
BOOK REVIEWS

ALEXANDRU MATEI, CHRISTIAN MORARU, and
ANDREI TERIAN, eds.

Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for
the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual
Commons

New York etc.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022

THEORY IN *the "Post" Era* comprises the recent work of the CITI (Critical Theory Institute) based in Păltiniș, Romania. Placed in direct continuity with the equally ground-breaking *Romanian Literature As World Literature*, edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian. (New York–London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), it explores the latest developments in critical theory and cultural analysis, discussing theory as a world genre and using Romanian criticism's so-called "marginal" position in the world-system as a privileged site of contestation and knowledge-production. Far from declaring the demise of theory, as some voices did in the 1990s, the authors posit that "our moment is 'post-theoretical' only insofar as its sometimes parallel and sometimes intersecting reformulations of major tenets and approaches lead, as they have for a while now, to a theory of the 'posts'" (18); more precisely, they practice and explain contemporary theory through a double turn: a purely *theoretical* one, questioning inherited notions and dichotomies such as nature vs. culture, center vs. periphery, now vs. then, and a *metatheoretical*, disciplinary and manifestly democratic transi-

tion to a world theory commons willing to dismantle its own power imbalances and restrictive historiographies. This unapologetic and programmatic ethical drive is articulated as such in chapters by Andrei Terian and Ioana Macrea-Toma, concerned with the rise of populism and discriminatory attitudes, as well as the literary representation of minorities and their subversive languages; it also functions more subtly in interventions like Corin Braga's, where the dislocation of aesthetic value from the cult of centered structures is meant to lead to a "democratization of genre theory" (122). In other words, no matter if they engage directly or obliquely with ideology, the essays in the volume are based on the belief that not only are theory (understood as: (re)conceptualization, collective self-discernment, connections across temporal and geocultural borders) and community mutually dependent, but also that solidarity and dialogue are crucial in our day and age, often defined by division and ignorance.

The three sections—aesthetics, temporalities, critical modes—all observe the principles of conceptual expansion and metatheoretical inquiry. That is, the map of theory, its history, periods, consecrated methodologies and related disciplines undergo reflection and revision (as indicated by the "post" label), always in an effort to address some of the blind spots, exclusionary reflexes and indissoluble tensions of contemporary theoretical practice.

To begin with, while looking at the multiple senses of an end marking the 21st century—the collapse of commu-

nism, postmodernism, the authority of the canon, aesthetics, to name but a few—the authors also analyze the history and mutations of theory per se, starting from the one-sided, hegemonic narrative of Western modernity and rationality as sole producers of abstract thought and moving on to less restrictive, more productive definitions of the field. For instance, Alexandru Matei announces the waning of aesthetics as an anthropocentric (and often nationalistic) domain compatible with the advent of European modernity; he describes today's literary critic as a Latourian diplomat interested in mediating and enacting change through the awareness that ideas and logical patterns can coagulate in “any composition, textual or not” (69), belying the opposition between intellect and affect. In the same vein of fragile dichotomies and their current undoing in theory, Teodora Dumitru demonstrates that a “constructalist” approach to cultural history, inspired by the work of physicist Adrian Bejan and proposing that the evolution of both living and non-living worlds be understood as flows of information and matter could be applied to literary theory, as an alternative to conflicting models like Marxist class struggle and arbitrary Darwinian selection. Similarly, Caius Dobrescu's essay highlights how the theoretical imaginary of world-peripheral theorists from the Braşov School managed to transcend the body-mind divide, as well as the anti- and pro-unitarian currents born in the dominant West, putting forward a somatographic project: the body is no longer viewed as the object of various power struggles, since embodied cognition itself becomes a counter-political act. Ultimately, cross-disciplinarity and experimental critical methods are never brought in

gratuitously, but rather in response to the crises and deadlocks encountered by recent literary studies.

