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THE CREATURELY MODERNISM OF AMOS TUTUOLA

Matthew Omelsky

Rarely is the work of Amos Tutuola described as modernist. In fact, his work is most often portrayed as modernism's inversion, as premodern, or "traditional." In J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), the character Emmanuel Egudu outlines the literary reception of the early Nigerian novelist. Africans initially rejected Tutuola's work, Egudu explains, for its "broken" English prose, for perpetuating the continent's "primitive" image. Europe, by contrast, was infatuated with the exotic imagery and language of his work. Egudu concludes that while Tutuola is an important writer, he is, ultimately, an "oral writer" whose work is "very simple" (40–51). Indeed, in Coetzee's novel we find a rendition of the all too trite appraisal of Tutuola's place in African literature. His work is often thought of as derivative of Yoruba folklore, as severed from the outside world.

Underneath this cloak of the premodern, however, lie traces of the modern. For Simon Gikandi, the apparent celebration of the premodern in much early African literature is paradoxically "a witness to its loss"—a loss that, Gikandi suggests, stems from the anxiety of the modern (2007, 12). But the modern in Amos Tutuola's work is not merely a pervasive sense of anxiety. Behind his borrowings from Yoruba oral tradition, Tutuola presents a global constellation of objects and goods—from radios to footballs to televisions—that rupture the conventional notion of an insular, primitive Africa. In Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), we find figurations of capital in the many creatures and monsters that pervade his fantastical landscapes. The bodies of these curious and haunting beings are literally composed of commodities, technologies, and tropes of exchange. These creatures and their modern appendages gesture toward

a vastly expanded lifeworld that extends to the farthest reaches of empire—indeed, to the farthest global reaches of capital.

Amos Tutuola's creaturely modernism, I contend, lies principally in the ontology and materiality of these creatures. Each is a freakish, worldly multitude, a melding of bacteria, television screens, maggots, and flashing lights. These creatures descend from the fantastical aesthetic tradition of West African folklore, yet the diverse objects and beings that compose their bodies mark them as part of a global system in perpetual motion. His creatures give life to the global flows of capital presupposed by their organlike commodities. Pivotal, too, is the biopolitical terrain these curious beings inhabit. They live in a world of seemingly inescapable terror, exploitation, and surveillance. The aesthetics and materiality of the creaturely body cannot be separated from the politics of modernity in which populations are controlled, ordered, and put to work. And, finally, any examination of Tutuola's modernism must attend to the question of style, to the aesthetic mode in which he articulates his creatures and their folkloric biopolitical world. His use of syntax, diction, and narrative form not only destabilizes linear time and space, but it vivifies his haunting creatures, bringing them to the fore of his fragmented episodic narratives. Amos Tutuola's creaturely modernism becomes fully apparent only when we examine the creature situated in its biopolitical environment, and when we consider the language through which this creaturely world is brought to life. To read Tutuola in such a way is meant to redirect Africanist discourse toward a more explicitly global and phenomenological conception of West African experience and aesthetics at midcentury. This notion of African modernism is not at all new; it has been in Tutuola's fantastical writing for more than half a century, shrouded under the veil of the "premodern."¹

In the early 1950s, when Tutuola's first two novels were released, much of West Africa was embroiled in anticolonial struggle, which, in many instances, insulated these emerging nations, culturally, economically, and politically, from the rest of the world. The publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1952 could be said to mark the opening up of West Africa to the world at a moment when so much African cultural production and political rhetoric turned inward in search of nationhood. *Palm Wine*, in other words, was ahead of its time, espousing the global even before the collapse of colonial rule. Tutuola's use

of the West African surrealist mode obfuscates allegorical readings of anticoloniality and liberation, but importantly, he retains palpable traces of a global capitalist system in which West Africa had an influential role to play. Tutuola's modernism inscribed West Africa into a *world* system, not merely an imperial system or one of national enclosure.²

Working through the optic of Tutuola's creatures allows us to examine a configuration of African modernism unmoored from the predictable tropes of the colonial encounter or the emergent African nation. Instead, these creatures with televisions for hands and flashing lights for eyes allow us to think of West Africa as a global nexus of consumer culture, commodity flows, and social relation. Tutuola's modernism reveals a phenomenological sense of what it means to be global, and to think globally. His Africa is a site of syncretism, a space in which airplanes, shape-shifting ghosts, photography, and palm wine merge to form a new African mode of being-in-the-world. Amos Tutuola's *sui generis* creatures open us to a global African modernism.

AFRICAN MODERNISMS

African modernism as an aesthetic category has historically been multivalent and contested. It reaches far, from figurations of subjectivity, tradition, and loss to allegories of liberation and national collapse. To be sure, Amos Tutuola is a modernist writer, but he is not one that can be read solely through these common tropes that pervade African modernist discourse. His modernism comes through the global reach of capital, not necessarily through familiar representations of the emergent nation, the individual, or postcolonial crisis. Tutuola's creaturely modernism is, however, related to that important lineage of African modernist thought.

While there may be many lenses through which to examine the modernist sensibility in African cultural production, one critical notion underlies them all. Aptly put by Okwui Enwezor, "The narratives of modernity in Africa are predicated on an encounter of antagonism" (615). This antagonism, of course, has its ostensible historical roots in the fifteenth century and the first Portuguese sea expeditions to sub-Saharan Africa. The antagonism emerged, in other words, in

the rupture brought on by the European encounter and its attendant impositions of violence, capitalism, language, and social institutions. Undoubtedly, modernity is not simply synonymous with Europe, as if it brought the modern to Africa. Modernity emerged on the continent through the syntheses, mistranslations, and gaps between European and African economic and social formations. African modernity was born in the interstices of Europe and Africa. African modernism is marked by the cultural forms and tropes produced in these interstices.

Questions of liberation and nationhood are among the most frequent discursive constructs in African modernist criticism and cultural practice. The establishment and construction of the autonomous nation was a critical issue for many writers and artists of the mid-twentieth century. As Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1970) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) demonstrate, the literary text effectively inscribed itself into the political discourses of anticolonialism and nation-building. And with this comingling of the literary and the political came the fraught issue of the role of aesthetic experimentation vis-à-vis the politics of the emergent nation. The problematic concerned the extent to which experimental writers, such as the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, effectively obscured a necessary sense of political engagement through oblique uses of language and form. For writers and scholars at the fore of this debate, like Wole Soyinka and Chinweizu, questions of literary form and technique were central to the role of the aesthetic in shaping the emerging nation (Quayson 2004, 826). Moreover, notions of liberation and national autonomy were also pivotal in the African visual arts, with artists in many newly independent nations, notably Senegal, establishing direct relationships with state institutions. The prominent Senegalese modernist painter Iba N'Diaye, for instance, was appointed by the Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1960 to direct a major section of the newly established *École des Arts* in Dakar, where he taught the next generation of Senegalese painters and sculptors. With the postcolonial state's enlistment of artists, a system of state patronage was formed in the interest of refashioning a sense of cultural and national autonomy to reflect the modern, independent moment. In the mid-twentieth century, African modernism was very much a nationalist undertaking, an entanglement of the aesthetic and the political.

