

Introductory Note

The Emergence of Portuguese Modernism: Contributions to its Cultural History

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The Spring and Summer of 1915 saw the appearance in Lisbon of the two issues of the literary magazine *Orpheu*. Initially intended as a quarterly, the magazine had a short life span and, mainly due to financial pressures, the planned third issue failed to be published. Although it was the intellectual product of a small group of young and practically unknown poets and artists, the magazine instantly caused a large literary scandal which spilled out into the mainstream press. The reaction of the Lisbon cultural establishment oscillated between attempts to ridicule the undertaking, by calling the protagonists lunatics, and real indignation before some of the poetry and art collected in the magazine, which differed substantially from traditional literary and artistic conventions of the day. But *Orpheu* was not merely a provocative magazine, since it published representative works by some of the main Portuguese authors of the twentieth-century, and succeeded in stirring the cultural milieu, leading to a much-needed renewal of the national arts and letters. Despite the magnitude of the scandal that followed its publication, the *Orpheu* moment was short-lived and quickly overtaken by political events that dominated public life in Portugal at the time and by concerns over the ominous armed conflict rearing up in Europe. Nonetheless, the magazine's revolutionary agenda and effect had a profound impact on contemporary writers, works and aesthetic trends, justifying the use of the term generation to refer to the figures that gathered around it, and subsequent publications and other cultural initiatives that ensued from it or in reaction to it in the following years. As the extraordinary document of Portuguese cultural history that *Orpheu* is, tracing its contemporary reception and its afterlife constitutes a privileged starting point to a reappraisal of the determining social and cultural factors underlying the first manifestations of Portuguese modernism and of the extent of their impact.

In revisiting the historical circumstances and material culture of the generation of *Orpheu*, this special issue is largely driven by a historiographical aim of reconstructing the socio-cultural context of the earliest modernist manifestations in Portugal and to sketch a kind of 'sociography' of *Orpheu*, its milieu and its time,

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which includes the larger international context of the outbreak of WWI and contemporary phenomena in the cultural field (STEINMETZ, 1912/1913). Aware, through the lessons of Walter Benjamin, of the impossibility of reconstituting the 'authenticity' of *Orpheu* as an aesthetic expression in its own time and place (BENJAMIN, 1963), we are circumscribed to punctually revisiting some of the contexts – material, aesthetic and other conditions – in which the contributors to the magazine and other cultural actors belonging to the same generation produced their art. Even so, this undertaking relies on the assumption that a more phenomenological account of the reciprocal relationship between literary and artistic expressions and their socio-cultural conditions is not only feasible but desirable, since it offers the possibility of revealing less known facets of the cultural phenomenon or revisiting known aspects in a new light. It goes without saying that this type of more historically sensitive re-examination of specific modernist manifestations involves a recapitulation of national and transnational trajectories of the different modernisms which, in turn, offers privileged conditions for an objective comparison with different cultural contexts. Additionally, the comprehensive identification of regional or ethnic particularities of different modernisms leads to a more differentiated use of the complex terminology of 'modernity', 'modernization', and 'modernism', which is the object of ongoing debates in modernist studies, namely with the spatial and temporal widening of the discipline (FRIEDMAN, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2015; BROOKER & THACKER, 2005). It can, therefore, shed new light on the systemic factors and forces operating in the cultural field which underpin different national physiognomies of Modernism.

In considering that the modernism of the generation of *Orpheu* is not satisfactorily explained solely through an aesthetic critical lens, contributions to this issue draw on concepts which originate in the social sciences and are predominantly used in the field of cultural studies, such as internationalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, materialization or synthesis. Aided by these critical tools, it is hoped the issue will depict, at least schematically, the socio-cultural reality within which Portuguese modernism emerged during the first few months of WWI, and trace its relationships with other artistic phenomena in Europe and beyond. In doing so, it highlights the contemporaneity of the *Orpheu* magazine with the earliest European modernist cultural manifestations, as well as its importance for the cultural history of Portuguese Modernism. Additionally, by re-visiting the generation of *Orpheu* in relation to a wider socio-cultural context with both a national and international scope and its diversified material and cultural production, particularly forms of artistic expression which have been less-examined with regard to the first generation of modernists, this issue has yielded new findings about the multifaceted dynamics of Portuguese modernism, adding to previous studies in this field (DIX & PIZARRO, 2011; ROCHA, 2013, 413-435).

Published amidst great political and social upheaval, the call of *Orpheu*'s proponents for an overhaul of literary and artistic practices testified to a period which is commonly regarded as marking the transition into a new reality for European culture. Virginia Woolf dated this turn to December 1910 (WOOLF, 1966: 320), Eric Hobsbawm identified 1914 as the end of the 'era of empires' and the beginning of the 'era of extremes' (HOBSBAWM, 1995), and for D. H. Lawrence, the old world ended in 1915 (LAWRENCE, 1923; 1960: 220). António Sousa Ribeiro's article examines works produced by key figures of the generation of *Orpheu* in relation to this dissonant, changing European temporality at the time of "the Great War". In turn, Steffen Dix's article offers an account of the national context in which *Orpheu* appeared, arguing that the publication of the magazine functioned as a catalyst to sociocultural modernization in Portugal, regarding especially some ideas proposed by that generation's leading figure, Fernando Pessoa. The War also features alongside other significant aspects of the changing sociocultural landscape of this historical period, notably issues of gender, in Irene Ramalho Santos' article, which examines comparatively *Orpheu* and other international, transcontinental little magazines of the period. Similarly, Andrew Thacker's article addresses contextual and material aspects of the little magazine understood as a world form, examining cross-culturally several characteristics of modernist magazines, including *Orpheu*.

