Jessica Pressman. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xiv, 224 p. ill. ISBN 9780199937080. UK £65.00 (hardcover).

Jessica Pressman's *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media* is an impressive accomplishment. Pressman deftly handles modernist, New Critical, and contemporary electronic literature contexts. Her central argument that a strain of contemporary electronic literature relies on the same mechanism of newness and tradition as modernist literature is compelling and convincing. Both literary movements, she argues, are "centrally about media" (4), about serious literary production, and about "renovating the past *through* media" (original emphasis, 4). Digital modernism communicates "newness" by updating and reworking the canonical literary past in a way that is particularly concerned with media. This argument extends to Pressman's defense of close reading as her methodology: she skillfully demonstrates how the project of literary seriousness demands deeply attentive reading in both print and digital media.

The monograph contains an introduction and six chapters, most of which compare historical modernist literary texts with contemporary digital modernist literary texts. Through this comparison, the echoes between each literary moment emerge: each has a similar definition of newness; each is fundamentally about media. Chapter three most convincingly achieves this argument in its comparison of newness, aesthetic difficulty, and media-saturated aesthetic strategies in Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries's *Dakota* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Chapter five diverges the most from the structure of the book, comparing modernist linguistic movements like Esperanto and Ezra Pound's explorations of the Chinese ideogram to contemporary representations of computer code as a universal language. In addition, this chapter's central literary text, Eric Loyer's digital novel *Chroma* (2001), exposes how "universality" can mask an exclusionary specificity. For Loyer's characters, racialized bodies remain racialized even in cyberspace; for computer code, the cultural dominance of English is inscribed in the history and substance of computer languages.

Despite its impressive breadth, I frequently found myself frustrated by the way in which Pressman's study sidesteps certain cultural critical contexts. Chief among these is the book's engagement with seriousness and canonicity, to which I add an additional term, "prestige." Pressman's account of modernism as an aesthetic movement is canonical, which also means that it is male. The maleness of this version of modernism is important here, as maleness has been, even if only incidentally, central to the development of literary prestige and

seriousness. Pressman's argument hinges on both the scholarly creation of the canon and artistic reworking of canonical literatures. Her observation that digital modernists wish for their art to be serious and difficult is a key aspect of these artworks' definition as *modernist*. But without a critical engagement with canonicity, concepts like seriousness and difficulty likewise go uncriticised, as do the gendered aspects of these concepts.

I do not think that Pressman's project should have also been one of feminist recovery. However, I am surprised that the book did not undertake a more thorough engagement with questions of canonicity, seriousness, and prestige. In fact, the book's introduction touches on how "modernism was in fact deeply permeated by the lowbrow and mass media" (9) in order to note that scholarship has moved beyond the "great divide" of high and low culture described by Andreas Huyssen. But digital modernism is explicitly concerned with distancing itself from the popular and the accessible. The fact that electronic literature uses the media platforms developed for mass media does not translate to a permeation of the popular into the elite anymore than the populist history of the novel renders contemporary novelistic high art popular.

Despite my criticisms, I recommend Pressman's book — it is particularly timely. Pressman is explicit that her study fits into the scholarly contexts of modernist studies and New Media studies. A third context, the digital humanities, occupies very little of Pressman's explicit attention, but it is an important one. To contextualize Pressman's book within digital humanities is to align it with a current scholarly zeitgeist. In the last few years, the maturity of digital humanities methodologies has combined with the recent release of modernist text from copyright. In the resulting flurry of scholarly activity, an account of the shared genealogy of modernism and the digital is invaluable. The book has already allowed me to make my own insights into the digital humanities: in its preoccupation with newness, media specificity, and reading practices, the digital humanities may itself provide another strand in the trajectory of modernism's rootedness in media.

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