These concerns with cultural nationalism and the new nation inform the enchantment-disenchantment dialectic of African modernism. In many African fictions, colonial modernity entails a simultaneous enchantment with the new and disenchantment with the failed promise of the new. Colonial modernity, in other words, pivots on a dialectic of loss and desire, failure and promise. The contradiction emerges when that which is considered to be “modern” is at once condemned as an alienating, repressive illusion, but also hailed as a catalyst for social and economic advancement (Olaniyan, 83). This dialectic is further complicated when we consider the linkage between this sense of disenchantment and the “metaphysics of the premodern” in African literature. Many African writers and intellectuals have looked to tradition to stave off the discontent engendered by colonial modernity. For Simon Gikandi, however, this romanticization of the premodern simply reveals what is ultimately the *loss* of the premodern. Turning to tradition as a “rescue plan from the pain of modernity” is more a symptom of the anxiety of modernity than a celebration of cultural nationalism (2007, 9–12). Instead of understanding tradition and modernity to be mutually exclusive, the two are enmeshed in modernism’s anxious dialectic of loss and desire.

Inside these modernist African narratives of enchantment and disenchantment is the figure of the individual. The heightened sense of individualism, interiority, and self-reflexivity common in the work of writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf finds related configurations in the work of African writers like Chinua Achebe, Kofi Awoonor, and Tayeb Salih. Predictably, this shift toward the articulation of a modernist subject has been sharply criticized as merely revealing the disintegration of African social structures, as representing a European model of the individual. But this rigidly composed binary of individualism and communalism is indeed a false one, for most African writers in fact establish a “middle space” between the two (Quayson 2004, 826–28). Gikandi illustrates this well in his discussion of Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958): “In spite of his [Okonkwo’s] overdetermination by a communal ethos, either in support or revolt against it, Okonkwo is the classical bourgeois subject of the modern novel, a subject defined simultaneously by his alienation from his community and the charismatic hold he has on it” (2007, 5–6). The modern African subject is very much a blurring of the individual and

the communal. The articulation of African modernism at the interstices of European and African cultures comes to the fore in literary figurations of the subject.

This blurring of cultures that produced African modernism shifted throughout the twentieth century, moving from tropes of nation-building at midcentury to ones of postcolonial crisis in the late century. The accompanying aesthetics of this crisis moment were, and in many cases remain, an aesthetics of fragmentation and dissonance. These aesthetics are perhaps most evident in the turn to magical realist-like writing beginning in the 1960s, in works such as Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962), Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* (1979), and Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978). The institution of African literature itself was in crisis, having lost the claim of authority it once drew from the past (Gikandi 2007, 15). The fragmented literatures of the postcolonial moment have corresponded to society's crises of broken institutions, political instability, and fractured sense of history. Indeed, the crisis is both a product of modernity and the decay of the institutions of modernity. As Gikandi provocatively suggests, "Africa has entered its Weimar period." For him, issues of experience and truth are now inextricable from those of life and death. "What is the role of art," he asks, "when its condition of possibility is one of unprecedented crisis?" (14–18). The collapse of the euphoria of independence and the postcolony's subsequent atrophy are some of the more recent tropes of African modernism. An aesthetics of crisis has emerged in a deeply uncertain historical moment.³

Sarah Lincoln has recently given close attention to this period of crisis aesthetics, isolating a particular modernist mode in Nigerian magical realism. Reading Ben Okri's collection *Stars of the New Curve* (1988), she develops the useful term "inflationary modernism" to characterize the way Okri's nonrealist aesthetics coincide with Nigeria's "oil boom" and "inflationary bust" of the 1970s and 1980s. She explains how oil wealth produced a social and political culture of excess and spectacular opulence that concealed pervasive state corruption, producing a "simulacral symbolic economy" in which the commodity became severed from the fantastic superstructure it generated. "Okri's magical realist vision [is] an attempt to bear witness to the oil economy's radical disruption of the bond holding signifier to signified, representation to reality, and the signs of value to its substance"

(250). For Lincoln, Okri's modernist aesthetics seeks to "memorialize the wasted bodies, social relations, landscapes, and dreams" rendered invisible by this break between the production of oil and the inflationary spectacle.

Another scholar to carve out new terrain in discussions of African modernism in the last few years is Tsitsi Jaji with her notion of "stereomodernism." If global circulation is implicit in Lincoln's concept of inflationary modernism, Jaji brings circulation to the fore in her examination of the ways African diasporic music circulates throughout African texts from the late nineteenth century to the present. Jaji focuses on the "symbolic roles of diasporic music in pan-African writing and film, and . . . how music informed what it meant to be 'modern' in the context of globally interconnected, mutable, and mutually constituted black identities" (2). Stereomodernism, for Jaji, is this global circulation of sound, but it is also a metaphor for the subtle (sonic and cultural) differences of sound as it circulates, akin to the notion of stereophonic surround sound wherein two separate signals produce "slight temporal differences which the ear interprets psycho-acoustically as information about spatial orientation" (13). Jaji's modernism is thus a theory of black solidarity-in-difference as it takes shape in the reverberating global circulations of diasporic music.

Both Jaji and Lincoln reread important works of twentieth-century African cultural production in order to articulate modernist modes that move beyond dominant African modernist tropes. In Amos Tutuola's modernism we can see the elements of circulation and global capital that underwrite Lincoln's and Jaji's formulations far more than the well-worn categories of the nation or the subject. In *Palm Wine* and *Bush of Ghosts*, there is no clear colony or nation to speak of. One could imagine allegorical readings in these novels—allegories of the nation, the collapse of tradition, or even postcolonial crisis. But the structures of fragmentation, wandering subjectivity, and alterity that could be read as modernist allegories could just as easily be traced back to borrowings from Yoruba oral tradition. Before we isolate Tutuola's modernist sensibility, the writer needs to be situated among his literary precursors and his audience. In doing so, it will become clear just how uncommon it is to refer to Tutuola as a modernist. Indeed, Tutuola has effectively been discarded from African modernist discourse, buried in the annals of African literature's premodernity.

OF LINEAGES AND RECEPTIONS

This ascription of the premodern is largely based on an association between the many folkloric traditions in West Africa and the narrative form, fantastical elements, and use of proverbs in Tutuola's first two novels. While most of his works follow similar patterns of narrative development, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* are particularly well suited to a dialogical reading. Each is an episodic journey featuring a shape-shifting picaresque hero who sets out in search of something that he ultimately attains. Both heroes travel through unfamiliar realms, encountering monsters and ghosts that violently beat them, threaten to enslave them, and some who help them attain their objectives. *Palm Wine* features a gluttonous young man in search of his palm wine tapster after the tapster fell to his death while extracting wine from a tree. The protagonist uses his "native juju" to transform himself into many different beings and nonbeings, including a bird, a lizard, a canoe, and even air, so as to evade the many "terrible and wonderful creatures" he encounters during his quest to find his tapster. *Bush of Ghosts* features a boy who walks into the "Bush of Ghosts" to elude the slave traders chasing him near his family home. The novel catalogues the events in the life of this boy in the bush, notably his encounters with various smelly, colorful, and fire-emitting creature-ghosts, as he attempts to reenter the human world and return to his family.

