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The four articles collected in this special issue of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies (JEPS)* derive from four lectures that were presented at the Sixth International Conference of the *European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit)*, which was held at the International University of Languages and Media (IULM), Milan, on 28–30 June 2017. The topic for the conference was ‘Conflict in the Periodical Press’.

Before considering the results of the research we are publishing, perhaps it is necessary to say a few words about the ‘state of the art’ which was revealed in that context. We might even scold the organizers in Milan (which would be a kind of self-criticism, as I was the scientific coordinator for the conference) because they chose a theme that was almost too easy, too pertinent to the area of research that we now call ‘periodical studies’. If a *periodical field* actually exists — and no one would deny that — then it cannot help but be intersected by an articulated system of conflicts. Pierre Bourdieu has argued this idea, as well as Raymond Williams — though from a different perspective (with Antonio Gramsci’s school of thought peeking out from the background). Yet most of all, the academic community has adopted such a methodology mainly thanks to an amazing burgeoning of recent studies, in terms of quantity and especially quality, about the specific characteristics of periodicals. These studies have been effective in describing the weave of dynamic relationships that intersect in the periodical field. It is not within the scope of this introductory essay to sketch out a bibliographical review; it is enough to refer to the first issues of *JEPS* and to their related bibliographical notes. However, it is clear that over the past two decades what was once an empirical research sector that bowed in various ways to the needs of each discipline’s individual interests has become an arena in which — at last — the connection between a concrete, positive fact and a *theory* turns out to be feasible. It is now possible to have a ‘theoretical’ vision of periodical literature, and factual research cannot help but reap benefits from a range of indispensable methodological pre-requisites. This assumption is so appealing that, as I will attempt to do here myself, one is tempted to take the floor and make constructive proposals with a view to the current state of what is a highly lively debate.

Anyone who has the chance to even just leaf through the [abstracts](#) will notice how *conflict* can be stated in at least two seemingly opposite ways. There is the *internal* conflict of a given field, but there is also a field — or one of its sectors — that reflects an *external* conflict. As a result, on the one hand we are faced with an intellectual, confrontational activity which deals with a sectorial strategy, while on the other we are faced with a heteronomous action which ‘mirrors’ strategies other than its own. In the first case, Bourdieu’s heritage is vital, as it highlights the cultural capital of a periodical and the habitus which structures it; in the second case, the mirror effect activated by the periodicals seems to make its intra-systemic significance less clear-cut. After all, it is evident that the two dynamics are closely interrelated, and that something like a reciprocal strengthening of the issues at play should be considered as completely normal. In fact, the external and internal do support one another. And what ensues is

a kind of confusion which is utterly inevitable. We might even consider this reading as a simplification of the problem: in fact, the external and internal are but the two sides of conflicts that almost inevitably co-exist.

Gender studies provide a significant contribution to the debate. Gender issues were discussed at length during the 2017 ESPRit Conference (about a dozen papers) with different research methods. I suppose the gamut of possibilities extends between two extremes: analyses that are linguistically dominant, and those that are sociologically dominant. The identification itself of a female issue as a subject linked to periodicals implies the recognition of a heteronomy, of something existing before the periodical and conditioning it. But here we are not just dealing with a truism, because a specific focus on at least two factors can stem from this. In the first place, and unsurprisingly, attention should be focused on how the publication's editorship defines and reformulates extra-textual events. In the second place, attention should be focused on how, in a specific field, the symbolic capital of single activities starts competing with all the other activities: that is, with other periodicals, in order to achieve full authority. And the authority is certainly not just symbolic. Women's periodicals, discussing their specific topic, compete with other periodicals; at the same time, they fight a battle whose consequences (political, social, etc.) go beyond periodicals.

Perhaps it is possible to recognize these types of power relationships in each of the areas that the conference touched on. In short, we are dealing with the acknowledgment of a *twofold system of conflict*. A periodical operates as an enhancer or multiplier of the divisions circulating in a social system. It helps shape them and relaunches them *iuxta propria principia*, according to its own operational rules. The attention that is focused on what happens with, and through, language is noteworthy, also in the quantitative sense. A high number of papers (about ten) that worked with linguistic tools, and in particular with *corpus linguistics* methodologies, emphasized the intrinsically *ideological* nature of what language does; but especially of what periodicals do *with* language. To take a simple example, the word 'girl' may become the symbolic domain for a struggle, in which the original image of a young woman is deformed and frantically reformulated, bent to perform the most challenging semantic roles. The 'young woman' disappears behind a system of semantic distortions. The same can be said about the use of metaphors in the literary sphere, for words used in sports and medicine, and for the vocabulary of immigration. Linguistic expression inevitably 'divides', separates, and discriminates. Periodicals always have full responsibility in these processes.

