

Integrated Modernisms:

Introduction

In the introduction to *The Contemporaneity of Modernism*, Michael D'arcy and Mathias Nilges acknowledge the existence of two dominant trends in New Modernist Studies concerning the potential for contemporary modernist literature¹. They argue that despite a critical tradition aligned with the Frankfurt School's critical theory and New Materialism, which suggests that art and the world are in a constant dialectical relationship, New Modernist Studies tend to prioritize either art or the world separately, rather than emphasizing their interconnectedness. As such, when focusing on art, New Modernist Studies engages with trust in modernist aesthetic autonomy that manifests by employing the legacy of historical modernism in contemporary fiction. When focusing on the world, instead, it rejects the tradition of aesthetic autonomy in favor of addressing what is essential for today's society, namely the political and ethical dimensions of art.

This effort of criticism to move beyond the proliferation of new -isms (posthumanism, metamodernism, etc.) in favor of reviving an older -ism has made literary modernism to mean both a great deal and very little at the same time. Not only that it is “an ingrained yet somehow weightless concept”², but despite critical efforts to link it with global modernity, literary modernism retains its distinctly Anglo-American allure. Eastern, Southern, or Northern Modernism hold little significance for scholars, whether Anglo-Saxon, European, or from other continents – not to mention the case of France, which continues to resist the label of “modernism”.

Starting from the premise that modernism in both literature and art at large was never a program or a fashion of the present, but rather has always operated in hindsight, as “a retrospective rearrangement of values”³, as stated by Jean-Michel Rabaté in a recent interview, or as “an involuntary tendency that one can only attest to retrospectively”⁴, according to Thierry de Duve, the aim of our special issue, titled *Integrated Modernisms*, is to engage in a critical task undertaken from the postwar period to the present, to see whether modernism can continue to function in today's world and literature and if it can work as “a discourse of the legitimation of change”⁵, as seen by Peter Osborne.

In doing so, we aimed not only to incorporate as many diverse forms of modernism as possible, from East to West, in a transnational endeavor, but also to explore how these forms of modernism are connected today, through which means and methodologies, and

to further investigate the relationships among them. First, we are particularly interested in the links between modernism and modernity, which we consider a central focus of our issue. Second, we examine the relationship between modernism and the avant-gardes, that, despite their distinct traditions in Europe, often become intertwined concepts for an Anglo-American audience. We are also interested in the perspective of artistic modernism, rather than just literary modernism – on how modernism is viewed, for instance, from the vantage point of visual arts, theater or film studies. Last but not least, we explore the temporal connections of modernism with other contemporary -isms and theoretical clusters, such as ecocriticism, posthumanism or object-oriented ontology, especially since these help maintain the relevance of literary modernism today and hence its afterlife.

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Jamie Stephenson poses a series of extremely relevant questions to Modernist Studies and literary studies as a whole, in their philosophical reassessment of modernity and modernism through an aesthetics lens which posits sonority at its center. Stephenson astutely reads the main aesthetic and formal divide between 19th-century realism and modernism in their different approaches to representation, arguing that the visual dominance heralded by realism in the 19th century was gradually substituted by a more sound-oriented type of hermeneutic approach. He then discusses this hermeneutic approach with the aim of disentangling criticism from its anthropocentric approach, instead encouraging a way of reading that focus on ambience as an existing pattern between entities.

Rahma Khazam undertakes a comparative analysis of two theoretical constructions that seem to have nothing in common at first: formalist modernism, as developed by Clement Greenberg (1960-1965), and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), following Graham Harman's line of thought. In bringing these threads together, the author manages to highlight some unresolved aspects of modernism and flat ontology, addressing topics such as (aesthetic) autonomy, the subject-object divide, and high modernism.

Anna Dijkstra considers the intersection of affect and epistemology in Robert Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities* (1930), arguing for a critical attitude towards various ways of aestheticizing rationality, especially in the context of fascism. This lens allows for drawing productive parallels between the novel's engagement with fascism and contemporary forms of neo-fascism, and reconceptualizes the famous novel as an anti-fascist text on an epistemological level.

Izabela Sobczak provides a close reading of Ewa Kuryluk's *Century 21* (1992), retrieving the features of Joseph Conrad's afterlife in that novel as echoes of Conrad's own Trans-/national, pre-modernist identity. The author also reads Kuryluk as an author who willingly taps into Conrad's way of representing subjectivity through the emotional relation with visual objects: comparable to Eliot's "objective correlative", this way of artistically translating the emotional domain is closely tied, for Sobczak, to both authors' disengagement from Polish culture and their quest for a trans-national, multilingual, and universal perspective.

