politics. Most of Tiflis’s inhabitants were effectively excluded from participating in the city’s governance until the revolution-

ary convulsions of 1905. The working populace, meanwhile, found its cultural voice and sense of economic agency in the professional guilds that had long governed the activities of trade and handicraft manufacturing (Akhverdov; Egiazarov; Bakradze and Berzenov; Suny, “Tiflis” and “Nationalism”).

If the division of labor by class and ethnicity was the primary force structuring urban space, then the construction of a European Tiflis, begun during the viceroyalty of Mikhail Vorontsov (1845–54), superimposed an East-West civilizational divide on a heterogeneous urban context. In contradistinction to the city’s residual Asiatic—essentially Persian—core but adjacent to it, Vorontsov’s urban renewal saw the construction of Golovinsky Prospect (now Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi’s main artery), a rectilinear boulevard boasting the viceroy’s palace and other government buildings; Georgia’s first proscenium theater; and the suburb of Sololaki, a European-style residential neighborhood designed for the ascendant Armenian bourgeoisie. One is tempted to draw a parallel with the contemporaneous restructuring of Paris by Haussmann, a process that, along with the reverberations of the failed revolutions of 1848, arguably provoked the earliest articulations of aesthetic modernism in France (Benjamin, “Paris”; Clark; Ross; Harvey, “Paris”). Yet if *Haussmannisation* was intended to facilitate the free circulation of industrial and commercial capital and bring about the eventual *embourgeoisement* of Paris, then Vorontsov was inspired by the different legacy of eighteenth-century Petrine modernization, which reinforced the autocratic state as the primary agent of economic development and cultural progress (Jersild 63; Bater 135). Imperial urbanism gave rise to what Daniel Brower has called “façade cities” throughout the Russian provinces (9), but the restructuring of Tiflis sought to encode Russia’s civilizing mission in its Eurasian peripheries: in this sense, the urban transformation of Tiflis followed many

of the essential parameters of European colonial rule elsewhere in the world, reasserting imperial authority while offering local elites the beguiling benefits of cultural enlightenment and political co-optation (Oldenburg; Glover; Avermaete et al.).

Modernity, then, was palpably evident in Tiflis: it was manifested in the spatial restructuring of the city and the cultural Europeanization of the elites fostered by the Russian state, in the prolonged struggle between artisanal and nascent industrial modes of production and the radically distinct social relations they implied, and in the distinctly modern ideologies, be they nationalist or socialist, through which the economic and cultural aspirations and grievances of various communities were articulated. Class and nationality elicited competing, multiple, and contingent loyalties such that the vertical collisions of class struggle were often mediated by the horizontal solidarity of shared ethnicity, the wider struggle against Russian autocracy, and the competing ideological visions of national sovereignty or supranational socialist federalism.

Tiflis's colonial and revolutionary history—with its legacies of statist modernization, interethnic coexistence and political resistance, premodern as well as modernizing cultural practices—evolved on a local, urban scale that we may usefully place alongside the better-known story of Parisian bohemia. A juxtaposition of these two distinct social genealogies—Western and Near Eastern but equally urban—offers us a precise means by which to think about aesthetic modernism locally, transregionally, and globally.

### Genealogies of Bohemia; or, Beyond the Flâneur

The Georgian, Armenian, and Russian elites came into contact with the urban populace of Tiflis in an unevenly modernized and densely differentiated urban context. Over the course

of the nineteenth century, Tiflis had consolidated its popular culture, displaying highly evolved codes of ethics and behavior governing all modes of work, leisure, creativity, and sociability. The self-consciousness of Tbilisi's popular culture was most strikingly displayed in various kinds of merrymaking, festive poetic recitation, and song that were rooted in a social milieu of bardic minstrels, tradesmen, and artisans and that drew on a diverse repertoire of Georgian, Armenian, Azeri-Turkic, and Persian linguistic, musical, and generic forms.