In this sense, it should not be surprising to see a rather high number of papers (at least six) that have emphasized conflict within national traditions, triggered by domestic policy issues. After all, the internal is not always *only* internal: just think how often the threat of that thing called 'Brexit' (though initially only journalistically!) hovered overhead during this *European* Conference. *Intranational* conflict, then, takes on an additional meaning, possibly its truest meaning, if interpreted from an *international* standpoint. Inevitably, as we have already seen and will observe later, certain issues that are strictly literary, and well-consolidated at this point, come to the fore. The first of these is modernism, a subject that often implies studying how *national* traditions have dealt with aesthetic innovations. The fact that we can talk about national paths to modernism (or to the avant-garde) means that we can also state that a network of international relationships, a network of periodicals, is pre-existent or in any case accompanies the development of certain tensions and artistic concerns.

Two other macro themes that are intrinsically controversial also received an interesting reception (and it could not have been otherwise): one is 'imagology', the representation of the other, even through the practice of stereotypes; and the other is youth culture, with a specific focus on the activism of 1968. Well-known conceptual

tactics re-appear: for example, the tactic of labelling Futurism with the brand of *Italian* fascism; or the need on the part of southern and eastern nations to build an artistic identity through the cult of European literature. On this account, it is interesting to note how, at times, the strategies of periodicals combine *phobia* and *philia* — fear of others and loving others. Once again, it is part of a periodical's nature to excite passions and to abruptly overturn them. For example, Marius Warholm Haugen argued in his presentation that during the Napoleonic wars in France a sort of 'double bind' affected many English reviews about French travel books; to the extent that the French reviewers felt obliged to criticize English travellers, even by resorting to very rough stereotypes. Yet behind the prejudice an interest, an admiration, in a word the ancient *Anglophilia* can still be perceived. Although the English explorers appeared to the French journalists as unquestionably wrong, mainly because they turned out to be enemies, their ideal prestige had not been undermined.

This assumption could be claimed *a fortiori* about the publications, often *fanzines*, that emerged from youth circles in the heyday of 1968. The music publishing industry has been particularly adroit in triggering 'tribalizing' effects — sorts of conflicts within conflicts — whereby musical or literary passion enhances political passion and clarifies it, generally in a factious way, thus producing debates that turn out to be 'revolutionary' and 'specialized' at the same time. And it is curious to observe, for example, that the connection between the music of Albert Ayler, a free jazz improviser from the US, and the class struggle, became a topical affair through the mediation of Black Power (of course), in a great number of 1970s avant-garde jazz magazines throughout Europe. Nothing of this could have existed without the lure of periodicals.

If anything, a different question can be asked in a slightly provocative way, perhaps taking inspiration from what Laurel Brake has explained about the practice of 'appreciation' in Victorian journalism. In certain cases, it may be plausible that a given editorial policy encourages, in fact, the exercise of a mere, unbiased, *objective* appraisal, a sort of imperturbable, godlike indifference towards conflicts. After all, Victorian 'composure' is a kind of myth we easily subscribe to, like an obvious stereotype. Nor was it an isolated case. We will soon tackle other cases of an attempted cancellation of (endogenous or exogenous) conflicts. Hence, can a periodical also *stifle* a conflict, practicing strategies that nullify tensions?

In order to attempt to answer this question (and I am aware that the answers are actually infinite), I would like to propose an Italian example. A specimen of Italian *petite revue* (*ante litteram*, so to say) was *Il Conciliatore* — whose name means something like 'the peacemaker' or 'the reconciler'. It was published with some effort (due to political issues and censorship) in Milan between 1818 and 1819, during a period when romantic literary ideas and texts could suggest political, liberal practices. However, the official posture (certainly not the habitus) of the intellectuals who wrote for *Il Conciliatore* was one of pacification, the denial of conflict in the name of a kind of national harmony (a typical bourgeois myth, so to say). We might conclude that, paradoxically, the more struggle is denied, the more the effects of struggle emerge and actually explode. A low profile stands out against the background of historical upheavals, which condition the periodical and mark its destiny and its placement in the cultural field. In other words, the denial of conflict can have an exasperating effect.