Ilinca Pelea's exploration of pictorial memory is one that lifts research on memory in Proust's *Search* to a new level. Starting from the novel's engagement with various painters, she shows how Proust incorporates their styles to transform narrative modes of remembering. Approaching this matter from a temporal angle, Pelea considers the role of both Carpaccio and Vermeer's paintings in the background of two important scenes, using their artistic styles to elaborate a model of remembering as, respectively, anachronism and a meaning-laden, temporally irreducible "patch".

Somjyoti Mridha revisits E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), to build a connect between the literary aesthetics of modernism and the political ideology of imperialism and the contradictions latent within. Highlighting how Forster's political views impacted his creative journey, the article engages with two seemingly contrasting but ever-present approaches vis-à-vis colonial modernism: supremacy of the colonizer, and envisaging *friendship* between the colonizer and the colonized. His article succinctly highlights how Forster mediates the contradictions underlying modernism and imperialism.

Aathira Peediakaparambil Somasundaran's article adds an important aspect to the Modernist tradition by taking it beyond the purview of *Western* modernism and introducing the Levant literary movement as a significant contributor in re-imagining the milieu of literary modernism in Beirut. By situating the movement in the context of migration and cross-cultural exchanges that followed, the author highlights the unique literary and cultural dynamics that emerged in the region. Somasundaran examines how migration to the West played a key role in shaping the literary culture of Beirut. The movement is presented as one that responded to the social and political pressures of the time, while also embracing the aesthetic innovations characteristic of modernism. In this context, the importance of spaces – in disseminating plural voices and creating scope for dialogues to foster – is also explored. The essay poses the Levant literary movement as an oppositional movement that promised freedom from the shackles of customs and traditions, and traces how it contributed to the broader transformation of modernist literature in ways that resonate with contemporary concerns about migration, identity, and the politics of space.

At the crossroads between New Modernist Studies and Cognitivism, Amalia Cotoi undertakes an analysis of the body in modernist literature, spanning from East to West, in the works of authors such as Constantin Fântăneru, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Sarina Cassvan, Mircea Eliade, Henriette Yvonne Stahl, Gustave Flaubert and Marcel Proust, while frequently returning to figures of High Modernism like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. She does not only bridge the gap between national and universal modernisms, but also between the body, mind, and environment. Starting from the cognitivist theory of "embodiment of mind", her analysis focuses on the interdependent relationship between subjectivation and the body, as well as the way the body and environment merge and influence each other.

A dive in the contemporary art world is provided to us by Ioana Șerban and her rich article on Scandinavian visual artists Elmgreen&Dragset. In her contribution, Șerban productively reflects upon the legacy of the "new" in Postmodern and contemporary culture,

borrowing from a composite methodology involving Terry Smith, Clare Bishop, and Peter Osborne. Her work provides a through overview of the semantics of installations and how they played out through time. She provides an evaluation of Elmgreen&Dragset as emblematic of the modernist tendency to disrupt and question tradition, especially by seeking out the active involvement of the viewer in their works, and by the problematization of the cultural significance of Nordic design as both a tradition and a “dystopia of uniformity”.

Alina Gabriela Mihalache and Ștefan Firiță give a detailed historical overview on the Habima theatre, the first Hebrew language theatrical company to exist, founded in 1917. The essay explores the Zionist ideological origins of the theatrical project, highlighting how it found home in Russia, the United States, and Palestine, and how the company came in contact with Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theatre. By a reading of Yevgeny Vakhtangov’s adaptations of ancient Jewish folklore, the article discusses how the Habima theatre sought to overcome language as the main means of signification, both to transcend language barriers and as a statement to be made in their competition with Alexis Granovsky’s Yiddish theatre. Finally, the authors highlight how these necessities led Habima to develop the foundation of what will later become the “theatrical theatre”, a style more based on non-verbal semiotics than language which has become a staple to signify the Jewish Holocaust, migration trauma, and deterritorialization.

