

CfP “Margins of Modernity: Networks, Transfers and Mediators”

Date: 4-5 June, 2026

Place: ULB, Brussels

This interdisciplinary workshop focuses on **marginalized figures**, **peripheral genres**, and **overlooked pathways** that shaped **modernist culture** across artistic, literary, and intellectual domains. It is organized by Elizaveta Berquin, Eve Filée, and Sybil Raysz (MODERNITAS, ULB) within the framework of the ARC project “**The Artist, The Scientist, and The Industrialist**” (2022–2027).

Call For Papers

At the turn of the twentieth century, European modernity was both a disruptive and creative force: it nourished artistic experimentation, scientific innovation, political upheaval, and social transformations. While the notion of “modernity” is largely domain-dependent (McEvoy, 2007), its cross-disciplinary nature offers an opportunity to explore multiple (trans)national and regional narratives across artistic, scientific, technological, social, ideological, philosophical and economic fields.

As modernity can take on many forms, this workshop draws on Piotr Piotrowski's concept of *horizontal art history* to challenge the dominant narratives that generally prevail in recent studies (Jakubowska & Radomska, 2022). Rather than viewing modernity through a single, linear lens, we propose to shed light on 'secondary' occurrences of modernity that emerged in dialogue, tension or resistance with canonical centres. The margins of modernity are understood not only as geographical "peripheries" but as zones of creative tension between disciplines, genders, politics, science, visual arts, and literature. This multidisciplinary is also reflected in the methodology, which seeks renewal, in both theory and practice, from archival research for network (re)construction to digital humanities approaches, such as network and data analysis.

First, we intend to question geographical marginality by shifting attention away from the dominant centers and highlighting the cultural production of non-dominant, "semi-peripheral" contexts, which often display understudied national and especially regional specificities (Casanova, 1999; Ram, 2014). The cultural and linguistic tensions that these territories often

present, as for the Belgian and Czech context to cite only two of special interest to us, prevent traditional national-focused studies and favor transnational and comparative analyses. We will highlight these elements of cultural mediation and these processes of transfer by looking at networks of intellectuals, concepts of emigration, cultural exchanges, and the intertextuality inherent to this moving modernity.

Our second axis of interest is the social marginality of individuals remaining in the shadows despite their roles as mediators of modernity. These include translators, editors, critics, journalists, educators, but also women actors who often remain excluded from these narratives, regardless of the extent of their role in the diffusion, transformation and reception of modernist thought and aesthetics. We invite proposals that foreground these figures and their social networks.

Lastly, the workshop aims at casting light on disciplinary and cultural marginality by considering overlooked or ‘minor’ forms and genres that operate outside the traditional boundaries of socially praised art and literature, such as science-fiction, children’s literature, applied arts, illustrations, periodical culture, exhibitions, and other hybrid or interdisciplinary practices. The workshop seeks to reassess these genres not as genres of lesser importance but as sites of experimentation and innovation within modernities.

Therefore, through the concept of *margins*, *interspaces*, *marginality*, etc (Habaj & Hučková, 2024). the workshop aims to question the relevance of literary and artistic canon in order to revalorize regions, figures and genres whose contributions sustained and enriched modernist culture, yet are often relegated to the footnotes of its history. Uncovering such narratives will allow us to broaden our understanding of modernity, and to think of it not as a homogeneous entity but as a multiplicity of conflicting and symbiotic relationships.

We are therefore interested in case studies of marginal trajectories of modernity in Eastern and Central Europe in dialogue and exchange between each other and other Western cultures, especially the ones facing the same challenges of semi-peripherality, being outside of the so-called centers.

Submission Guidelines

We invite abstracts (200–300 words) in French or English for 20-minute presentations. Proposals should be sent by **15 January 2026** to modernitas@ulb.be.

We welcome contributions that address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Theoretical and methodological reflections on the concept of “modernity”
- Centre-periphery dynamics and the role of regionalism, linguistic diversity, and political fragmentation in shaping modernities
- The role of institutions and non-human actors as cultural mediators

- Challenges to the modernist hierarchy of genres, including the highbrow–middlebrow–lowbrow distinction
- Cultural transfer across languages, regions, and disciplines, including the circulation of texts, artworks, and ideas
- Mobility, migration, and exile as drivers of cultural exchange
- Contributions of female figures to modernity construction
- Translation and multilingualism as modernity-building processes
- Digital and data-driven approaches to modernist studies

Scientific Committee

Patrick Flack, Tomáš Glanc, Libuše Heczková, Dennis Ioffe, Petra James, Martina Mecco, Barbora Svobodová

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