As a meeting point of several literary tendencies concomitantly unfolding in Portugal in the early years of the twentieth century, *Orpheu* gave expression to different and sometimes divergent facets of Portuguese modernism, from the more advanced to those generally termed as *arrière-garde*. Some of the articles collected in this special issue argue for the heterogeneous nature of Portuguese modernism, which – as was the case with other early modernist manifestations, particularly those occurring in so-called peripheral contexts, i.e. more distant from the cultural centres of the day – conflated multiple temporalities and had a more diversified ideological framework and formal and thematic expression than has been acknowledged and critically examined. The plurality of this cultural phenomenon is also evinced by the variety of media through which modernist ideas, *topoi* and forms were expressed in the Portuguese cultural field, which encompassed different art forms and had a significant inter-artistic dimension. Although these facets of the magazine and the movement it heralded were highlighted by as important a figure from that generation as Almada Negreiros at the time of the first commemoration of the publication of *Orpheu* (*Orpheu 1915-1965*), they have not received much sustained critical examination, especially in the light of new findings that have emerged only recently. Accordingly, Patrícia Silva's article explores the transnational links of writers and visual artists belonging to the generation of *Orpheu* to contemporary international artistic circles, tracing the impact of avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Futurism and Orphism on

some of their works. As well as the visual arts, expression in other media by the first Portuguese modernists also included music, as shown in Edward Ayres Abreu's article about the composer Ruy Coelho, who knew several of the figures associated with *Orpheu* and whose modernist musical works have received very limited critical attention to date.

Finally, this special issue also proposes to examine the legacy of *Orpheu* and its generation; both the more immediate impact on the production of its contemporaries and its lasting significance for contemporary Portuguese culture. In its own time, *Orpheu* acted as a catalyst to several periodical publications, manifestos and other forms of cultural intervention attendant on the revitalized Portuguese cultural scene. Ricardo Marques' article examines the magazines that emerged alongside and in the aftermath of *Orpheu*, leading up to *Portugal Futurista*, the magazine which gave continuity to its project of shaking the cultural establishment through exposure to advanced aesthetics and of re-affirming translocal links to the international avant-garde. Over 100 years later, *Orpheu* has become an almost mythical publication for Portuguese culture, encapsulating the emergence of modernism, and its centenary was therefore marked by numerous conferences, exhibitions and publications. Sílvia Laureano Costa and Jerónimo Pizarro's article examines that legacy through the lens of Almada Negreiros – one of the most interventionist figures of that generation who continued to play an active role on the Portuguese cultural stage throughout the twentieth century and a key role in memorialising the magazine and the so-called *Orpheu* group –, focusing on its recurrent commemorations and future virtualities.

The recent centenary commemorations have occasioned a wealth of commemorative publications which have contributed in different ways and to different degrees to advance our knowledge regarding the *Orpheu* moment (SARAIVA, 2017: 180-83; see bibliography). However, the specific context of their publication meant that the latter focused predominantly on the magazine as well as on the figures that contributed to it and intervened directly in its publication, and on its immediate context. By contrast, this issue proposes to examine the *Orpheu* phenomenon from a diversified set of angles which, in an effort to reconstruct a more nuanced and eclectic picture of early Portuguese Modernism, encompasses co-temporalities and co-spatialities converging on the emergence and proleptic aftermath of the magazine up to 1917 and beyond, encompassing less-studied aesthetic practices and forms of artistic expression of that period. Accordingly, the topics addressed in the contributions to this issue are pertinent to its underlying critical framework – a historiographically informed re-visitation of the generation of *Orpheu* and the socio-cultural conditions attendant on the emergence of a Portuguese Modernism cradled in the European avant-garde – and obey the desire of its editors to explore the generational value of an evolving Portuguese Modernism through its many facets and cultural manifestations. As

such, it is hoped that the essays collected in this issue can contribute to the establishment of new lines of inquiry into the phenomenon of Portuguese Modernism, especially in the exploration of its generational continuities and divergences as well as its varied forms and media of cultural expression.

Lisbon, 12 May 2017
STEFFEN DIX & PATRÍCIA SILVA

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Annex I. Program of Workshop “1915 – Modernist Legacies and Futures”

Lisbon Workshop
“1915 – Modernist Legacies and Futures”

20 February 2015
 Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon
 Room Sociedade Científica

9h45: Welcome and Introduction
 Steffen Dix (Catholic University, Lisbon- CECC)
 Peter Hanenberg (Catholic University, Lisbon- CECC)

Modernism at 1915 (morning sessions - English)

10h15: The Kinetic Impulse: Painting in the Light of Film, 1915
 Christopher Townsend (Royal Holloway, University of London)

10h45: Modernism and the Periodical Scene in 1915
 Andrew Thacker (Nottingham Trent University)

11h15: Coffee-Break

11h30: 1915 - Modernists and/at War
 António Sousa Ribeiro (Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra)

12h00: *Orpheu* et al.: Modernism, Women, and the War
 Maria Irene Ramalho (Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra)

1915 – 2015 Modernist Legacies and Futures (afternoon sessions - Português)

14h00: Sensaçonismo e Vorticismo: Resistência e Afirmação pela Revista Modernista
 Patrícia Silva McNeill (Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra)

14h30: A Herança de uma Revista Modernista: Almada's *Orpheu*: 1915-1965-2015
 Jerónimo Pizarro (University Los Andes, Bogotá)

15h00: Coffee-Break

15h15: Os Guardadores de *Orpheu*: Memória e Divulgação
 Sílvia Costa (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, IELT)

15h45: Da *Orpheu* como Desafio à Posteridade
 Jorge Fazenda Lourenço (Universidade Católica, Lisboa - CECC)