Georgios Katsantonis’s paper provides us with a close reading of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s literature and cinema from an ecocritical perspective. The author investigates poems such as *Il pianto della scavatrice* (*Weeping Excavator*) (1956-1957) and Pasolini’s unfinished novel, *Petrolio* (published posthumously in 1992), exploring the relationships they establish with nature through the power that the Italian writer attributes to air and landscape in capturing the political changes in Italy during the 1950s and 1960s. Katsantonis also delves into movies such as *Mamma Roma* (1962) and *Porcile* (*Pigsty*) (1969), analyzing how Pasolini criticizes capitalist society by depicting the destruction of the environment and the animalization of humans.

Innovatively highlighting the occurrence of various Western avant-garde movements in Chinese art exhibitions, artistic publications and literary magazines, Shiyi Zhu’s article considers a frequently ignored national context for integration of modernist values. Realizing a comprehensive overview of the influences of Western ideas of modernist art on both Chinese art and intellectual discourse in the early 20th century, Zhu elaborates discussions on “global modernism” by illustrating how and why (post-) impressionist and cubist movements resonated so much in the Chinese artistic and intellectual scenes.

Radu Toderici’s essay concerning the evolution of the concepts of “modernism” and “modernity” throughout the 1960s in socialist Romania raises the question of the reception of modernism in the context of the gradual detachment from socialist realist aesthetics. Analyzing the difficulties of integrating terms for which there was no prior tradition in a specific field such as the Romanian cinema, the author attempts to highlight the strategies by which cinematic modernism has been both defined and understood in a way that has limited its innovative intentions.

Rui Sousa provides us with a thorough overview of Portuguese Surrealism through Mario Cesariny's (1923-2006) theoretical perspective, as expounded in *A Intervenção Surrealista* (1966) and *Textos the Afirmação e de Combate do Movimento Surrealista Mundial* (1977). By employing the Warwick's Research Centre's methodology on "core", "periphery", and "semi-periphery" to assess the circulation of cultural capital within existing power systems and structures, Sousa highlights how the peripheral/liminal space inhabited by Portuguese surrealism, both in terms of its chronology and its geography, actually allowed Cesariny to reword and rephrase the specificities of the avant-garde movement against, and in resistance to the Bretonian orthodoxy.

In this essay, Fernando de Moraes Gebra examines the avant-garde experiments in the *Orpheu* magazine to analyse the Portuguese literary traditions, particularly through the lens of literary criticism. Through the theoretical frameworks of "intertextual and dialogic condition" propounded by Dionísio Vila Maior, the essay reads *Orpheu's* poetics through dialogic relations by placing it within the decadentist-symbolist literary tradition. These frameworks allow Gebra to interpret the avant-garde experimentation in *Orpheu* not as isolated or independent of literary tradition, but rather as a product of ongoing dialogues with other literary movements and texts. The magazine's writers did not merely imitate or continue the decadent-symbolist aesthetics; instead, they engaged with them critically and dialogically. The dialogic condition propounded by the essay helps frame *Orpheu* as a critical site of exchange where past and present literary forms converge and create a vibrant space for the evolution of Portuguese modernism.

Frederico van Erven Cabala traces the notion of the "modern" through two centuries of Brazilian theater, showing its gradual integration of various aesthetic influences. While the term's meaning was fairly limited upon its emergence in the 19th century, it gradually evolved, picking up additional significations on the way. Van Erven Cabala considers how some of these significations are contradictory, to finally settle on an understanding of "modern Brazilian theater" that allows for the elasticity ingrained in its values.

Anca Chiorean explores two possible categories of artistic installations present in the single-issue Romanian magazine *75 HP*, published in 1924. She compiled works of "languages that must be looked at" and "languages that look like languages that must be looked at", as "not-paintings" and "not-poetry". The author delves into the interplay between visual and verbal elements in literature, focusing on how texts operate when language is treated as something to be "looked at" rather than just "read". The body of the text and the body of the reader are both implicated in the creation of meaning, shifting the focus from passive reception to active interaction.

Alex Ciorogar conducts an in-depth analysis of the evolution of the Romanian poetic and critical discourses in a broader post-communist environment, strongly linked to the global intellectual movements like metamodernism and posthumanism, while employing and wielding concepts like *RoMePo* (as in Romanian metamodernist poetry), *zemiperiphery*, and poetics of provision. Ciorogar discusses areas of the Romanian poetry published after 2000 that reflect the broader ideological debates present in the contemporary Romanian literature around the feminist, queer, ecological and posthuman poetic trends.

