

FOREWORD

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This special issue of *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* brings together prominent figures in Western and national intellectual and academic circles, managing to accomplish a challenging interdisciplinary task, that is to reflect on issues that are beyond the confines of a specific research field. There is no established tradition advocating for the association between New Modernist Studies and the anthropology of "the Moderns", as proposed by Bruno Latour. Hence, our approach surpasses the established norms of criticism and interpretative habits, delving into an innovative realm of interdisciplinary exploration. While the concept of interdisciplinarity may seem vague, we hold the belief that we can forge connections across diverse fields of study and disciplines, by creating a network grounded in shared concepts. As such, the common threads weaving through all the articles, interviews, and reviews in this book are the concepts of *modernity* and *modernism*. Considering that modernity, alongside modernism, remain among the most extensively discussed concepts inherited from the last century within humanities and social sciences today, we believe that Bruno Latour's pluridisciplinary approach would provide a suitable context to bring these two together and explore whether our century possesses adequate means to define them.

The first to embark on such an interdisciplinary endeavour is **Yves Citton**. His essay, keen and (self-)ironic, titled "A Metarealist Tale About the Supersumption of Modernity," draws both on his own concept of "ecology of attention", and on Latour's text from 2013, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (AIME). To put it briefly, Yves Citton aims to introduce a new

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aspect to Latour's modes of existence for "the Moderns", specifically the existence of the mediascape that currently exploits our minds. In AIME, Latour clarified that modernity failed to recognize the distinctiveness of these modes, leading to a misuse of the world. Among these modes, modernity overlooked the significance of fiction [FIC] and media communication. This oversight is why Citton envisions a second edition of AIME, expected around 2032 and referred to as LOVE2, which could revolutionize the modern mediascape. Citton believes that LOVE2 has the potential to eliminate "cognitive capitalism", which is eroding our ecology of attention. According to Citton, this would mark the supersumption of modernity.

Jean-Christophe Cavallin also starts from AIME and draws inspiration from Latourian anthropology, as well as from his personal experiences in rural settings, in order to envision a modern utopia. In "A Goat's Story. Postcards from the "Metamorphic Zone," Cavallin intertwines narrative with theory, uniquely expanding on Latour's proposal of the "metamorphic zone" preceding formalization. In this space, the subject and the object have not yet taken shape, and the agents exist as virtualities awaiting distribution. Cavallin does not focus on fiction as a theme, but grounds his hypothesis in a narrative – the encounter between a shepherd and his goats. Unlike the interspecies encounter reminiscent of Donna Haraway,¹ this scenario involves two entities that are not yet fully formed as actors. In these circumstances, they invert their roles as subject and object, challenging the conventional modern understanding of these terms. He refers to this situation as "thwarted modernity".

"Historical [Pre-]Modernism and the entangled networks of the Enlightenment. Dimitrie Cantemir's *Descriptio Moldaviae* during the long 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century" by **Alexandra Chiriac** marks a significant contribution by addressing and harmonizing the interplay between Actor Network Theory² and historiographic methodology. It concentrates on the circulation of Romania's earliest pre-modern historiographical text, *Descriptio Moldaviae* (1716) by Dimitrie Cantemir, spanning a century. The author's investigation into Romanian early modernity coincides with a transhistorical viewpoint. It illustrates that Cantemir's text, situated within the extensive historical network enveloping it, has fluctuated between the roles of "an actant" and "an actor", influencing the pre-modern historiographical discourse of Moldavia.

Adrian Tudurachi explores the writings of Marielle Macé, one of the prominent figures in contemporary French eco-poetics. In a comprehensive and meticulous undertaking titled "Marielle Macé and the Politics of Form," Tudurachi embarks on what we can term as an ecological reconsideration of literary form, originating from a dynamic conception shaped by phenomenology and pragmatics. The author shows not only that poetics and politics are inseparable, but also that a postmodern moment of thought is unnecessary for modernism to

¹ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007).

² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bruno Latour, "On actor-network theory. A few clarifications," *Soziale Welt*, no 4 (1996): 369-381.

emerge as a contemporary form of practice and sensibility. Conversely, the author asks himself to what extent the language of literary forms aligns with contemporary discussions about the imperative to ground modernity in practical reality for sustainability.