Originating in premodern, interethnic, and transregional patterns of trade and cultural exchange but reflecting the shifts in modern urban life, the popular culture of Tiflis evolved a distinct system of syncretic practices, mostly derived from a wider Near Eastern matrix but inflected by the local predilection for wine. These festive practices were pursued in a materially tangible urban realm: the taverns, gardens, and eating houses of the old city, all located in proximity to the bazaars and workshops of the artisanal and trading classes. Guild sociability gave rise to an ideal masculine prototype, that of the დარდიმანდი კაცი (*dardimandi k'atsi*), or “man without a care,” and found expression in a genre of sung verse, the მუხამბაზი (*mukhambazi*), that celebrated his amorous exploits, his leisurely pursuits, and the paradoxical moral values that informed his sybaritic excesses (Ram). Indeed, the moral economy of the მუხამბაზი was to a large extent predicated on the inversion of expectations and conventions: profligacy was extolled in opposition to parsimony, and any effort expended in the pursuit of hospitality, love, or shared pleasure was deemed preferable to profit, or gain. The idealized prototype of the დარდიმანდი კაცი was manifested according to a differentiated typology of professions, such as the chivalrous ყარახოხელი (*qarachokheli*), or guild craftsman, or the rakish and déclassé კინტო (*k'int'o*), or peddler. Ac-

ording to the carnivalized poetics of inversion characteristic of Tiflis's popular culture, the markers of each profession related less to what a man made or sold for a living, or to his station in life, than to his corporate dress code; his speech; his leisurely, poetic, and amorous pursuits; and his capacity to drink. Sociability, which Georg Simmel once termed the "play-form" of democratic association that is most fully realized among equals belonging to the same social stratum, came to be celebrated as a performative value, a form of festive cultural semiosis that was consistently in excess of the exchange value of the commodities being made or sold in the city (130, 132–33).

How does Tiflis's popular culture compare with the more familiar story of Parisian bohemia, widely recognized as the social niche from which European modernism emerged? In Europe the social preconditions for modernism arose much earlier, in the Romantic era, out of what César Graña has called an "unresolvable tension between society and the man of letters" (xiii). The decline of traditional forms of patronage, the commercialization of the literary market, and the rise of mass literacy produced a surfeit of indigent literati whose vindication of the creative imagination came to resonate as a protest against the newly ascendant bourgeois order. This process, generally traced to Paris under the July Monarchy (1830–48), gave rise to a mobile and growing substratum of intellectuals typified by vagabond independence, non-conformism, and a manifest hostility to the new market-driven values of thrift, industry, and pragmatic calculation. Bohemia arose, in Trotsky's astute if formulaic dismissal of the Russian futurist avant-garde, as the "revolt . . . of the semipauperized left wing of the intelligentsia" against and yet ultimately within the bourgeoisie (114). It borrowed its antiutilitarian cultural posture from the old aristocracy, even as its evident lack of means contrasted with the lifestyle of the leisured classes. It rejected the marketplace in principle but none-

theless responded to the marketplace's call for innovation, topicality, and scandal. These contradictory affiliations—culturally aristocratic but economically petty-bourgeois or déclassé—corresponded to a historic transition in the status of the modern artist, an "intermediate stage," as Benjamin would have it, in which the Parisian intelligentsia "still has patrons but is already beginning to familiarize itself with the market." Bohemia, for Benjamin, was the social formation proper to this transitional stage, in which the poet "sets foot in the marketplace—ostensibly to look around, but in truth to find a buyer" (*Arcades Project* 10). The poet here appears quintessentially as a flâneur, "the idling pedestrian, the curious, perhaps disinterested, purposeless observer of teeming urban variety, the spectator connoisseur" (Alter 9). Poetic modernism, then, arose from the bohemian poet-flâneur's negotiation of an urban sensorium newly transformed by the market economy.