Since the publication of these first works, Amos Tutuola has undergone one of the most fraught receptions in African literary history. V. S. Pritchett's 1954 review of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in *The New Statesman and Nation* encapsulates well the exhilarating exoticism Europe and America saw in his work: "Tutuola's voice is like the beginning of man on earth, man emerging, wounded, and growing" (23). Tutuola's work was initially received as infantile and primitive in the United States and Europe, feeding established tropes of African otherness, darkness, and simplicity. While some West African readers saw the merit of Tutuola's work, many were incensed by the image of the continent depicted in his novels. As one reader, I. Adeagbo Akinjogbin, writes in a 1954 issue of the magazine *West Africa*, "Most Englishmen . . . are pleased to believe all sorts of fantastic tales about Africa, a continent about which they are profoundly ignorant. The 'extraordinary

books' of Mr. Tutuola . . . will just suit the temper of his European readers as they seem to confirm their concepts of Africa" (41).

In addition to reviews in various magazines, the most prominent scholarly examinations of Tutuola's work have focused on the influence of Yoruba oral tradition.⁴ The style, episodic structure, and frequent cautionary nature of Tutuola's work have been unequivocally linked to the oral tradition in several rigorous studies. In his pioneering work on the Nigerian writer, Bernth Lindfors demonstrates the clear parallels between sequences in Tutuola's first novels and Yoruba oral culture, including the episode of the "Beautiful Complete Gentleman" in *Palm Wine* in which a man lures a woman into the deep forest while returning his rented body parts to their various owners (316). Importantly, however, Ato Quayson argues that Tutuola does not merely reproduce tales from the Yoruba tradition, but instead, "brings together a whole range of oral genres such as riddles, proverbs and etymological tales so that his narratives become concatenations of several elements from Yoruba storytelling traditions" (*Strategic Transformations*, 46). For Quayson and Lindfors, Tutuola is not a novelist, nor is he simply a transcriber of tales. He's a writer who assembles and remixes oral traditions.

Intriguingly, the many creatures in *Palm Wine* and *Bush of Ghosts* appear to have been influenced by disparate sources aside from West African oral tradition. For one, the morphologies of Tutuola's monsters seem akin to those of figures in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which Tutuola is known to have read while in school. Where Tutuola's creatures have "uncountable" fingers, wings, and eyes, the figure of Appolyon in *Pilgrim's Progress* has fishlike scales, dragonlike wings, and feet like a bear. Tutuola's creatures also share much with the creepy beings in the work of Daniel Fagunwa, the prominent Yoruba-language novelist, in whose midcentury novels we find a giant snake with the head of a man and a spirit with sixteen eyes (Lindfors, 324–29). Tutuola's monsters are composite formations derived from disparate cultural locations. Curiously, however, in the now large body of Tutuolan criticism, rarely are his creatures referred to as modern. His beings always seem to be understood as recastings of prior creaturely forms.

Indeed, discussions of modernity are scarce in Tutuolan studies. When the modern is broached, it's mentioned in passing without sufficient depth. Take, for instance, Gikandi's brief examination of the

modern in *Palm Wine*. Rightly, he emphasizes, “Tutuola’s fable is constantly haunted by the claims of the modern it seeks to foreclose.” Despite the novel’s folkloric packaging and its attendant connotations of the premodern, traces of modern life emerge throughout the text. For Gikandi, these are the traces of capitalism that pervade the Tutuolan landscape. The protagonist’s concern for wealth makes him a “consummate capitalist,” he says, and therefore a figure of modernity (2007, 1–2). This claim may be indisputable, but Gikandi’s examination of the formations of capital in the text ends here, merely gesturing toward capital’s saturation of Tutuola’s surreal world. Gikandi’s insight must be opened up to bring Tutuola’s modernist sensibility into view.

FLOWS, COMMODITIES, AND CREATURES

Uncovering Amos Tutuola’s creaturely modernism requires a new series of African modernist tropes. It calls for tropes that configure Africa as a locus of flows of capital, not merely a geography peripheral to capital’s putative “center” in Europe. The theory needed to speak to Tutuola’s modernism is not the overworked narrative of capital’s homogenization of global cultures. It is one in which the flux of our late-capitalist moment produces an endless series of interchanges, differences, and mistranslations. The points of origin and ending of a given commodity as it circulates throughout the globe do not matter so much as the reconfigurations the object undergoes en route. Tutuola’s modernism emerges when we pay attention to his commodities, when we give life to the flows of the objects embodied by his creatures.

Indeed, Sarah Lincoln’s “inflationary modernism” and Tsitsi Jaji’s “stereomodernism” are important catalysts for working through these elements of Tutuola’s modernism. Following Lincoln, reading for the commodity form allows us to see Tutuola’s midcentury aesthetic as a prefiguration of the central place of oil in Okri’s modernist aesthetic: “Okri reminds us repeatedly that, underlying this entire economic and psychic complex, flows the liquid commodity on which all depends” (Lincoln, 257). And this “flow” in Lincoln’s theory is crucial, in a different form, in Jaji’s account of how “black diasporic music travels and circulates in cultural contexts of continental Africa,” following the global circuits of capital to shape a distinct form of the pan-African

modern (2). There is a phenomenological structure of global movement undergirding Jaji's and Lincoln's modernist accounts—albeit more explicitly in the former—that will be crucial to articulating Tutuola's creaturely modernism. Moreover, Jaji's insight of sonic and cultural difference in her metaphor of the stereo gestures toward the differences in shape and significance of Tutuola's creatural commodities as they move through capital's global circuits. The particularities of Jaji's and Lincoln's recent theories of African modernism may not be enough to articulate the full range of Tutuola's modernism, but they introduce us to several crucial categories through which to work out Tutuola's sprawling, global aesthetic.

Moving then toward a theory of African modernism as global flow, Stuart Hall provides a crucial next move. "With the modern . . . condition," Hall suggests, "the process of *cultural translation* means that cultural languages are not closed; they are constantly transformed from both inside and outside, continuously learning from other languages and traditions, drawing them in and producing something which is irreducible to either of the cultural elements which constituted it in the first place. . . . The West is an absolutely pivotal, powerful, hegemonic force, but is no longer the only force within which creative energies, cultural flows and new ideas can be concerted" ("Museums of Modern Art"). Hall's model is one in which the "West" remains dominant, but the center-periphery framework becomes obsolete. Commodities and technologies are certainly included in his "cultural languages" that move in flows, mutating as they wander through disparate world geographies.

The hands of the "Television-handed Ghostess" in Tutuola's *Bush of Ghosts* are part of a global circulation, and West Africa is a location in which these televisions are inserted into the body of the creature and transformed into a singular instance of the modern. Through *literal appendages*, in which commodities are actual component parts of the body, and *figurative prosthetics*, in which commodities are embodied via the comparative figure of the simile, Tutuola creates a network of global consumer culture and technology with its nexus in the creature's body. It is Tutuola's experimental use of figures of speech, syntax, and form that brings these creatures to life. His global modernism may emerge from the body of the creature, but it's his often-unexpected use of language that enables us to see the phenomenology of the creaturely body.