Starting from Nietzsche's dramatization of philosophy, **Erik Bordeleau** demonstrates, in "Into the Who of Things: Speculative Pragmatism and the Method of Dramatization," how dramatization, which he refers to as speculative pragmatism, not only rejuvenates current philosophical discussions, but also serves as a crucial formal and argumentative resource for ecological criticism. While this is notably apparent in the works of Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, Bordeleau contends that Nietzsche still holds significance over these thinkers in addressing a question that has preoccupied modernist literature and, more recently, ecological thinking, namely "who speaks?". Bordeleau endeavours to illustrate that certain significant modernist literary and philosophical works respond to this question in ways not dissimilar to the approach adopted by Isabelle Stengers or Bruno Latour in their essays.

In "The Novel as the Foundation of Romanian Literary Terminology in the Age of Cultural Modernity," **Alexandra Olteanu** not only recounts the inception of the novel in the Romanian Kingdom, encompassing both original compositions and translations, but also charts the development of a culture of modernity. She demonstrates that the capacity to define the novel, that was still in its early stages at the end of the 19th century, aligned with the rise of both literary and theoretical awareness.

"Unveiling The Unconventional: Regimes Of Art, Literature, And Representation In 21st Century Left-Wing Literary Theory," by **Emanuel Lupașcu**, scrutinises the contemporary understanding of theory, beginning with Timothy Bewes's award-winning book, *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* (2022). Lupașcu confronts challenging topics such as aesthetic regimes of modern art, as they are defined by Jacques Rancière,³ the idea of "narrative unconscious", and the distinctions between the modern epic and the novel as explored by Franco Moretti in *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia*.⁴ By framing Timothy Bewes's work within World Literature theories, Lupașcu examines both the positive and negative aspects of Bewes's theory.

Amalia Cotoi's article, "Modern Negotiations: the Interplay between Public and Private Life in Romanian Modernist Literature," is an important contribution to the issue for two reasons. Firstly, it constructs a working definition of modernity at the intersection of the Frankfurt School and Bruno Latour's work. Secondly, it tackles the concept of modernity in relation to Romanian Modernism. Amalia Cotoi shows that the surge in migration at the end of the 19th century and the emergence of the tourism industry in the early 20th century influenced the way in which modernity was perceived and constructed through literature. Moreover, she demonstrates that the expansion of the Romanian modernist universe is not solely driven by the modernist character moving between locations. Modernity also plays a crucial role,

³ Jacques Rancière, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1998]).

⁴ Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (London: Verso, 1996).

suggesting, alongside the mobile character, a blurring of the distinctions between the two dimensions of life – public and private.

In “The Paradox of Modernism after Latour,” **Alexandru Matei** endeavours to discover a point of intersection between Latourian modernity and the aesthetic modernism that engages scholars in New Modernist Studies. Drawing on the concept of modernism as defined by Peter Osborne,⁵ Matei shows that we can establish a shared form of temporality that involves both historical modernism and Bruno Latour, as depicted in *We Have Never Been Modern*.⁶ Specifically, this involves the concept of a temporal cut leading to a new distribution of temporalities. What makes the anthropology of “the moderns” different from the modernity in New Modernist Studies is the content of this redistribution, namely the interplay between the arts of writing and performative arts.

In the interview “Unlocking Modernism. Theory’s Fulfilment in the 21st Century,” **Jean-Michel Rabaté** engages in a discussion with Amalia Cotoi starting from a volume of reference in modernist studies, *Historical Modernisms: Time, History and Modernist Aesthetics* (2021), edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté and Angeliki Spiropoulou. The prominent literary theorist delves into theory, his research interests, his formation as a modernist, and his academic relationship with Derrida. The urgent matters that Rabaté addresses include the interrogation of French modernism, the ongoing relevance of modernism, and the relationship between theory, close reading, and modernism, stating that “theory has fulfilled its aim [...] in the constitution of modernism as a strong and autonomous field.” He also explores topics such as the concept of modernity, the status of theory today, and the future of both modernism and academia.

In the interview “A Latourian Glossary: Modernity/Modernism, Relativism, Non-Humans, and Politics,” **Patrice Maniglier** engages in a discussion with Alexandru Matei. The French philosopher provides a thorough x-ray not only of the current philosophical landscape, where modernity has developed its own anthropology, but also of the modernity as understood in the last century. This exploration starts from the convergence of its intellectual history and the incorporation of “nature” into historicity. Maniglier speaks about five major topics of contemporary intellectual debates related to Bruno Latour’s work: modernity and modernism; relativism; non-humans, and politics. Identifying himself as a “Latourian” and drawing on Viveiros de Castro’s anthropology (similar to Cavallin), he envisions the development of a “relativist ontology” following in the footsteps of Latour’s “modes of existence”. Based on this premise, he suggests, a new form of comparative literature that seeks to contextualize and assess “the very notion of literature, which is thus redefined by contrast with what appears to be literature but is also something else”. Extending politics to a planetary scale, he criticizes the Marxist class reductionism and proposes to replace it with a politics of multispecific alliances.

