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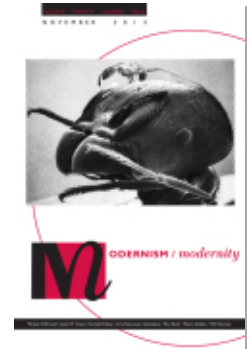
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## Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War by Andrew N. Rubin (review)

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**Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War.** Andrew N. Rubin. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. Pp. x + 184. \$39.50 (cloth).

**Reviewed by Mark David Kaufman, Tufts University**

During a recent panel discussion held at the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard, Sheldon Pollock advocated a return to philology as a means of checking the reification and instrumentalization of the liberal arts. The goal of the humanities should not be to resolve complexity, Pollock suggested, but to foster it, by restoring contexts and reapplying skills that have lapsed with the advent of new technologies and critical practices.<sup>1</sup> In *Archives of Authority*, Andrew N. Rubin concludes his engaging study of the relations between culture and power with a similar gesture. Combining investigational criticism with cultural historiography, Rubin reveals that state sponsorship of the humanities played a crucial role in the transfer of authority from Britain to the United States in the early years of the Cold War, and he argues that this transfer redefined “the position of the writer in society, the conditions of humanistic practice, the ideology of world literature, and the relationship between writers and the rising dominance of new and efficient modes of mass transmission” (17). Essentially, this shift in power dynamics transformed *Weltliteratur* into *Weltkultur*, the former a Goethean concept signifying not so much a global literature as the modalities that cultivate “an enlarged awareness of the shared, but discrepant experiences between nations” (2), and the latter understood as the appropriation of these modalities for ideological ends. In response, the author envisions an alternative humanism founded upon methods of philological inquiry resistant to synthetic conceptions of “world literature.”

Framing his critique as an appeal for “democratic criticism” (23), Rubin delves into little-known government archives. He particularly examines documents that concern how the Anglo-American intelligence community manipulated humanities discourse through Cold-War fronts like the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and its media organs, magazines such as *Encounter*, *Der Monat*, and *Black Orpheus*. In the first chapter, he introduces a valuably reflective and interpretive perspective that is often lacking in otherwise informative accounts of the secret state’s forays into the world of arts and letters, among which are Frances Stonor Saunders’s *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (1999) and James Smith’s more recent *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930–1960* (2013). As Rubin highlights the historical and critical implications of state sponsorship, he argues persuasively that the Cold-War transfer of power from Britain to the United States established a form of imperialism in which “the physical occupation of territory was replaced by the occupation of literary and cultural space” (20).

Turning to specific instances of so-called “cultural diplomacy,” the next two chapters examine how the work of the public intellectual was solicited, translated, and disseminated across the globe. For Rubin, George Orwell serves as a crucial case study for charting the modalities of transmission that worked to subsume anticolonialism under the imperative of anticommunism. Orwell’s infamous blacklist, his secret roster of political undesirables compiled at the behest of Britain’s Information Research Department, epitomized the larger relationship between his literary works and the IRD, which launched translations of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in response to perceived “communist” threats. Recontextualized in magazines, comics, and films, these adaptations co-opted and redirected the genuinely emancipatory energies of postcolonial discourse and made them to serve the reductive dichotomy between “totalitarianism” and the “free world.” If emergent technologies permitted the deformative “reproduction” of Orwell’s works, increasingly faster modes of “literary replication” facilitated the translation, diffusion, and juxtaposition of writers as diverse as W. H. Auden, Thomas Mann, Albert Camus, Ignazio Silone, and Jorge Luis Borges (21). In effect, the CCF commandeered print, film, and

792 radio culture—inasmuch as these are all venues for literary transmission—in order to stifle or manipulate dissenting voices, thereby reshaping the discipline of comparative literature.

Explicitly tracing these Cold-War mechanics of power to the post-9/11 world, *Archives of Authority* asserts that such “forces” continue to “circumscribe our own procedures of investigation, inquiry, and criticism up until this day” (27). In his fourth and fifth chapters, Rubin explores the possibility of alternative practices through the figures of Theodor Adorno, Erich Auerbach, and Edward Said. The co-author of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* occupies a pivotal position in Rubin’s argument. Adorno’s time in exile, shaped by the constraints of FBI surveillance and by his unsavory experience carrying out empirical radio research for the Rockefeller Foundation, inevitably informed his subsequent denigration of positivism and of instrumentalized knowledge. Offering what may be interpreted as a defense of Adorno’s refusal to participate in the student movement, Rubin observes that Adorno extended his critique of empirical sociology from anticommunism to identitarian thought in general. Eschewing the unreflective “conflation of praxis with theory” (83), Adorno’s conception of “negative dialectics” serves as the basis for a potentially non-reified, non-identitarian humanism that Rubin locates in the late work of Edward Said, particularly in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004). Rearticulating Auerbach’s historicist philology in “spatial and geographical terms” (106), Said foregrounds the condition of exile, the decentered and displaced perspective that attends to “lapses, silences, and distortions” (105). As it reconfigures the relations between “social space” and the “space of words,” such an approach would constitute, in Said’s words, “a *modernist* theory and practice” (quoted on 102). Adopting the philological equivalent of a “late style,” the humanist must elect, like the Beckettian narrator, to “go on.” But this is not to acquiesce to the inevitability of failure; rather, Rubin contends, democratic criticism requires our ongoing “[resistance to] ideological forms of closure, synthesis, and resolution” (107).

Given Rubin’s critique of received critical practices, it is hardly surprising that the big names of contemporary theory are few and far between. He briefly touches upon Agamben’s “state of exception” in his discussion of the government’s power to suspend the Freedom of Information Act in the interests of “national security” (14). Badiou, on the other hand, he dismisses with a single sentence. The study could benefit from a more thorough, if refutative engagement with recent theoretical positions, especially Badiou’s own anti-identitarian thinking concerning the particular and the universal, which has a bearing on Rubin’s call (via Said) to re-theorize the relationship of “the particular text to the potential whole of secular human history” (105). Perhaps more strikingly, Rubin ultimately endorses an alternative humanism founded upon modernist aesthetics and tropes of exile, which seems to contradict his earlier emphasis on how the “exhausted” energies of the little magazine (51) and the “laborious and painstaking” methods of modernist-era translation (45) were supplanted by more efficient technologies of transmission. In an ideal *Weltliteratur*, conceived not only as a means of exchange and understanding but also as a traversing of boundaries, what becomes of modernism’s outmoded modes? Provocatively, Rubin opens a space in which to conceptualize new modernist modalities in an age that has witnessed the birth of both digital humanities and WikiLeaks.

## Note

1. Lawrence S. Bacow, Homi K. Bhabha, Stefan Collini, Drew G. Faust, Lynn A. Hunt, Sheldon I. Pollock, and Diana Sorensen, “The Humanities and the Future of the University,” panel discussion (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University), 30 April 2013.