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Post-novel/Post-semiotic/Post-dispositif in Contemporary Literature. A World-Systems Perspective

Call for Papers

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Many of the theoretical fundamentals developed for literary and cultural studies throughout the twentieth century have become less efficacious. In recent decades, scholars have, indeed, investigated the transformations of storytelling and cultural consumption in the digital age. However, this issue looks to further explore the future of literary and cultural studies from a world-systems perspective with a focus on the alterations of novelistic narratives in the larger context of the supplanting of liberal, humanistic, sense-making mechanisms by computational regimes of meaning. In this context, we would like to investigate 1) the decline of the category of the "novel" for long-form fiction, 2) interpretive methods grounded on semiotics, and 3) the claims for truth-formations through Michel Foucault's notion of the apparatus/dispositif.

Today we assume all long fictions are novels because of the way this form so adeptly housed and reconfigured liberalism's divisions. The novel could promote public-oriented national imaginaries and fictions of manifest destinies while plumbing the depths of privatizing desire by listening for interior signals. As liberalism promoted the self-enacting individual as the bulwark against the tyranny of the majority, the novel promoted the corresponding ideals of autonomous authors' unique genius and stylistic signatures. Such was the novel's success and dominance of liberal print culture that it managed to marginalize other forms of narrative, making them residual (the epic), or pushing them into the social subordination of "genre," understood as the realm of para-literature and pulp or lowbrow production.

Yet, all the cultural languages that were once dominant lose their magnetic authority. The novel today, for instance, is now shaped by its nemesis through what is called the genre turn, wherein prestige writers adapt the para-literature of supernatural, fantasy, and science-fiction as a form better equipped to register and respond to the current romoment.

Similarly, those credentialized by the university to study liberal literature similarly begin to devote their intelligence to serious discussion of generic writing or new media forms, like television, comic books, and video games. The liberal apparatus buttressed its civilizational claims for gradual development by deploying mechanistic and deterministic science and frequentist statistics to argue that social complexity could be expressed in predictable laws that were easily visualizable. However, the new computational platforms, from Google's search query to new forms of artificial intelligence now depend on a different kind of mathematics, one called Bayesian probability, wherein the known input of frequentist statistics is not required, since these are replaced with an inferential probability of future occurrences based on past examples. Unlike frequentist statistics, Bayesian probability does not seek to create regularities, but looks to dynamic optimalization that aims at developing better, but not necessarily always correct results.

The linguistic turn that motivated so much of the Humanities in the last 50 years, in its structuralist or poststructuralist guises, was based on the Saussurean binary claim that meaning is differential. Yet meaning today is not differential, but correlative, and the semiotic models have decreasing efficacy. Nowadays, we experience life in a "post-truth" society, not because of the appeal of relativizing claims about history and documentation, but because the academic institutions that authorized these statements have themselves become prey to the declining authority of liberalism's binary theoretical machinery. This issue aims to track the changes and substitutions in the semiotic regimes of the liberal apparatus, especially through the attempt to define a concept of the 'irrealist' or 'post' novel from a world-systems perspective, including the Romanian contemporary literary system and beyond.

Possible topics for the essays include but are not limited to:

- Fan-Fiction
- Collaborative Fiction
- Life Writing
- The post-Cold War novel
- Contemporary and post-communist narratives
- The transnational, international, global, cosmopolitan, or world novel
- The Digital Novel
- The Post-Novel

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Submission calendar:

- 31 December 2024 – proposal submission deadline (200-word abstract, 7 keywords, 5 theoretical references, 150-word author's bio-note);
- 1 October 2024 – notification about acceptance;
- 1 February 2025 – submission of full papers (Instructions for authors regarding formatting rules and style sheets can be found on the journal's webpage: INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS;
- 30 September 2025 – publication of the special-themed issue.

Please send your abstracts and papers to the following email addresses: philologia.studia@ubbcluj.ro, s.shapiro@warwick.ac.uk, alexandru.ciorogar@ubbcluj.ro