At the same time, while acknowledging the problematic perpetuation of inequities and uneven development in the community of world theory (much like in world literature), the authors also investigate the emancipatory mutations of theory on the peripheries of the world system (that is, the production of localized knowledges) and point out the crucial intersections between postcolonialism and other critical subfields: Ştefan Baghiu outlines a “Global South” network connecting Romania, Italy, and the Southern United States through the literary imaginary of poverty and precarity after WWII; likewise, Alex Goldiş derives his “affective, ideologically minded narratology” (74)—a hybrid critical model in its own right – from the experience of totalitarianism in Eastern-European literatures; in his turn, Cosmin Borza proves that a post-canonical reading of “peripheral” literatures (studying broader power relations through the lens of canon-formation rather than simply contesting or expanding the canon) might help solve some of world literature's aporias. Therefore, as the strategies for reading and theorization devised for the “post” era render temporal boundaries porous—as shown by Christian Moraru's “postfuturism,” Carmen Muşat's “post-synchronism,” Andreea Mironescu's “post-memory,” and Laura Cernat's analysis of the “return of the author” through biofiction—world theory ends up being traversed by countless parallels, facilitating comparisons and exchanges between intellectual time zones, as well as “peripheral” theoretical laboratories.

Finally, it must be said that the “reluctant epochalism” mentioned in the vol-

ume's introduction also suggests a new, rigorous, and non-linear approach to intellectual history. When arguing for the necessity of new critical modes—Mihai Iovănel's "neocritique" (a brand of "investigative" reading which retains a constructivist perspective on knowledge, but is more committed to realism and materialism), Adriana Stan's "digicriticism" (responding to emergent, communal literary values and the on-line democratization of cultural analysis), Bogdan Crețu's "post-presentism" (a more historicized, self-reflexive presentism) or Ștefan Baghiu's "geocritique" (a reconceptualization of geocriticism, rectifying its insufficient preoccupation with class, socioeconomic vulnerability and their depiction in literature)—the authors do not proclaim the definitive victory of radically different philosophies or methodologies. Instead, they are fully aware of the sometimes recurrent, non-teleological nature of literary and theoretical evolution (to quote Teodora Dumitru's chapter) and reveal the gradual, ethically driven, self-conscious labor of contemporary theory within the *Crit* and elsewhere.



MARIA CHIOREAN

DELIA UNGUREANU

Time Regained: World Literature and Cinema

New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021

IN A world of trans-mediation accentuated by globalization, the separation of the arts seems to be less relevant. In this sense, Delia Ungureanu's *Time Regained: World Literature and Cinema* aims to discuss the ways of thinking about time with applications from both literature and film.

It doesn't follow just correspondences and influences, but shows how ideas circulate and transgress contexts and geographies, generating different ways of creation. The book focuses on the idea of *circulation* to "reveal the often invisible networks in which writers with a filmic imagination and filmmakers with literary training develop their ideas" (17).

From the beginning, the author observes that world literature and world cinema are intended to be fields of study as open and democratic as possible (both with a stake in overcoming national and linguistic borders), but they have rarely intersected in applied studies. In this sense, Delia Ungureanu uses André Bazin's concept of "mixed cinema." Following the French theorist, films won't be considered only adaptations of literary works, but a *translation* into another medium, with its conventions and creative techniques. Starting from his idea of cinema as "objectivity in time," she also pursues the problem of temporality and the heritage of surrealism. Selected writers and directors have in common not only the topic of time in their works, but also the constant preoccupation for conceptualizing memory and irreversibility. The author sees a structural relationship between the selected works from world literature and world cinema, and this relationship is based on the valorization of surrealist poetics and Proustian modernism (understood and analyzed in close connection with surrealism).

As a research method, Delia Ungureanu carries out, as in previous books, almost a detective investigation: she analyzes artistic creations but goes further (in journals, letters, interviews and other documents from the artist's archives) to understand the entire creative network of writers and