Bogdan Vișan provides us with a thorough overview on the theoretical nature of postmodernism in Romania, starting with the first occurrence of the term in the literary field in 1974 in Andrei Brezianu's article, *Post-modernii americani. O traiectorie spre viitor* [*American Post-Modernists. A Trajectory Towards the Future*]. By employing Mieke Bal's idea of the "travelling concept" and by adapting it to the Romanian postmodernism, Vișan highlights the political instrumentalization of local postmodernism, which renders peripheral Romania "intellectually captive" and dependent on Western epistemology for self-explanation.

Bărboiu Arina-Mihaela conducts a genealogical analysis of the most recent form of modernism in literary studies, namely metamodernism. The essay begins with the foundational text *Strategies of the Metamodern*, published in 2010 on the online platform *Notes on Metamodernism*, founded by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, and traces the concept back to its earliest formulation in the 1970s. After examining the various and competing theoretical definitions of metamodernism, Bărboiu discusses the term's reception and applicability in Romania in recent years.

Horațiu Tohătan's essay centers on a reassessment of the nihilistic premises of modernism, retrieving a network expanding from Nietzsche to Musil, Milan Kundera, and Houellebecq. In their analysis of *The Man Without Qualities* (1930), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), and *Submission* (2015), the author maps a diachronic conceptualization of Nietzsche's reception by the three authors, arguing that the characters' nihilistic attitudes had the ultimate effect of freeing them from the shackles of societal expectations, to various degrees. Furthermore, this overview allows the author to read nihilism as the driving force behind the emergence of relativism, the loss of ontological meaning in discourse, and the postmodern simulacral approach to representation.

Iren Boyarkina's article pulls out various threads of reference to the natural sciences from *Ulysses* (1920), weaving them together into two patterns of the novel's engagements with Einstein's theory of relativity, and with non-Euclidean geometries, respectively. By taking into account biographical elements of Joyce's familiarity with various scientific discourses, and combining these with close readings of the novel's scientific allusions, Boyarkina manages to give dimension to the vast landscape sketched throughout the years of Joyce's engagement with the natural sciences.

In her essay, Gabriela Glăvan discusses the problematic iconography of Sylvia Plath as a biographical object. After addressing the theoretical issues arising from late modernist critical stances around biography as an imperfect practice, which ultimately led to discarding a significant amount of material on Plath, the author productively discusses the biographical research work put forth by scholars Rosenstein and Hinchcliffe on Plath during the Seventies. In her detailed overview of both scholars' work, Glăvan is able to retrieve potential for actualizing and re-organizing that material.

Andrea Olah draws a parallel between Constructivism and Futurism within the context of the arts during the interwar period. By focusing on the experiences of Kassák and Marinetti, the author underlines how both artists sought to shift away from scientific, materialistic, and positivistic approaches to build their aesthetics. Respectively

building their views on an absolutization of art, and on Tactilism and immersion, Kassák and Marinetti are presented by Olah as viable case studies to reassess the directions taken by contemporary conceptual art.

Smaranda Ștefanovici and Georgeta Matei present a critique of the relation between modernism and postcolonial literature. The authors point out how the postcolonial writers J. M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, and Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie use modernism as a tool to analyze and challenge cultural imperialism. Through specific focus on experimental narrative techniques, the essay aims to decentralize modernism as a ‘Western’ literary concept, instead emphasizing on *Global* nature. By expanding the scope of modernism, the essay highlights the adaptability of modernist techniques to address global issues. The essay demonstrates how modernism can be re-imagined to provide new cultural and political purposes in postcolonial literature. This re-envisioning highlights the enduring relevance of modernism in contemporary writing, particularly in its ability to confront and deconstruct the ongoing effects of colonialism and imperialism.

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Francesca Caraceni
Anna Dijkstra
Anca Chiorean
Anandita Pan

NOTES

1. Michael D’arcy, Mathias Nilges (eds.), “Introduction”, in *The Contemporaneity of Modernism. Literature. Media. Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 21.
2. Sean Latham, Gayle Rogers, *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, p. 2.
3. Jean-Michel Rabaté, “Unlocking Modernism. Theory’s Fulfilment in the 21st Century”, *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, vol. 28, no. 2, Amalia Cotoi, Alexandru Matei (eds.), “Modernism and Bruno Latour”, 2023, p. 350.
4. Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 1993, p. 376.
5. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London, New York, Verso, 2013, p. 83.