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Review of Paolo Giovannetti, ed., *Periodici del Novecento e del Duemila fra Avanguardie e Postmoderno* (2018)

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Reviews

Paolo Giovannetti, ed., *Periodici del Novecento e del Duemila fra Avanguardie e Postmoderno* (Milan: Mimesis, 2018). 302 pp. ISBN 9788857548623

Published by Mimesis Edizioni and edited by Paolo Giovannetti of the University of Milan, the excellent collection, *Periodici del Novecento e del Duemila fra Avanguardie e Postmoderno*, brings together eleven articles written between 2016 and 2018 and originally presented at the 2017 International Conference of the European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit), which also produced a [special issue](#) in the *Journal of European Periodical Studies* guest-edited by Paolo Giovannetti, Andrea Chiurato, and Mara Logaldo. The fact that this book resulted from both a face-to-face conference and a special issue of the Society's journal emphasizes the rigorous process the papers underwent in bringing together the edited collection. Indeed the papers included situate themselves in an organic conversation while also showing the polish which the peer-review journal process (as well as the book editing process) provide. While the volume makes explicit its intention to wrestle with the complicated concept of postmodernism, the articles included tend to avoid deep theoretical navel-gazing. Instead, each study explores a historically specific aspect of how periodicals changed and transformed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on their evolution as modernist technologies and tools used by the avant-garde, as well as their evolution into a postmodern state which we currently inhabit with all its textual deconstruction and the often heralded death of the newspaper.

The international character of this Italian-language publication is made explicit with its first chapter, which is in fact an English-language contribution by Stefano Maria Casella. Casella offers us a rigorous look at the evolution of the

modernist periodical and its relationship with the avant-garde via a discussion of *BLAST*, a two volume (1914/15) literary publication edited by Wyndham Lewis and including contributions from young but already well-known figures as the writers Ezra Pound, Henry Gaudier-Brzeska, Ford Madox, Rebecca West, and artists including Edward Wadsworth, Frederick Etchell, William Roberts, and Jacob Epstein. The 164-page first edition of *BLAST*, billed as a 'Review of the Great English Vortex', is examined not only for its content but also its format, typography, coloration, and the other materially specific manners of presentation which the publishers employed to make its 'modernism' and avant-garde character explicit to the reader. Casella notes that the periodical's artistic and typographic presentations were combined with a modernism that was similar too but also very different from the futurist manifestos of the era, which were explicitly attacked in *BLAST*. This position is illuminated by Casella's close examination of the text. Her reading of images is insightful and her examination of the manifestoes and poetry in the publication moves the discussion beyond the simply theoretical to make interesting new connections. As such it makes an excellent opening for Giovannetti's volume, highlighting both the thematic discussion of modernism and the avant-garde in the push to the postmodern well also grounding such discussions in the close reading of periodicals which is the hallmark of the European Society for Periodical Research.

This study is followed by Marida Rizzuti's examination of *Modern Music*, a periodical published from 1924 to 1946 in the United States which analyzed modern

music both in the United States and Europe following the First World War. Structurally Rizzuti's chapter is similar to Casella's. We are presented with the study of a protracted public discussion which would shape how much of modern music was understood by a larger community. Exploring the work of contemporary composers of the time such as Kurt Weill, Hanns, Eisler, George Antheil, Aaron Copland, and Marc Blitzstein, *Modern Music* was a journal that entered into what Rizzuti describes as a kind of dialectic with artists helping articulate the modernism that the composers were exploring in their musical works. Notably this included taking seriously new venues of musical expression such as 'film music', a theme we see expanded on later in the book by Chiara Grizzaffi in her chapter on the journal *Cinema and Film*. Rizzuti's article, much like Casella's, dances between a close reading of the periodical's content, exploring the debates and discussions that animated its pages, while also stepping back to think critically about how *Modern Music* functioned as a periodical itself. For those not directly concerned with the evolution of music in the modern era, but rather in the study of periodicals, it is this meta-analysis that is most interesting, while the attention to the role of new technologies in shaping the evolution of music in the twentieth century emphasizes the chapter's connection to the book's theme of avant-garde art and postmodernism.

In a similar matter Francesco Laurenti's study of *Botteghe Oscure* and Gian Luca Picconi's in-depth examination of *Nuova Corrente* emphasize the increasing role journals played as forums for avant-garde expression and the emergence of realism in the formation of a twentieth-century literary and artistic canon. Other chapters that stand out are Giovannetti's study of avant-garde journals in Milan during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Giovannetti provides a lengthy and immaculately researched contribution to our understanding of Milanese cultural practices. His look at

the use of art in these journals is of clear importance, highlighting the role Milan played in a larger artistic community which it is often excluded from in the minds of British and American scholars. This emphasis on Italian-language periodicals continues with Andrea Chiurato's look at publications of Italian 'sperimentalismo' [experimentalism], which highlight the continued emergence of avant-garde art in the construction of dissent in the middle of the twentieth century. Continuing this forward chronological exploration, Donella Antelmi and Mara Logaldo bring the book forward into the second half of the twentieth century with an examination of linguistic structures in British journals that is both wide ranging and well-grounded. Their data-driven study, which examines how the content of British journals changed overtime, is expanded upon by Filippo Pennacchio's chapter on new narratives of America and Americanness in Italian reviews in the 1980s and early 1990s. Pennacchio also highlights the Italian nature of the overall book, being the only one that makes explicit the examination of how Italians were thinking about Americans.

The collection concludes with an interesting theoretical section on modernism avant-garde, postmodernism, and metamodernism, opening with a chapter by Ralph Szukala, who examines the avant-garde work of Peter Bürger. This is followed by an article by Fabio Vittorini on the foundation of meta-modernism. Taken together these final chapters attempt to provide a more concrete theoretical foundation to the previous chapters. While they do illuminate some of the context and theoretical underpinnings of the previous work, they also seemed slightly out of place in the volume. Overall, Giovannetti's edited volume provides a timely addition to any library concerned with the study of journals and other periodicals. Each chapter is highly professional, exhibiting deep research and thoughtful articulation. While some chapters may be of more interest than

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others, depending on particular focus, as a whole, the authors remain well-focused on the periodicals themselves and display a range of methodologies and approaches that can be used by other scholars to their benefit.

The one limiting factor would be the use of the Italian language, which will render most of the articles inaccessible to the majority of scholars. As such I would highly recommend this volume for future translation in publication for English-speaking audiences. I emphasize

translation into English here because aside from the studies of Italian periodicals the majority of the chapters included discuss literary works that originally appeared in English either of American or British origins. In fact, the lack of discussion of French or German language periodicals is itself noteworthy. However, one edited volume can clearly not contain everything and what this book does it does well.

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