The notion of the creaturely, of course, is not unique to the work of Amos Tutuola. As Eric Santner's influential work *On Creaturely Life* (2006) makes clear, Tutuola's creaturely shares much with other representations in world literature. Santner suggests that the figure of the creature emerged in the German-Jewish literary tradition as a symptom of European modernity and biopolitics. "Creaturely life," he contends, "is a product . . . of [the human's] exposure to a traumatic dimension of political power and social bonds whose structures have undergone radical transformations in modernity" (12). Creaturely life, in this particular literary tradition, surfaces at the "threshold of law and nonlaw" (15). It signifies bare life: life expelled by juridical law, from juridical law, into a Schmittian state of exception. It is the deformed, excessive, less-than-human life abandoned to that "paradoxical domain in which law has been suspended in the name of preserving law" (22). Santner isolates Kafka's particular version of the creature as marked by a "chronic state of agitation and disorientation, a perpetual state of exception/emergency in which the boundaries of the law become undecidable" (21). In Kafka's world, the human-as-creature is subjected "to an agency, a master's discourse, that has been attenuated and dispersed across a field of relays and points of contact that no longer cohere, even in fantasy, as a consistent 'other' of possible address and redress" (22). The ubiquity of the modern biopolitical order renders the human a creature, relegating it to this suspended space of nonlaw, nonlife.

Indeed one might argue that the creaturely formations of the German-Jewish tradition have little in common with those of West African folklore, that there remains a kind of experiential, if not historical, incommensurability between the two. I want to suggest that Tutuola's creaturely life has more in common with the German-Jewish tradition than one might initially expect, but that, of course, Tutuola's creaturely biopolitics is in many ways distinct. Similar to Santner's exposition of Kafka's world, when the protagonist in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* walks into the bush, life and death, law and nonlaw become indistinguishable. There is no singularly identifiable sovereign power. Power is distributed, and violence comes from everywhere and nowhere. Achille Mbembe reads Tutuola's first two novels through this biopolitical lens, examining in these works the "forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life

that confer upon them the status of living dead" (1). Like Santner's study of German-Jewish writers, Mbembe studies the "threshold experiences" in Tutuola's work that render life perpetually spied upon, haunted, and unlivable. Mbembe does not use the term "modern" to describe Tutuola's creaturely world, but he does relate it to the corruption and violence that plagues "the contemporary African context." Here, of course, Mbembe alludes to the African postcolony and the violent colonial inheritance that crippled much of the continent at the onset of formal independence from Europe in the mid-twentieth century. In a way, then, Santner and Mbembe speak of two sides of the same global structure of biopolitical violence that emerged in the late eighteenth century. The biopolitical structure that Santner suggests transformed the human into creature in the German-Jewish tradition must indeed be thought of as integrally related to the biopolitical structure of violent colonial incursions, racial classification and separation, and the commodification of human beings on the African continent.⁵

The biopolitical violence that shaped the modern world pervades Amos Tutuola's fiction, but he provides his own articulation of it using the fantastical logic of Yoruba storytelling. In his work, protagonists transform from human to snake to airplane, and bacteria-infested monsters are didactic storytellers. Tutuola's space of exception is one in which the folkloric and the biopolitical merge, generating an episodic series of hauntings, hallucinations, and contorted logics. Whereas Santner's creatures are still human, though perhaps *less* human, Tutuola's creaturely ontologies are nonhuman multitudes, simultaneously robot, ghost, animal, virus, and plant. They reside in their own world parallel to the human world, in this space, as Mbembe puts it, where "there is no life but a life that is fractured and mutilated" (6). And like Santner's notion of the "traumatic exposure" that renders the human a creature, Mbembe explains that in Tutuola's fiction, "[we] penetrate into the world of ghosts by means of tragedy" (8). Protagonists stumble into the exceptional space because they seek their dead tapster, or they have taken flight from slave traders: "After I had travelled sixteen miles and was still running further for the fearful noises, I did not know the time that I entered into a dreadful bush which is called the 'Bush of Ghosts'" (22). The *Bush of Ghosts* protagonist passes the threshold into the zone of folkloric terror where he encounters ghosts covered in colorful lights, excrement, and festering wounds. This is the West African

iteration of biopolitics, a kind of African surrealist biopolitics. In Tutuola's world, Auschwitz blurs into a space of ghosts and the afterlife, of shape-shifting beings, tricksters, and cautionary proverbs.

I raise the question of biopolitics in Tutuola's fiction to address the world his fantastical creatures inhabit. If the ontology of Tutuola's creatures is the core of the Nigerian writer's modernist aesthetic, this ontology cannot be isolated from the modern biopolitical structure that engendered it. His creatures are of this surreal biopolitics, simultaneously victims and perpetrators of it. The bodies of these creatures through which we read histories of capital and the modern world emerge from this fantastical, worldly space. If the resonance between Tutuola's surreal biopolitical landscape and Santner's account of creaturely biopolitics in the German-Jewish tradition tells us anything, it is that Tutuola's West Africa is indisputably of the modern world, situated among the disparate forms of power and capital that gave rise to what we call modernity.

Moving from the Tutuolan biopolitical terrain to the creatures themselves, Santner's *On Creaturely Life* again provides a crucial point of entry. He begins the text with a discussion of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* particularly apt to Tutuolan creaturely forms, concerning himself not with the creaturely human, but with Rilke's animalistic conception of the creature, and the poet's corresponding notion of "the Open." For Rilke, *das Offene* is the "sphere of the creature," the space to which the animal directs its gaze. The human's gaze is inward, overwhelmingly dominated by representations and distractions; plants, animals, and insects, by contrast, see the pure phenomena of the world before them, such as the motion of a blossoming flower, or trees bending in the wind. The creature sees the subtle, hidden movements that make up its world.⁶ Rilke makes it clear that the creature is also unequivocally a figure of alterity, a being that exists as the human's Other (1–5). Later in his discussion of Joseph K. in Kafka's *The Trial*, Santner turns to Emmanuel Levinas to articulate how the creature—here, the human abandoned to the juridical state of exception—feels shame both in its sense of uncanny intimacy and its sense of foreignness to itself. The creature is a figure of alterity, in other words, in relation to others, but also to itself (22–23).

These notions of alterity and "the Open" illuminate important features of Tutuola's nonhuman life forms. The freakish alterity of the

creatures in *Palm Wine* and *Bush of Ghosts*—their foreignness to others and their foreignness to themselves—reveals a phenomenological sense of the world. If Tutuola's creatures are multitudes, made up of West African insects and dirt, of bacteria and viruses, of commodities and technologies that have circulated the globe, then these strangely disparate component parts have histories and relations to other commodities and viruses that span the world. Through the body of the Tutuolan creature we literally see "the Open" that is the modern world, with its global trade routes, intercontinent-traveling viruses, and histories of invention and capitalist production. In the morphology of these creatures we find Amos Tutuola's insertion of West Africa into a system of global capitalism and cultural influence. Indeed, the trope that best enables an examination of these notions of "multitude" and "the worldly Open" in Tutuola's work is the commodity form. For the worldliness and the freakishness of the Tutuolan creature derive largely from that object which Karl Marx famously characterized as "mysterious" and "metaphysical."

