BOOK REVIEWS

CARMEN BORBÉLY, ERIKA MIHÁLYCSA, PETRONIA PETRAR (EDS.), *Temporalities of Modernism* (Milan: LEDI Publishing, 2022)

Let us start with three simple, straightforward questions: *What? Where? When?* We use these three coordinates every day to map reality and to pin down what is happening. So, when one, completely unsuspecting and inexperienced, first meets modernism, bafflement usually ensues. How is it, that no precise, reliable answer can be provided to these simple questions? But what at first sight seemed so simple, upon further study proves to be dizzyingly complex and quite ambiguous. Modernists were fascinated by this multiplicity, fragmentation and contradictoriness, which is also reflected in their view of time and temporal experience. *Temporalities of Modernism*, published in the series *European Modernism Studies* in December 2022 by LEDI Publishing, and edited by Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa and Petronia Petrar, is a volume which questions the reciprocal influence of time and narrative in the context of modernism.

As the editors point out in the introduction, "modernity brings together contradictory and antinomic senses of time" (p. 20), just as this collection brings together a host of diverse contributions, enriching our understanding of the many aspects of temporality in modernist fiction and thought. The fourteen essays of the collection are grouped together in five parts, dedicated to the different faces and figurations of the relation between modernism and time, constructing a fascinating conceptual arc for the book.

The first part of the volume, under the title "Modernist Temporalities between Presentism and Time Interminable," is opened by Jean-Michel Rabaté's thoughtful investigation of the end of modernism. As the title of the chapter already suggests, "Modernism Terminable and Interminable", the author reaches back to Freud's views on the terminability of psychoanalysis in order to reflect on the (im)possibility of affixing an ending or a point of completion to the modernist project. Through a thought-provoking comparison of Schuber's *Eighth Symphony* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses and Aaron*, both unfinished musical pieces, Rabaté demonstrates how the latter performs the crisis of modernism, the clash of the desire for the Absolute and the inevitable compromise, resulting in an interminable, impossible project, a phenomenon revisited by Rabaté in other famous unfinished works of art by Mallarmé, Hofmannsthal, Kafka and Beckett. Finally, Rabaté, together with Freud, states that one needs more theory, concluding that modernism is a never

closing collection. The kind of snapshots this collection hosts is the central question of the next chapter authored by Randall Stevenson, who, starting from a panorama of modernist appraisals of cinema and train/car travel, re-evaluates the relation between Bergson's philosophy and the modernist view and treatment of time. While Bergson's evaluation of cinema as an inadequate, 'chopped-up' representation of experience, which is "absolutely indivisible" (p. 66), closely resembles for instance Woolf's rejection of the mechanical and ordered division of time, yet Stevenson argues that the Bergson-modernists relation is not as straightforward as it seems at first. What is more, Stevenson brings attention to the way modernists valorized not only internal, subjective time, but as D.H Lawerence put it, the "vision isolated in eternity" (p. 76) as well, the glimpse which connects the past to the present through memory. As the nature of light is dual, being both wave and particles, Stevenson shows that the modernist approach to temporal experience is just as multifaceted, deeply affected by the interplay of unity and fragmentation.

This multiplicity and rejection of conventional divisions of time is revisited from a different angle in the second chapter of the volume, dedicated to recasting chronology and temporalities out of joint. In the first chapter of this section Mimmo Cangiano offers a new perspective on modernism and its disruption of history through the mirror of the Italian example, maintaining that modernism cannot be truly understood, unless "identified as the cultural logic of a specific historical moment" (p. 86). Building on the thoughts of Lukács, Nietzsche, Pirandello, Prezzolini and others, Cangiano demonstrates how the new epistemological approach supported by Italian thinkers and used as a tool to support nationalism is progressive only in appearance, as it only replaces an old with a new scheme. He locates this in a radically contingent view of life, which rejects any universalization or objectivism, reducing ideologies to the expression of individual wills and urges and making shared beliefs and values impossible. The following chapter, authored by Louis Armand and David Vichnar, also investigates a regional/national expression of an international movement, offering a well-researched deep-dive into Czech Dadaism. While for a long time art history regarded Dadaism as a foreign and superficial influence in Prague, reducing and effacing the achievements of important Czech artists, Armand and Vichnar set out to rewrite these false chronologies. Structured in seven numbered sections and interspersed with images, this chapter introduces the reader to the Ur-Dadaist scene in Prague (the *Red Seven* cabaret, the author and performer Jaroslav Hašek, the composer Erwin Schulhoff and the philosopher Ladislav Klíma), as well as to authors such as Melchior Vischer, the writer of the first Dadaist "novel", and Walter Serner, who penned the first Dadaist manifesto in 1918. The last chapter in the second part, contributed by Verita Sriratana, examines Marx's views on the Paris Commune in light of the novel *I Burn Paris* by subversive Polish futurist writer Bruno Jasieński. Despite being a socialist, through his novel Jasieński exposes Marx's idealized perspective on the Paris Commune and his over-romanticized, one-dimensional portrayal of the working-class, as in the midst of the decadent and monstrous capitalist city represented in the novel, the proletariat prove to possess no transformative power at all. As Sriratana deftly demonstrates, Jasieński is sceptical of any form of extremism, his novel serving as a warning for today's world.

