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WHAT IS POST-CRITICISM? RECONSTRUCTIVE INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This introductory article examines the transition from conventional criticism to post-critical methodologies in literary and cultural studies. It discusses Bruno Latour's compositionist approach for cultural preservation and Rita Felski's advocacy for a postcritical, curatorial method focusing on the unique qualities of texts. The paper highlights the significance of surface reading, object-oriented criticism, and their influence in contemporary ecocriticism and intermedial studies, underscoring a reevaluation of critical practices in light of aesthetic and ecological considerations.

Keywords: post-criticism, compositionist approach, object-oriented criticism, ecocriticism, intermedial studies.

In his *Compositionist Manifesto* from 2010, Bruno Latour argues for a cultural poetics which does not deconstruct, but prefers to recompose “ruins,” out of ecological care for cultural retrievals in the age of the Anthropocene: “While critics still believe that there is too much belief and too many things standing in the way of reality, compositionists believe that there are enough ruins and that everything has to be reassembled piece by piece” (Latour, *Manifesto* 475-476). In keeping with Bruno Latour’s aesthetic and philosophical anthropology, the figures of fiction are mediators, “diplomatic” agents that contribute to the development of a composition. The compositionist, reconstructive method takes its inspiration from artistic practice (literary, pictorial, musical, visual, or performative), therefore offering an alternative to iconoclastic, deconstructive manners of doing critique within humanities and art studies.

In her turn, literary historian Rita Felski invokes the Latourian insistence on composition over critique and argues against the “school of suspicion.” As she pleads for a keen self-awareness of critique’s ideological presumptions and interpretive limits, Felski proposes instead a postcritical approach (which is not necessarily an equivalent of anti-critique), a “curatorial”, restorative method of text analysis. The so-called postcritical turn in cultural, literary and media studies brings forth new interpretive methods focused on the particularities of the objects of analysis (whether literary texts, visual artworks, or intermedial products) rather than on a pre-existing critical-ideological apparatus: the “descriptive turn” (embraced by the literary theorist Heather Love), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus’ plea for surface reading, the strategy of “reading with the grain” (propounded by Timothy Bewes, in a polemical take on criticism that goes against the grain), the “object-oriented” criticism advocated by philosopher Graham Harman, and the “reparative reading” (derived from the work of Melanie Klein and promoted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick).

Other theorists reaffirm an ecology of reading and artmaking, considering literature and artistic activities as generators of social coexistence, of behaviour patterns and ways of self-relation, which pertain to the aesthetics (and ecology) of existence. Certain concepts that belong to the art world are reconsidered and, although they do not entail whole paradigm shifts, they have been lately expanded beyond the aesthetic sphere. Relevant in this respect is the kind of aesthetic anthropology practised by literary theorist Marielle Macé, who argues that style can

be recontextualised as a way of being/ *manière d'être* and thus accounts for a stylistics of existence.

In keeping with the ecological reappraisal of aesthetic and cultural theory, the present issue of the *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* puts forward a comprehensive range of methodological approaches, placed in between postcriticism (as promoted by Rita Felski, in the aftermath of Latour's "nonmodern" cultural anthropology), contemporary ecocriticism as practised within intermedial studies, environmental humanities, affect ecologies and the new aestheticism in humanities and art studies, posthuman and (post)medial studies. The articles included in this issue of the *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* engage with such theoretical debates and reveal their practical-analytical outcomes, focusing on topics such as: a postcritical curatorial perspective on literature and the arts; postcriticism as ecological practice; the Latourian legacy in art criticism and theory; posthuman and post/ intermedial challenges to critique; the transformative and reparative potential of affect theory; critical communities in post/ intermedial times; more-than-human/ posthuman relations and assemblages in the Anthropocene.

Thus, Alexandra Brici's research meticulously unravels, for instance, nonhuman perspectives in literature, employing cognitive narratology and affect theory to read Ann Pancake's novel. Ousseynou Sy's examination of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* illuminates the novel's incorporation of diverse media to enhance its narrative framework. Andra Purdea delves into ORLAN's art, probing the confluence of augmented reality, feminism, and posthumanism, thus uncovering the transformative influence of technology in the artistic realm. Daiana Sargan bridges performance art and cognitive science in her study of Alexandra Pirici's creations, highlighting the dynamic interaction between human cognition and artistic innovation.

Within the sphere of cultural and historical discourse, Alex Ciorogar tackles the evolution of authorship in the digital age, highlighting the transition towards collective and networked identities, while Ranit Samrat provides a nuanced analysis of Amitav Ghosh's novel, situating it within the context of the Marichjhapi massacre.

The section dedicated to ecocriticism and posthumanism includes Daniel Cinci's persuasive argument for an eco-critical posthumanist approach in literature, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between humans, nature, and technology.

Ana-Maria Deliu investigates the impact of the Anthropocene on literary discourse, evaluating literature's response to ecological shifts. Noemi Fregara analyses Olga Tokarczuk's works through an ecocritical and ecofeminist lens, inquiring into environmental and feminist narratives.

Denisa Chirtes's essay is notable for its examination of the intersection between queer themes and ecological concerns in Romanian literature, providing insights into current societal dilemmas. Erik Bordeleau adopts a philosophical stance, exploring Isabelle Stengers' cosmopolitical ideas and their speculative dimensions. Finally, Francesca Medaglia investigates ergodic literature as a form of metamodern fiction, emphasising the changing nature of literary structures.

Closing this issue are two splendid reviews. Ana Țăranu's survey analyses Moraru's *Flat Aesthetics. Twenty-First-Century American Fiction and the Making of the Contemporary*, which reinterprets contemporary American literature using object-oriented ontology, advocating for an egalitarian literary approach that values all objects equally in aesthetic discourse. Bogdan Vișan's review critically examines Matthew Caracciolo's book (*Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene*) on the intersection of narratology and ecocriticism, focusing on narrative ethics and challenging anthropocentric views in literature.

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