For Marx, the commodity is inherently a representation of something beyond itself, of the labor and social relations that produced the object. But his formulation also presupposes the commodity's proximity to a network of related circulating objects. For him, of course, the relation among commodities finds its source in the social relations among laborers. In the section on "The Fetishism of Commodities" in *Capital I*, Marx writes of the "metaphysical subtleties" that lay beyond the ostensible "thingness" of the commodity (303–29). The commodity is never a single construct—it is always already in excess of itself. It is this notion of existing *in excess* that opens us to Amos Tutuola's modernism. The footballs, radios, and photographs in his novels are all commodities that represent social relations and modes of production beyond their immediate materiality.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida expands on this notion of the commodity's "excess," pushing us to think of the commodity itself as a ghostly creature. Working with the tropes of the theater and the table, Derrida writes that the table becomes a commodity "when the curtain goes up on the market and the table plays actor and character at the same time." Derrida identifies the commodity as "spectral," troping on Marx's language of the commodity's "metaphysical and theological niceties." The many faces and relations behind the commodity's surface

"haunt" the object in its use-value. On the stage, the commodity "stands up and addresses itself . . . to other commodities, its fellow beings in phantomality." The commodity qua specter is social, Derrida suggests, standing before its others as a "strange creature," which is at once "Life, Thing, Beast, Object, Commodity, Automaton." In its creaturely multitude, the commodity embodies a lineage of "fantastic creatures," of other beings and objects, a "lineage of a progeniture that no longer resembles it, inventions far more bizarre and marvelous." Commodities are embedded in a history of commodities that are also freakishly "many" in their own being. Commodities relate to other commodities, to workers and to nonworkers, and to the genealogies of objects and social relations that have allowed them to come into being. This, for Derrida, is the spectral "dance" of the commodity (187–97).

Tutuola's "Television-handed Ghostess" in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* represents this spectral dance on a global scale. This creature literally has a television embedded in each of its two palms. If Derrida refers to the commodity as a "strange creature," Tutuola's Ghostess is indeed a *hyper*-strange creature.⁷ The televisions in her hands may be as strange as any commodity, but when situated in the context of the Ghostess's morphology, strangeness becomes an understatement. It is during the final stage of the unnamed protagonist's journey through the bush of ghosts that the protagonist encounters the Television-handed Ghostess. The Ghostess is more than two hundred years old, entirely bald, covered in sores and maggots, and has "uncountable" short fingers. Bizarrely, the Ghostess requests that he lick the sores on her body every day for ten years, since only that will cure her wounds. She then turns over her hand for the protagonist to see: "When she told me to look at her palm and opened it nearly to touch my face, it was exactly as a television" (161–62). The television, as commodity, is itself an object of multiplicity, but so too is the creature's body even before we consider the TV.⁸ Between the embodied televisions and the living beings covering her body, Derrida's ontological description of the creaturely commodity seems astonishingly apt to Tutuola's creature: "Life, Thing, Beast, Object, Commodity, Automaton."

Derrida's specter is literalized in Tutuola's TV Ghostess. Not only is the creature itself is a specter, but it embodies the spectral commodity. That which lay beyond the TV's ontic materiality are flows of global capital and histories of social relations. The TV is composed of raw

materials that have been extracted from the earth. It's an assemblage of experiments in electricity and circuitry. It embodies a lineage of prior forms of communication technology such as Morse code, the radio, and the telephone. The TV is part of a global social history in which technologies disseminated through the pathways, classes, and historical stages of empire, moving from the sitting rooms of the metropolitan privileged to those of the metropolitan working classes, the colonial administrators posted in British West Africa, the indigenous colonial elite, and on to the middle- and working-class families of postcolonial West Africa. And, of course, the television is a commodity produced by factory workers and the social relations that made their labor possible. It is situated among many other televisions of different types, sizes, ages, and weights. The televisions of the TV Ghostess are commodities formed from a global constellation of relations.

The television, understood as a singularly modern technology, is inherently in excess of itself. The television connects worlds, it links immediacies unlike any other prior technology. The Ghostess shows the wandering protagonist her television hands, in which he sees and hears his family relaxing at home. This is the location he has sought to return to for years. Still pressed by the Ghostess to cure her sores, the protagonist asks to view the television again:

My people appeared again at the same time and as I was looking at them and also hearing what they were talking about me which I ought to answer if I was with them, luckily, a woman brought her baby who had a sore on its foot to my mother at that time to tell her the kind of leaf which could heal the sore. . . . She cut many leaves on a kind of plant and gave them to this woman, after that she told her that she must warm the leaves in hot water before using it for the sore. But as I was looking at them on the television I knew the kind of leaf and also heard the direction how to use it. (164–65)

The wanderer concocts a medication according to his mother's direction, treats the sores of the Ghostess, and within a week the sores disappear. Here, the television embodied by the creature becomes a site of sociality, of communication, and of knowledge production. Tutuola literalizes the notion of linkage inherent in the technology when the Ghostess ushers the wanderer into the image, effectively enabling him to teleport through the TV. The novel ends when the protagonist finds himself physically in the same location he had just viewed on the screen.

The Ghostess becomes a kind of surreal biopolitical gatekeeper, a haunting figure that controls the movement of populations, and determines whether one lives by passing into the world of the living. The protagonist's experience is mediated and facilitated by the television, but the Ghostess-creature reveals in her hands the Rilkean creaturely "Open" that she possesses. She gazes at the phenomena and events denied to human perception.

The Television-handed Ghostess enables the wanderer to see, and ultimately, to live the life of the image. Moments before he sees the TV hands for the first time, the Ghostess tells the wanderer, "You are seeing the way every day and you do not know it, because every earthly person gets eyes but cannot see" (162). The television, and in turn, the creaturely body, permits the protagonist to see in a way he could not otherwise, given momentary access to the creaturely Open. The TV reveals the world to him. In an insightful and very much related discussion on television, spectatorship, and social space, Raymond Williams writes of the TV viewer's need "to watch what is happening, as we say, 'out there': not out there in a specific street or a specific community but in a complex and otherwise unfocused and unfocusable national and international life, where our area of concern . . . is unprecedentedly wide" (14). Indeed, this "unprecedentedly wide" area of concern is the optic of modernity that television enacts. The TV connects disparate global geographies, reaching beyond the confines of the nation and the colony. Tutuola's television provides a similarly expansive view of the globe, one that allows us to watch and listen to what is "out there." Tutuola's TV hands perhaps reach even further than Williams's model, for Tutuola expands the protagonist's *Weltanschauung* not merely to other nations and colonies, but to another world, to the human world outside the nonhuman bush of ghosts. By connecting people, commodities, and histories on a global and even otherworldly scale, the Television-handed Ghostess is unequivocally a figure of modernity.

But this creature, certainly, is not a modernist figure merely in her worldliness or spectrality; it is undoubtedly Tutuola's particular use of language that makes these qualities possible. Consider this initial description of the Ghostess: "I noticed carefully that she was almost covered with sores, even there was no single hair on her head, except sores with uncountable maggots which were dashing here and there

on her body. Both her arms were more than one and an half foot [*sic*], it had uncountable short fingers" (161). In this brief passage we find the sort of syntax and diction characteristic of Tutuola's prose. There is a staggered, jolted flow to his writing. The second clause—"even there was no single hair on her head"—at first seems out of place next to the description of sores, but he then returns to the sores only to move immediately on to "maggots." The adjective "uncountable" appears dozens of times throughout the novel, and twice in these two sentences. It is a curious word, one that Tutuola uses to describe a quantity at once excessive and indeterminate. The "uncountable maggots" and "uncountable short fingers" enact a certain revulsion in the reader, as if Tutuola were describing a threateningly alien mass, something writhing, uncontrollable. And Tutuola also curiously refers to the Ghostess as both "she" and "it." He modulates its gender from feminine to neuter, perhaps even merging the two, effectively inscribing the ghostly creature outside any readily identifiable gender position. The Television-handed Ghostess herself is a beastly, multispecies creature, one that acts as the gatekeeper to the worldly Open, but it is Tutuola's language that brings this creature to life. This description, like so many in his novels, is almost sculptural. With stuttering language, he crafts the image of a horrifying, bald-headed ghost, covered with festering sores and crawling maggots. His singular use of syntax, diction, and grammar constructs the creature as something vivid, material, and fantastical. The TV Ghostess is a quintessential example of his creaturely modernism, and this is made possible by the language Tutuola uses to bring that modernism to life.