From a theoretical point of view, leafing through the abstracts of the Sixth ESPRit Conference, it is also possible to summarize a few important critical results which may be useful to the layperson intending to approach for the first time this kind of research. To start with, it seems quite obvious that periodicals can be understood only within a network of *international* and *transnational* relationships. Even the most local perspective must consider that there is something that transcends the single periodical and provides

it with a broader meaning, beyond the language or the civilization in which the 'text' was written. If anything, we might ask if this need is only a recent methodological acquisition or, rather, a way to understand the meaning of 'periodicity' as such, as a publishing activity that is intrinsically *modern* and linked to editorial practices that perhaps have always demanded an international vision. Put in these terms, the set of problems may appear as extremely general. However, this research method does require a broadening of horizons, and this should be regarded as a positive thing, especially given the ongoing and unfortunate tendency of many scholars to fall in love a bit too much with their own subjects of study, thus overlooking the very interesting external connections.

Another issue that is not entirely settled is still one of the most important methodological proposals of periodical studies. I am referring to the conundrum of authorship, the ontological *origo* of the periodical 'text'. Who is the author? Which agency is responsible for it? How can the persistent and also inevitable personalization and individualization of writing 'for periodicals' be counterbalanced? Currently there is a broad range of alternatives to the literary way of understanding authors. On the one hand, there are more traditional approaches, which focus on the editor or rather on editorship; on the other, there are more problematic yet more interesting approaches, which emphasize collective issues and identify the author with the name of the periodical itself. It seems to me that the idea of *habitus* is becoming increasingly indispensable, in that it is the identification of a structural necessity within the periodical's system that goes beyond individual intentions and even persons.

This becomes all the more important and gains more meaning in so far as it is supported by two other approaches to research. The first one regards the codes that make up a periodical. Going beyond the current debate about what can be intended as *codes* for a periodical, it seems that an increasingly sharper awareness of the organic nature of a periodical is taking shape. We can better understand that this is a complex medium, and on a level that is radically different from where we place a printed monograph. What is obvious for a librarian has been much less so for the historian or critic. The *mise en page* in a periodical of the simplest of poems, of the most conventional article, involves a quantity of features and extra codifications that are generally inexpressible in the peaceful typographical role of what we call a 'book'. Consequently, 'citing' from a periodical should also feature, in visual terms, the material nature — in fact hardly transposable — that characterizes the source context.

The second approach to research is the one that rehashes the centre/periphery relationships in a problematic way. The very fact that scholars of modernist periodicals have started to search for modernism also in the southern part of the world suggests that approaches are changing profoundly. Yet, until recently, 'modernism' has been a blatantly Anglo/Eurocentric concept, to the extent that the term itself, translated into Italian as 'modernismo', still sounds like an (undoubtedly useful) Anglicism to an old Italian professor like me. I should say that post-colonial studies have helped us greatly to correct our current perspectives, even though we still anchor our identity within a programmatically *European* dislocation.

Even more radically, the methodologies that are gaining ground entail a healthy marginalization of literature, of its specificity. If codes and media effects are differential elements, the subservience of literature actually appears to be inevitable. Literary problems are but an epiphenomenon within the periodical field. Yet, the effects in meaning-making processes can be quite interesting. Even within a purely literary perspective, these consequences should allow us to acquire more awareness of the external boundaries — barriers in some cases — between specific sectors, or specialisms, and put them in touch with something larger and more consolidated. A broader scope should

allow us to perceive more effectively some of our critical automatisms, and scale down some of our fetishizations (for instance, by rethinking our emphasis on small periodicals).

And yet a doubt — or, rather, a perplexity — remains. Even though a few studies on the post-typographical age exist, it does not seem to me that there is a sufficiently strong focus on the digital world. Some useful research could have been presented, for instance, dealing with a topic like ‘conflicts’ with reference to *webzines* and the like. However, this did not happen. Still, the struggle for an increase in cultural capital is carried out in a much harsher and more savage way in the web as compared to the relatively ‘peaceful’ ways characterizing the domain of the press. When a periodical contaminates itself with the modes of social media communication, the meaning effects can be ferocious, and the debate can become barbarous. Perhaps new theoretical formulations, not just with reference to the codes (in this case digital codes), should be elaborated.

The four papers published here reflect rather well many of the issues I have attempted to present in brief. Certainly, the connection to modernism/avant-garde and a persistent literary-centered attitude are still evident. Significantly, three out of the four papers deal with the same period (1914–20), a decisive one for literary criticism. At the same time, in a few cases several corrections to the more usual conflictual paradigm emerge, providing us with cues for a theoretical reflection.