In Russia as in Georgia, the emergence of bohemia as a marked social category coincided with the birth of modernism, more than half a century after its Parisian manifestation (Krivtsun 108–09). In Georgia, modernism arose as a bohemian and urban phenomenon, a fact vividly recalled by Robakidze in 1918: "In the beginning of 1915 the sermon of the new artistic word rang out over [the town]." Its effect was to "suddenly transform" all the taverns

into Parisian literary cafés, where, alongside the sounds of hoarse accordions and the inevitable "Mravalzhamier" [a popular Georgian ritual song toasting the longevity of those present], one could hear the cherished names of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. . . . (46–47)

Robakidze's breathless incantation of the European modernist canon in the locale of a Georgian city tavern returns us to the topic with which we began, namely the role of

aesthetic modernism in effecting the cultural coarticulation of center and periphery. My concluding point is this: Georgia's singular success in importing and adapting modernism was owing not just to a mimicry of European models but also, fundamentally, to the recognition of a compatible local ambience. Put simply, Caucasian festive, singing, and drinking practices provided a regional analogue to modernist bohemia, a convergence lucidly discerned by Tiflis's greatest poet-chronicler, Ioseb Grishashvili, in his elegiac ethnography, ძველი ტფილისის ლიტერატურული ბოჰემა ("The Literary Bohemia of Old Tiflis"). In its dandyism, insouciance, and indifference to gain, the figure of the Tiflis folk artist was perceived as the vernacular equivalent of the Baudelairean poet-flâneur. Two distinctly cosmopolitan cultures, entirely discrepant in their geographic provenance (Russia and Europe versus the Near East) and points of cultural reference (elite versus popular), converged in a moment of mutual—if partial—recognition. This was particularly true of revolutionary Tiflis, which saw a rapid mushrooming of Parisian-style cafés and cabarets alongside the taverns and gardens of the old city, all flourishing under the auspices of the Georgian Menshevik government. Generally reduced to exotic ciphers of *couleur locale*, the festive spaces and practices of old Tiflis are best seen as the palpable signs of a still living popular culture, rooted in an older relation to production, circulation, and consumption in which time and space were structured by sociability more than by monetary exchange. These traits of Tiflis's leisure practices—rooted in premodern cultural forms and noncapitalist modes of exchange—resonated with the implied or overt critique of bourgeois norms proposed by the café culture of Tiflis's modernist bohemia in its Georgian, Armenian, and Russian articulations.

What has been gained by viewing aesthetic modernism as at once a global movement, linking multiple peripheries to multiple

centers, and a site-specific set of cultural phenomena, historically asynchronous, socially and linguistically heterogeneous, but coexisting in dense proximity? Global modernism, like many supranational phenomena, would appear to require the simultaneous and mobile application of more than one scale of spatialization. Restaged as the asymmetrical dialogue of imperial and national elites, non-Western modernisms would appear to fit readily into a center-periphery model, even as peripheral literary histories seem frequently to anticipate terminological generalizations, including the term *modernism*, that are reached only subsequently by Western theory. At the same time, Tiflis reveals the existence of a sui generis vernacular culture, anterior to the establishment of the nation, permissive of hybrid or multiple identities, and requiring a spatial model that exceeds the binarism of nation and empire, of dependent national elites and their hegemonic imperial counterparts. A scalar jump from global cartography to local geography reveals the contours of a city that allowed modernism to function simultaneously on two equally cosmopolitan registers—the broadly Europeanized culture of the Russian, Georgian, and Armenian elites with their competing literary registers of symbolism, Acmeism, and futurism and the vernacular Near Eastern and commonly Caucasian culture of the urban masses. For a brief moment coinciding with the Russian Revolution, these currents converged in a ludic re-enchancement of the everyday. Their convergence points to the necessity of scalar thinking, capable of mapping hierarchical cartographies of power as well as tracing the networks that link local and transregional histories.

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## NOTES

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