Another archetypal modernist creature in Tutuola's oeuvre is the "White Tree" creature in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. During the palm-wine drinkard's episodic journey to find his palm-wine tapster, the drinkard and his wife encounter a monstrous creature that is at once tree, mobile being, automaton, and a dwelling for other creatures. The tree is "about one thousand and fifty feet high in length and about two hundred feet in diameter." Its trunk, limbs, and branches are all white "as if it was painted everyday with white paint." While passing the tree, the drinkard and his wife see something "focusing" on them like a camera. Terrified, the two begin to run, but the "focusing gaze" follows them until two hands emerge from the tree, pulling them into a large door that opens on the side of the tree. Inside, they meet the

"Faithful Mother" who hosts their stay in this city-inside-a-tree. For the next year, the drinkard and his wife dance in the tree's technicolor nightclub, eat food prepared by the Faithful Mother's 340 cooks, lose all their money gambling, and are even treated for hair loss in the tree's hospital (246–52). So much happens to the couple in this episode that it is easy to forget it all takes place inside the body of a tree creature—literally inside a living, moving thing. Capital saturates this episode in the tree. The tree's colorful lights, cameras, and photographs serve as metonyms for global capitalism, some as literal appendages, others as figurative prostheses. If the Television-handed Ghostess is a multitudinous being, this tree is a super multitude in its many valences of embodied capital.

The camera is the first form of capital we encounter in this creature. The device surfaces in the figure of speech of the simile as a sort of creaturely mode of surveillance: "Somebody peeped out and was focusing us as if a photographer was focusing somebody." This does not initially appear to be an actual camera, but the comparative reference augments the sense of anxiety and invasiveness that this "focusing" instills in the couple. As the drinkard and his wife enter the dance hall inside the tree, however, they see photographs of themselves displayed on the wall:

But our own images that we saw there resembled us too much and were also white colour, but we were very surprised to see our images there, perhaps somebody who was focusing us as a photographer at the first time before the hands drew us inside the white tree had made them, we could not say. (248)

What is initially a figurative simile—"as if a photographer was focusing"—becomes literalized in these photographs. The tree-creature is a kind of biopolitical apparatus, tracking and recording individuals passing by. If this mode of surveillance did not already feel surreal, it certainly does when the images are found to be partly obscured, turned "white colour" like the tree itself. The bleached-out photographs symbolically subsume the protagonists into the creaturely tree, increasing its multitude, collapsing them into its field of absurdist control. And the fractured language—the consecutive "but" conjunctions, the excessive stretching out of the sentence—only serves to heighten the couple's apparent baffled terror.

The curious absurdity continues inside the White Tree's technicolor dance hall, which bears its own kind of modernist lineage. With characteristic Tutuolan peculiarity, the hall is a cacophonous assemblage of sound, color, and movement:

Over twenty stages were in that hall with uncountable orchestras, musicians, dancers and tappers. The orchestras were all busy. The children . . . were always dancing, tapping on the stage with melodious songs and they were also singing with warm tones with non-stop till morning. There we saw that all the lights in this hall were in technicolours and they were changing colours at five minutes intervals. (249)

Given the historical moment in which Tutuola writes, the aura and aesthetic of this space recalls performances only a few decades removed from Josephine Baker's *La Revue Nègre* in 1920s Paris, Duke Ellington's orchestra at Harlem's Cotton Club, and the Highlife clubs in Nigeria and Ghana in the first decades of the twentieth century. Tutuola takes a modern social space that existed throughout the world in the first half of the twentieth century and inserts it into his fantastical aesthetic, that is, into the body of a folkloric creature.

Beyond these clear manifestations of modernity in the White Tree, however, is an intriguing veiled critique of the capitalist system. This critique commences when the drinkard and his wife enter the tree: "We had 'sold our death' to somebody at the door for the sum of £70: 18: 6d and 'lent our fear' to somebody at the door as well on interest of £3: 10: 0d per month" (247). In short, the drinkard and his wife have been commodified. Consequently the two "did not care about death or fear again" while in the tree. Life becomes worry-free, they all but forget about the outside world. While living worry- and death-free, the drinkard and his wife are in awe of the opulence inside the tree. The Faithful Mother is essentially seated on a throne, "a chair in a big parlour which was decorated with costly things" (247). The walls of the dance hall are literally covered in money, "with about one million pounds (£)." The situation becomes satirical when the drinkard loses all his money—effectively everything he received when they entered the creature—while gambling inside the tree. "I had forgotten," he says, "that one day, we should leave there and need money to spend" (250). Penniless but enjoying the Faithful Mother's luxuries, the two are reluctant to leave, having become dependent on what they receive in the tree. When the Faithful Mother expels the drinkard and his wife from

the tree after more than a year, the buyer of their death refuses to resell their death, but they regain their fear along with the final installment of interest. So the drinkard and his wife recommence their journey to find their palm wine tapster, but now with only their fear and no death. This is in a way a Tutuolan reconfiguration of Foucault's notion of biopower as the power to "make live and let die." The White Tree exerts its power over the drinkard by, as Foucault would put it, "intervening to make live"—ensuring that the drinkard not only stays alive, but, in effect, is unable to die at all (Foucault, 239–48). Tutuola's folkloric biopower takes Foucault's notion to a fantastical extreme of population control and regulation.

Like an individual conscripted by the capitalist system, the palm wine drinkard has no choice but to become a commodity and partake in the White Tree's system. He is forced into the tree by the giant hands, required to sell his death and lease his fear. In a surprising literalization of Adam Smith's notion of the "invisible hand," the protagonist feels that he has benefited from the tree's luxury, when in fact he's simply contributing to its parasitic internal structure. In the drinkard's gambling match, the tree regains the amount it paid for the drinkard's death. The tree has crippled him financially, yet his dependence quells his desire to escape. Living in a state of perpetual fear with no recourse to death is akin to the suffocating grip of a subsistence wage in which the capitalist system relentlessly crushes the worker, giving her just enough money to survive and continue to work. Tutuola presents a scathing critique of the capitalist system that, quite astoundingly, takes place in the body of a surreal West African creature.