The third part of the volume, "Keeping Time in Modernist Works", commences with Ilaria Natali's thought-provoking reflection on the theme of mirrors in Virginia Woolf's writing. The short story entitled "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" serves as a starting-point for Natali, who, relying on Umberto Eco's thoughts on mirrors, unveils a fascinating co-occurrence in Woolf's writing between reflective surfaces and the semiotic dream of catoptric nostalgia – the belief, that the image represents the object it refers to in its totality. Dividing her essay into two parts, she examines the ambiguity of mirrors: when looked into, they offer an illusion of permanence, a glance at a stable and complete essence, yet transformation, distortion and fluidity are nonetheless inherent to them. As Natali concludes, for Woolf people are a collection of selves in constant flux, where no absolute and final self can be pinpointed. A similar compulsion and inability to fix a stable, permanent self is featured in the next chapter written by Annalisa Volpone, who approaches Syvia Plath's only novel, *The Bell Jar*, as a modernist work. Though Plath studied and admired many modernist authors, Volpone holds up Woolf and Joyce as major reference points for her novel and proceeds to explore the relation between these authors in two dedicated subsections. Both authors represent for Plath a model to emulate and eventually surpass, Woolf for her style and her success as a woman writer, and Joyce for his linguistic ingenuity and meaning production, specifically in his final masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*. As Volpone shows, through her engagement with these modernist authors, Plath tried to find a method of synthesis between prose and poetry in order to be able to grasp reality in her writing. The last chapter of the third part addresses the turn towards modernist aesthetics and inner temporalities in Romanian literature during the interwar period. This turn towards the inner experience of time and the stream of consciousness was inspired, as Corin Braga demonstrates, by relativistic physics, Henri Bergson's intuitionism and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Though critics like Ibrăileanu and Lovinescu did not embrace this new direction, deeming it inferior to other forms of fiction, many others, such as Camil Petrescu, welcomed psychological, subjective prose, which made its presence first felt in Romania mainly through Proust's work. Moreover, the new style was quickly taken on by local authors, and in this chapter Corin Braga explores several examples from authors such as Max Blecher, Liviu Rebreanu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Camil Petrescu.

Dedicated to the disrupted temporal experience of war and revolution, the fourth part of the volume commences with Angelika Reichmann's chapter on the much-praised, genre-defying war novel *In Paranthesis* by David Jones. While Jones' writing shows a close affinity with T.S. Eliot's 'mythical method', making the past present and navigating the present through it, Reichmann argues that Jones' use of medieval and mythical allusions is subtler than Eliot's concept described in his review of *Ulysses.* Emphasizing the interconnectedness of Jones' literary and visual art, this chapter offers a parallel reading of his rendering of the Battle of Mametz Wood and his mixed technique drawing entitled *Guenever* in order to showcase how Jones creates a sense of sacred space and timelessness. The next chapter tackles the use of mythology in modernist works as well, by analysing the use of the prophetic paradigm in

Gertrude Stein's war writings, both autobiographical and fictional. As Chloé Thomas shows, though at first sceptical of the Occult, Stein turned to prophecies and superstition during the II World War, using it rather as a narrative device and a mechanism to cope with fear, than a genuine way to predict the future. However, in *Wars I Have Seen* prophecies take on a different meaning, informed by Stein's interpretation of history, a secularized version of typological reading in Biblical exegesis. According to Thomas here they announce the cyclicity of history, a vision of the past which helped Stein abstract herself from the harrowing reality of war. The last chapter in this part, written by Sanda Cordoș, maps the connections between modernization and revolution, offering an overview of the renditions of revolution in the modernist Romanian novel. As Cordoș underscores, Romanian culture was characterized by a constant desire for modernization, which was interestingly interwoven with national concerns. On the road towards modernity Romanian thinkers saw revolution as accelerated time, as a fast-track through which the intermediary stages of evolution could be skipped. However, after the installation of the Communist regime, revolution became a prescribed literary cliché, which came to take on a different connotation: instead of a chance for the community it became a "mischance for the individual" (p. 289), a change illustrated through the works of numerous Romanian authors, ranging from Liviu Rebreanu to Paul Georgescu.

The final part of the volume, entitled "Afterlives of Modernism VS its Liquidation after WWII", investigates what follows wars and revolutions. In the first chapter Gábor Schein tackles the ethical problems encountered in writing and living after the Holocaust through his discussion of the works of Imre Kertész, in particular his novels *Fiasco, Kaddish for and Unborn Child* and *Liquidation*. Schein sees Kertész' art as profoundly embedded in literary modernism, as an intricate signifying network which should be considered as a "con-temporaneous whole" (p. 306). In the Hungarian Nobel Laureate's work life is inseparable from writing, the latter being an invitation to death, liquidation, nonetheless leading to creation and literature, and also constituting the only way of self-identification which Kertész is willing to accept, rejecting any labels and identities ascribed to him. Schein also re-evaluates Kertész' reception in Hungarian literature and culture in the context of the memory (or willing oblivion) of Auschwitz, reflecting of how the writer's works (should) inform this memory. Also probing the different ways in which the traumatic memory of Auschwitz is rendered through art, Aura Poenar's closing contribution foregrounds the ethical dimension of images. She seeks to find an answer to how catastrophe and suffering can be portrayed ethically by applying a wide array of theoretical tools from thinkers such as Godard, Judith Butler or Didi-Huberman, in a series of case studies of various famous photographs or films. According to her, in order to be ethical, an image has to avoid the pitfalls of aestheticization and sensationalization to create space for memory, prompting the viewer to question and imagine. This is necessary, for art "is essential in recovering a memory which is not entirely retrieved through archives" (352).

The same can be said about the scholarly art exhibited in the present volume, as it offers a wide array of eye-opening discussions and explorations of modernism, shedding light on the previously unseen or the not-so-prominent. The key of this collection lies exactly in this multiplicity, as only a kaleidoscopic approach can be of use in attempting to gaze at the many-faced puzzle of modernist temporalities. Though most of the essays are written in a way that is accessible for the not thoroughly initiated as well, all the chapters testify of a high level of expertise on the side of the contributors which is worthy to be consulted by seasoned scholars.

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