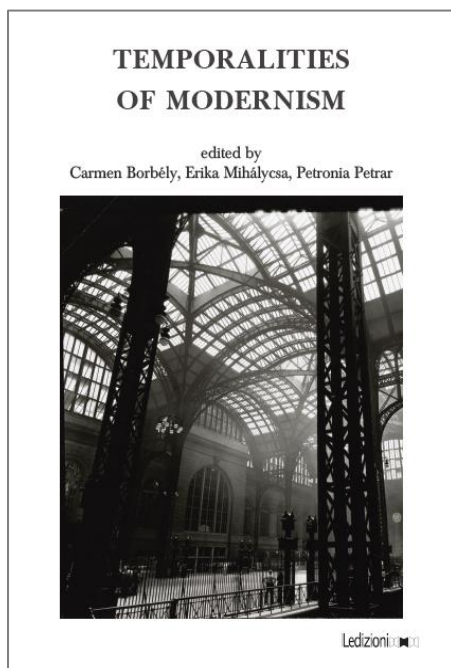


BOOKS

Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa, and Petronia Petrar (eds.), *Temporalities of Modernism*, Milan: Ledizioni, 2022, 379 p.

A seemingly inexhaustible source of scholarly debate and analysis, modernism and its relationship to time finds itself once again the topic scrutiny in *Temporalities of Modernism*, edited by Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa, and Petronia Petrar. The volume brings forth fragments of the literary body of modernism, as an aggregate of thirteen essays authored by a panoply of researchers from all over Europe.

This collection of essays addresses the main thematic preoccupations and anxieties of modernism and the way they have bled into, as well as shaped our contemporary world. Quite fittingly, through the diverse geopolitical perspectives employed, it decentralizes the chiefly English or French perspective of modernism



and the way it has shaped time. Thus, the fragmentary nature of modernism and the unity it paradoxically strives towards is mirrored by the international essays that make up the volume. The geopolitically diverse authors shed light on the perceptions of the modernist experience of temporality within the framework of their own cultural background, as well as on others.

The essays are divided into five parts, each dealing with a disparate aspect of temporality. We are introduced to “Modernist Temporalities: Between Presentism and Time Interminable” through Jean-Michel Rabaté’s tackling of the unfinished and unfinishable archive. By examining a few of the key works rendered



without an ending or a conclusion in the classical sense of the word, he draws a clear distinction between the “unfinished” and the “interminable,” two contrasting terms that are also the basis of the debate regarding the end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism, if it has happened at all. In the same section of the book one can read Randall Stevenson’s essay on the aporia between disparate, fragmentary moments and Bergson’s temporal continuum to be found within the experience of modernist temporality. With the invention of cinematography, the coexistence of separate units of time that are nevertheless indivisible in their uniqueness and stretched out within interior time is appeased.

The second section entitled “Recasting Chronologies, Temporalities out of Joint” presents us with alternative forms modernism has taken and, at times, its perilous consequences. Mimmo Cangiano makes a case for the individual freedom hailed by modernity as being turned into an ideological tool. History, according to his argument, ceases to be a transformative power that represents the story of communal progress, and it is instead replaced by singularity claiming the universal, akin to a temporal be-all and end-all, wherein time cannot exist without the individual. In the next essay, Louis Armand and David Vichnar bring to our attention a gap in the discourse surrounding modernism through an account of the Dadaist movement in Prague, the turmoil of the artists partaking in it, as well as a closer look at what might, albeit somewhat ironically, be called Melchior Visher’s Dada novel. Verita Sriratana follows a similar line of thought in her case study of Polish writer Bruno Jasienski. His novel, as per Sriratana, is meant to warn against

attempts at erasing temporalities, as they are bound to repeat.

In the next section of the book, “Keeping Time in Modernist Works,” time-keeping practices are highlighted in the works of Woolf, Plath and a number of Romanian writers. Ilaria Natali presents us with a close reading of a few of Woolf’s short stories in which she focuses on the temporal qualities of the reflective surface of the mirror. The ever-changing personalities of the protagonists are captured in brief, anamorphic reflections that are the object of scrutiny of the flux of becoming and the desire to grasp the unity of personhood, a desire that is ultimately impossible to achieve. Woolf’s influence reached Sylvia Plath a few decades later, as Annalisa Volpone points out as she demonstrates modernism’s capacity to spur the expression of inner time beyond arbitrary chronological limitations. Modernism’s far reach becomes apparent through Plath’s diary entries, which highlighted her struggle to “hold the centre” and the impression of D.H. Lawrence’s figure of the fig, as well as Volpone’s minute interpretation of Plath’s only novel, *The Bell Jar*. In another appropriation of modernist temporality, Corin Braga offers an ample overview of the Romanian novel’s chronotope during the first half of the 20th century. As he goes on to demonstrate, inner turmoil is the source of temporal disruption, particularly when the underlying catalysts are jealousy, war, pain and death, with the main sources of modernist inspiration being French authors.

However, the aforementioned temporal disruption resulted from a state of warfare is brought to the forefront by the fourth section, “War and Revolution as Disrupted Time.” Angelika Reichmann opens up this part of the book through an

examination of how modernism manifested in the work of the Welsh poet David Jones, especially in relation to T.S. Eliot. Jones' poem *In Paranthesis* combines biblical and mythopoeic elements with the disrupted temporality of the shell-shocked soldier in an account of the futility of war and its inexorable repetition. In a similar vein, Chloé Thomas offers an overview of the presence of occult spiritualism and the *mise-en-abyme* recurrence of history through the work and life of Gertrude Stein. Despite having a positivist background, during the Second World War Stein reverts to the work of an astrologer who believed himself capable of foretelling the way the war would go. This, Thomas argues, Stein turns into everyday, domestic prophecies that was to carry her from one day to the next as mere companions void of an immediate referent. While Stein turns out to prefer temporal loops, Romanian literature once again makes an appearance in the volume as a portrayal of altogether bypassing organic temporal development in an attempt to catch up with lost time, which is rather typical, as Sanda Cordoş argues. The sentiment is rooted not only in the belief-turned-cliché that they, as a people, are behind times, but it is also caused by the abrupt change of discourse caused by the imposition of the communist regime.

Lastly, "Afterlives of Modernism vs. Its Liquidation After WWII" presents us with the way our culture has been shaped by Auschwitz. Questions regarding temporality are accompanied by those referring to ethics in a post-testimonial world which, if not downright stuck in a

temporal loop created by the tragic events of WWII, are unquestionably still shaping our time. Gábor Schein makes a point of conveying the impossibility of expressing the unsayable and the condundrum of the imperative of need for a discourse in Imre Kertész. The issue post-Auschwitz of ethics is tackled by Aura Poenar as well, this time through an incisive interpretation of images that permeate today's culture. Through the specific examples she employs from Romania all the way to Venezuela, Poenar strives for a more ethical relationship towards the Other with a focus on decontextualized snapshots that are at risk of becoming disjointed from the temporality they belong to. These last two essays contain a shift in modernism and its echoes from sheer temporal concerns to ethical ones as well.

All in all, the discourse of *Temporalities of Modernism* is rich with a plethora of visions of the multifaceted and paradoxical period of modernism, as well as with the miscellaneous temporalities that accompany it. This is what makes it a rather accessible read to both the readers who would like to get acquainted with the general discourse surrounding modernism, as well as those who have an interest in getting familiar with the often-neglected manifestations of modernism on different cultural and geopolitical scenes.

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