Aside from the critique and figurations of capital that we find in the White Tree and the TV Ghostess, a crucial component to Tutuola's modernism is his use of the simile. The White Tree introduced us to this figure of speech in the "focusing photographer." Similes of technology and global consumer culture pervade Tutuola's *Palm Wine* and *Bush of Ghosts*. In most instances, these similes are clearly figurative comparisons meant to vivify the creature described. Yet the disorientation produced by Tutuola's incongruous juxtapositions of the literal and the figurative seems to heighten the prominence of the figurative, as if the figurative were made literal. Here, again, Tutuola's idiosyncratic, even experimental, use of language brings the figure of the creature to the fore, heightening its prominence by disrupting the distinction between

literal and figurative. Take, for instance, the episode in *Bush of Ghosts* when the protagonist, still attempting to return to his family in the human world, is trapped in a room. He begins to morph into another being, his neck grows three feet and his head inflates. Tutuola uses the simile to accentuate the change in the protagonist's eyes: "Eyes which were as big and round as a football formed and appeared on this head" (68). Tutuola references a commodity from a starkly different social and cultural context (*seemingly* different, anyway). Certainly, the simile clarifies how big and shapely the creature's eyes have become. But more than actual eyes, Tutuola invites us to imagine life-size footballs on this creature's head—literal soccer balls as prosthetic eyeballs. The commodity at the center of the world's most popular sport has been inserted into the body of this unearthly folkloric creature. These prosthetic eyes mark this creature's body as a global relation of capital and empire.

These types of incongruous similes are scattered throughout Tutuola's first two novels. In *Palm Wine*, a "half-bodied baby" rises from the ashes of a burned building, "talking with a lower voice like a telephone" (218). When the protagonist of *Bush of Ghosts* is trapped inside a piece of "dead wood," his cry for help is overheard by "a million homeless ghosts . . . who were listening to my cry as a radio" (50). The ostensible anomalousness of the radio and telephone in these contexts brings these objects to the fore of our attention, as if they were literal prostheses or props integral to the way these creatures communicate and listen. They become constitutive components of the creature's sense of space and world. These commodities come to life by way of the simile, inscribing the creature into capital's global circuits of exchange. Another notable instance is the "flash-eyed mother" in *Bush of Ghosts*, whose fireball-eyes are used "at night as a flood light in lighting the whole town as electricity lights" (99). Here, the literalized simile conveys an actual infrastructural network, gesturing toward the illumination of the modern African city.

However incongruous these electric lights, radios, and telephones may seem in Tutuola's work, they are, I want to suggest, intrinsic to African modernity. The Africanness of these modern technologies recalls Anthony Appiah's well-known discussion of a particular Yoruba wooden sculpture depicting a man riding a bicycle. Noting the significance of the bicycle, Appiah suggests, "It is not there to be the Other

to the Yoruba self . . . it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists" (157). Though many technologies and commodities found in Africa have been invented or produced abroad, in other words, what actually matters is how an object is reconfigured in each cultural context as it moves through capital's global circuits. A radio in Lagos or Dakar—and certainly the radio of the "homeless ghosts" in Tutuola's surreal novel—assumes different layers of cultural significance from a radio in London or New York. In Tutuola's creatures, technologies that have traveled the global pathways of empire, mutating across cultural geographies, blur into West African cultural forms. A modern African object is formed. And, as Tutuola's fantastical fiction reveals, so too is the modern African creature.

TOWARD A GLOBAL AFRICAN MODERN

Amos Tutuola's modernist sensibility shatters the overwrought binary of tradition and modernity that persists in much Africanist discourse. These constructs fuse in his fiction, creating a new form of interstitial cultural space. An exemplary instance of this space is the "10th Town" in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, which is inhabited entirely by "deads," yet has schools and hospitals built in "modern styles." A dead person can be healthy and educated in his surreal world. The afterlife is a modern life. Throughout Tutuola's oeuvre, we find a new form of life, an alter-life, emerging from the gaps and syntheses of histories and geographies. Contradiction, freakishness, and mutation are what manifest when Tutuola ruptures the dichotomies of tradition and modernity, local and global, center and periphery. His modernism collapses these figures to create a new sort of enchantment, embracing the tainted, messy, transfigured forms that tradition has become in modern Africa. And in the end, this enchanted peculiarity of Tutuola's world—his photographing trees, his folkloric biopolitical landscape—is brought to life through the enchanted peculiarity of his literary style, his blurring of literal and figurative, his stilted syntax, his meandering sentences.

This modernist aesthetic allows us to see the phenomena of the world, the relations that flow below superficial appearances. Through Tutuola's work, we see what would otherwise remain invisible to us.

His creaturely bodies comprised of disparate circulating cultural forms together constitute quite literally a sprawling sense of being-in-the-world. In them, we see the flows and contortions of a world system in perpetual motion. Understanding his nonhuman monsters as worldly multitudes effectively reinscribes Tutuola into African modernist discourse, a body of thought from which he had effectively been expelled. But Tutuola does not simply enter the fray of African modernism, conforming to its tropes of anticolonialism or the emergent nation. In his midcentury moment, he ushered in a new formation of the African modern—one that did not enclose itself in its call for liberation, but instead opened itself to the traces, contaminations, and undulations of global capital. His creatures bear the marks of these contaminations. They are freaks in their worldly excess and multitude. To be a figure of modernity, Tutuola tells us, is to be a mutant in and of the world.

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Notes

1. From the outset, I want to clarify some of the terms I use throughout this essay. By “modern” and “modernity” I refer most fundamentally to the historical period beginning in the mid-seventeenth century that Reinhardt Koselleck identifies as a critical turning point in the way European societies conceived of science, metaphysics, and temporality itself (Koselleck, 9–25). This period of more than a century, of course, coincides with the Enlightenment, the transition from feudalism to (merchant and industrial) capitalism, as well as the imperial expansion of European power, culture, and capital throughout the world. I therefore conceive of “modernity” as a diverse global phenomenon based on the ways in which European culture and capitalism merged with non-European cultures and economic structures since this mid-seventeenth-century moment. While capitalism is certainly not synonymous with modernity, the former is an absolutely central component of the global structure of the latter. As Fredric Jameson suggests, modernity is, above all, about the ways people conceive of themselves as modern: “If modernization is something that happens to the base, and modernism the form the superstructure

takes in reaction to that ambivalent development, then perhaps modernity characterizes the attempt to make something coherent out of their relationship. Modernity would then in that case describe the way ‘modern’ people feel about themselves” (310). If modernity is a kind of intellectual processing of base and superstructure, Jameson usefully locates “modernism” in the superstructure—the cultural and ideological forms that correspond to infrastructural modernization. More specifically, in terms of literary production, I use the term “modernism” to refer to the diverse array of aesthetic practices from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century marked by a certain break from “realist” representation and a certain degree of formal experimentation. But modernism, indeed like modernity itself, as I argue in this essay, took on its own shape in African cultural production, with writers like Amos Tutuola presenting their own kind of experimentations with nonrealist form and representation.