⁵ Peter Osborne, “Modernism and philosophy,” in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 388-409.

⁶ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

In the interview, "We Have Never Been Postmodern. The Mourning of Modernity Never Occurred," **Camille de Toledo** talks to Alexandru Matei. The French writer and essayist delves his intellectual and writing career. He observes that memory has often been a cause of conflicts and suggests harnessing it to form the foundation for new narratives of the future. When discussing the poetics of literature, he advocates for the remedy of translation as an "alternative language" to replace the formal rigidity of the realist novel inherited from the 19th century. He contends that this replacement is essential, as exemplified by Michel Houellebecq's novels, which he sees as perpetuating a "white man's nostalgia" for a world presumed to be under control.

In the interview "From Resistance to Theory to Resistance as Theory," **Horea Poenar** engages in a discussion with Amalia Cotoi starting from his latest book, *Teoria peștelui fantomă* [Ghost Fish Theory] (2016). He delves into his comprehensive grasp of theory, encompassing both its general principles and literary applications. Expressing reservations about the perceived limitations of post-theory, he favours French thinkers, encouraging moving beyond the constraints of prevailing trends, and emphasizing the idea of "resistance as theory". His contribution extends to topics such as modernity, the ongoing relevance of Critical Theory in academia, and the necessity of exploring forgotten thinkers alongside contemporary ones. Furthermore, he shares perspectives on both his novel and his *ars poetica*, as well as his overall outlook on the current literary scene.

Last but not least, the special issue captures the current state of research on modernism and modernity, at the intersection between literary theory, philosophy, and sociology, through the inclusion of book reviews for the following works: *Temporalities of Modernism* (2022), edited by **Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa, Petronia Petrar**; *Flat Aesthetics. Twenty-First Century American Fiction and the Making of the Contemporary* (2023), by **Christian Moraru**; *The Distance of Irish Modernism. Memory, Narrative, Representation* (2022), by **John Greaney**; and *Inventing the Social in Romania, 1848-1914: Networks and Laboratories of Knowledge* (2022), by **Călin Cotoi**.

In the end, we may confidently assert that our main accomplishment in the various contributions to this special issue, titled *Modernism and Bruno Latour: For a Resumption of Modernity*, has been the establishment of a space dedicated to looking at modernity through a magnifying glass. Although this issue does not explicitly advocate for a particular methodology in literary research or present a singular and uncontested definition of modernity, it introduces new interdisciplinary perspectives and principles for evaluating modernity in connection with world theory and modernism, and it illustrates how an interdisciplinary approach could be handled. Here are three of the conclusions:

1. The imperative to "re-ground theory" in reality is becoming more evident, not as a means to weaken it, but to fortify its connection with the world. Although we acknowledge the advantages of methodologies, it is important to mention that they tend to omit nuances and subtleties, functioning as a means of mass production. The process of "re-grounding" emphasizes the revitalization of attention to details and encourages close reading – a

practice consistently reinforced within the contributions to this issue, both theoretically and in application.

2. The resumption of modernity entails a re-evaluation of what qualifies as modern and why. To achieve this, one must acknowledge that is continuously connected to a never-ending network of actors. This applies not only to historically modernist literature but also to various artistic practices, serving as a source of inspiration for contemporary literature and arts. What holds significance is not the purity of the artistic medium in itself but the interconnections each medium establishes with others. From this perspective, whether high or post-, no theory can exempt itself from re-evaluating its objects within the intricate web of relationships that words and things engage in. As such, the texts you are about to read turn from putting into practice to exploring what we think to be a new formalism – both material and political.
3. Last but not least, allow us a conclusion in which we choose to position ourselves as researchers located in Romania. Although it is legitimate to consider our country a cultural periphery, the stakes of rethinking modernity from a global perspective in Romania are to find the most accurate descriptions and the most opportune solutions for our engagement in the world. In this global world, such an interdisciplinary endeavour serves as a reminder that every value and idea subsist through those who believe in it and are compelled to feel and act accordingly. *Modernism and Bruno Latour: For a Resumption of Modernity* would not have been possible were it not for all the contributors to this issue, who believe in the power of theory in reshaping our understanding of the world.