The essay by Anna Baldini, ‘Allies and Enemies: Periodicals as Instruments of Conflict in the Florentine Avant-garde (1903–15)’, interprets the events of the glorious Italian and Florentine magazine *La Voce* in strictly avant-garde terms. The magazine’s relationships of affinity and contrast are explored, especially with regard to *Lacerba* (also published in Florence), which initially aspired to be a backer of Marinetti’s futurism. Baldini applies Bourdieu’s categories in a very strict manner; for an Italian reader this is an important achievement, one which goes beyond individual drives and even depersonalizes the questions at play suggesting a kind of systematic necessity. One doubt does arise, however, because though much is gained in theory, perhaps a little is also lost in terms of historical insight. Baldini herself shares this observation when she stresses that according to Bourdieu the ‘avant-garde is a structural rather than historiographical concept’, and that therefore everything we observe in the sphere of the history of movements and ideas is nothing more than the manifestation of a more general, almost metahistorical principle. Personally, I find this statement interesting though somewhat worrying: I am not sure whether it would be desirable that future research, relying on a given method, can warp history to prove the assumptions of a heuristic device defined once and for all.

The contiguity with Thomas Mohr’s essay ‘Irish Law Periodicals and the Emergence of the Irish State, 1916–22’, allows us to perfectly grasp the contrast at hand. Mohr follows the *historical* phases of the Irish emancipation closely, from the 1916 Easter Rising up until the start of the civil war, and he looks for reflections of that public event in an institutional law journal, the *Irish Law Times*. The result is a kind of silence, though it is documented in detail. War outside corresponds to peace inside; more precisely, to the cancellation of war. Apparently, the non-conflict makes sense in the background of the great history that it does (not) come to terms with. Above and beyond this specific case (which had almost comic consequences, once the same journal appeared to be almost too prone to the measures of the newborn Irish state), one asks what might be the theoretical considerations of a similar damper-effect. However, as already remarked, zero-conflict can be nothing more than conflict with a vengeance. We shall return to this shortly.

Before reaching a conclusion, we need to examine the essay by Eszter Balázs, ‘*MA* and the Rupture of the Avant-Garde 1917–18: Reconstructing Aesthetic and Political

Conflict in Hungary and the Role of Periodical Culture'. A 'traditional', historical vision and methodology emerges here as well, as the author aims to reconstruct the 'truth of the matter' that had been deformed by ideological interpretations of the communist regime. The argument revolves around the activity of Lajos Kassák, a crucial protagonist of Hungarian avant-garde periodicals. He had been the founder both of *ATett* [*The Action*], an avant-garde and pacifist review which was published between 1915 and 1916, and of the (exclusively) literary periodical *MA* [*Today*], which was published between 1916 and 1925. The existence of a 'secession' of intellectuals who later became distinguished members of the Communist Party had created a one-directional, historiographical vulgate, intended to discredit Kassák. Balázs works against this interpretation, so that the originality of Kassák's position would receive its due credit.

The Italian writer and editor Elio Vittorini seems to place himself at the almost opposite position, although at this point the context itself has completely changed. In the early Sixties Vittorini attempted, without luck, to create an international journal called *Gulliver*. This intellectual parable is discussed in Silvia Cavalli's study, 'An International "Non-revue": Cultural Conflict and the Failure of *Gulliver* (1964)'. The title clarifies the point that I have touched upon many times: Vittorini's intentions were to aim for a journal that could subdue conflicts; and yet the conflicts hindered the journal's growth. On closer inspection, the contradictions at play made this failure almost inevitable. The journal's group of collaborators included, on one side, German intellectuals who wished to deal with the *Endlösung*, the 'infamous' legacy of the Second World War; on the other side, French collaborators who had to face the aftermath of the Algerian war. But the *écriture* of the latter, in accordance with the style of neo-avant-garde, did not permit any constructive discussion or conventional debate. Instead, Elio Vittorini's ideal was diametrically opposed: for him, a journal must affirm positive, humanistic values and all the tensions dominating the intellectual field must be excluded. Yet, this view was bound to fail in the Sixties. Too many radical movements were appearing in those years, and the idea of a 'peaceful' periodical was becoming impossible, at least in the literary domain. In short: in a similar context, the denial of conflict could not help but exasperate the *internal* tensions of a single periodical, and thus provoke its stagnancy, and then death.

Far from reversing theory, these episodes stress the importance of measuring periodical activity against some kind of systematic yardstick. It is a curious endeavour, that of the periodical scholar: her attention to detail and even to trivialities might constitute a temptation that distracts attention away from context, away from a consideration of the exact structure of the field. But I dare say that the passion for particularities is the most invaluable virtue of this kind of research, of this kind of researcher. From a theoretical perspective, such passion and diligence must be considered as a way to test, even to provoke, our capacity to check the borders of theory. The *parole plurielle* speaking in periodicals is a challenge we must accept, no matter how daunting and confusing the task. Listening to Babel is necessary. It is difficult, almost impossible, but — surely — there is no other way.