2. I want to be clear about the language I use to characterize Tutuola’s writing. There seems to be some consensus among Africanists that the works of Tutuola and Daniel Fagunwa (the Yoruba-language novelist whose work arguably most influenced Tutuola) are precursors to magical realism—the latter term, in the anglophone African context, being most closely associated with Ben Okri’s work. Tutuola’s and Fagunwa’s writing, according to Brenda Cooper, do not qualify as magical realism because they lack the sense of ironic distance from indigenous culture characteristic of magical realism: “These devotees and storytellers have not been torn from their societies in the manner of those modern writers whose village is now global. They have not distanced themselves from their belief in the supernatural, and therefore do not need to qualify their depictions with the irony of the magical realist. Their fiction is mythical, supernatural, allegorical and epic” (44). While my central claim in this essay has to do with the sense of the global in Tutuola’s fiction, Cooper is right that the global is not conspicuous in Tutuola’s novels in the way that it is in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*. The global in Tutuola’s writing is subtler, found primarily in his manipulations of figures of speech. Instead of magical realism, I use the terms “fantastic” and “surreal” to refer to the interstitial generic space Tutuola occupies between folklore and magical realism. “Surrealism,” of course, is not meant to align Tutuola with the twentieth-century European avant-garde. I use “fantastic” and “surreal” synonymously to characterize the singular nonrealism of Tutuola’s writing, to have language to identify his world of shape-shifting, fire-emitting, tapster-chasing beings. For more on Tutuola as a precursor to magical realism, see Quayson, “Magical Realism and the African Novel” (2009) and Wenzel, “Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature” (2006).

3. This brief overview is intended to be a sampling of the dominant currents in African modernist writing and criticism, and is by no means comprehensive. In addition to the scholars and texts discussed here, see also Anthony Appiah’s *In My Father’s House* (1992), Simon Gikandi’s *Maps of Englishness* (1996), Nicholas Brown’s *Utopian Generations* (2005), Michael Janis’s *Africa After Modernism* (2008), and Neil Lazarus’s “Modernism and African Literature” (2012).

4. There have of course been numerous examinations of Tutuola's works over the years. One of the most influential, in addition to Lindfors's studies, is Chinua Achebe's essay "Work and Play in *The Palm Wine Drinkard*," in which he claims that the novel's protagonist at times breaks the normative distinction between work and play and "raises pleasure to the status of work and occupation" (110–12). In contrast, Achille Mbembe's essay "Life, Sovereignty, and Terror in the Fiction of Amos Tutuola," which I discuss later in this essay, unpacks notions of ghostly violence, disrupted temporality, and suspended sovereignty. More recently, in *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature* (2012), Laura Murphy takes up related notions of terror in her examination of the historical residue of the Atlantic slave trade in Tutuola's fiction. The focus of recent Tutuolan criticism, though, has been the renewed consideration of the production and reception of Tutuola's early work. In *Commonwealth of Letters* (2013), Peter Kalliney argues that although the views of European and African critics at midcentury differed greatly, both groups paradoxically read Tutuola's novels through a similar discourse of international development. And Gail Low in *Publishing the Postcolonial* (2011) builds an intriguing case for the ways in which Faber and Faber molded the text of *Palm Wine* and its international promotion so as to establish a culturally translatable "value" for British audiences.

5. My notion of biopolitics and its emergence in the late eighteenth century comes from Foucault's observation of the development of a "new technology of power" at that time, which had less to do with the discipline of the individual than the control of the biological field, of "man-as-species" (242). That Santner and Mbembe both ground their work in largely the same body of continental thought further indicates the commonality between the biopolitical structures in the Tutuolan and German-Jewish literary traditions.

Both theorists, for instance, begin their examinations with the same theoretical model of sovereignty. "The tradition of thought I am calling 'German-Jewish,'" Santner advances, "is one that takes as its point of departure some form of the 'decisionist' logic of sovereignty articulated by Carl Schmitt" (13). And, as if in dialogue with Santner, Mbembe begins his essay on Tutuola's fiction claiming, "The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (1). With these clear common influences of Schmitt, Foucault, and others, Mbembe and Santner together demonstrate that the theoretical apparatus of biopower is not exclusively applicable to Europe, and that the instances of violence and terror in Tutuola's work in particular demand a theoretical approach related, but of course not identical, to the one Santner brings to bear on German-Jewish thought.

6. Related to Rilke's notion of the Open, taking a very different methodological approach, is Jakob von Uexküll's groundbreaking work in the field of biosemiotics. In *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934), published just over a decade after the publication of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, the Estonian biophilosopher presents a scientific though speculative account of the ways in which insects and animals perceive the world around them. The concepts of "effect space,"

“dwelling-tone,” and “self-tone” that Uexküll constructs from his speculations on animal subject positions indeed complement Rilke’s observational metaphysics on the creaturely Open. When, for instance, the latter suggests in “The Eighth Elegy” that “We know what’s out there only from the animal’s / face,” Rilke seems almost to prefigure Uexküll’s systematic analyses on how ticks and hermit crabs perceive depth of visual field, time, and movement in their capacity to read the different perceptual signs in their *Umwelt* (Rilke 55).

7. This notion of hyperstrangeness bears a broad resemblance to Timothy Morton’s notion of “hyperobjects,” in the sense of the hyperobject’s vast distribution across time and space in relation to humans. An in-depth engagement with Morton’s framework would take this discussion well beyond the scope of West African modernist forms, into the realm of ecological crisis and geological time, but the “hyper” embodied by the TV-handed Ghostess—a “hyper” indeed central to the phenomenological understanding of the Tutuolan creature—does entail a related sense of geographical, historical, and ontological expansiveness. The creature is *hyper* in the sense of being exponentially “beyond itself” or “in excess of itself” on these different registers.

8. I should note that Bernth Lindfors has argued against a literal reading of the ghostess’s TV hands as actual televisions. In his short essay, “Amos Tutuola’s Television-handed Ghostess,” Lindfors suggests that these “televisions” likely refer to nonelectronic Yoruba divination practices. He cites an anecdotal account in which a man recalls peering into a diviner’s liquid-filled earthenware pot to “see the nether-world.” Lindfors additionally cites Tutuola’s own relationship to the technology as further support for this divination thesis: “And since we have reliable evidence that he created the television-handed ghostess without ever having seen a television set in operation, it is no doubt safe to assume that his fabrication of the ghostess’s transcendental hand was inspired more by the Yoruba folk belief in the ability of professional diviners to magically tune in on a distant spirit world than it was by Western electronic technology” (76–77). Certainly it is entirely possible that Tutuola never saw an operating television prior to writing the novel, but unfortunately, Lindfors’s “reliable evidence” is an insubstantial aside in the foreword to *Bush of Ghosts* in which Geoffrey Parrinder simply declares Tutuola to be “a man who has never seen a television” (Parrinder 12). Beyond this issue of evidence, however, I am still not convinced that we ought not entertain the idea of literal televisions in the ghostess’s hands. Indeed, I think it would be a disservice not to take Tutuola’s deliberate choice of language seriously. Surely he must have been aware of the global, technological, and communicative connotations the term invoked in the mid-1950s. What is more, the ambivalent simile that introduces the TV in the novel—“it was exactly as a television”—decidedly collapses the distinction between literal and figurative. The precision of “exactly” erodes the metaphorical register of the comparative “as,” necessitating, in my view, that we at least consider the television’s literalness. But perhaps the most convincing indication to take the television hands literally is demonstrated in a fleeting moment

in Nnedi Okorafor's recent *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), a cyberpunk novel replete with Tutuolaesque "juju" and freakish beings. Characteristic of the range of her literary influences, Okorafor presents a cyborgian ontology that seems to belong just as much to the matrix-world of William Gibson as to the folkloric ghostly forest of Amos Tutuola: "I see three people in the same room with skin that glows a soft green. . . . [W]hen I look more closely, I see that their skin is embedded with millions of miniscule screens" (101).

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