Workshop: The Political Novel in Europe and the Challenges of the Digital Era

16ᵗʰ and 17ᵗʰ of January 2025 (ZfL, Berlin)

Call for Papers

In her epistolary novel *La Toile* (2017), Sandra Lucbert compares literary language to digital language as two contrasting and clashing constraints: the technological, economic, and political constraint imposed by platforms designed to capture attention and profit off of it; and the constraint of the novel, an often reflexive form rooted in a centuries-old past that pursues a work of symbolisation and distance. Or, in the words of the author: "A regime of *presentation* clashes with a regime of *representation*." This novel, driven by the hope that the ensuing hiatus will enable/allow us to detach ourselves from our practices, is part of an increasingly rich literature that reflects on the vast and multiple issues raised by digital tools from a *political* perspective.

Our workshop aims to explore the literary and political challenges the digital age poses for the genre of the novel. In her essay *Digital Modernism. Making It New in New Media* (2014), Jessica Pressman defines "modernism" as "a strategy of innovation that employs the media of its time to reform and refashion older literary practices in ways that produce new art." (4) What she calls "Digital Modernism" transposes this logic to current practices and issues: "Digital Modernism […] allows us to reconsider how and why media is (and always has been) a central aspect of experimental literature and the strategy of making it new." (5) Our workshop tries to link these formal considerations to more explicitly political issues.

Without a doubt, the digital age is having a profound impact on all aspects of the literary process. It opens up a new context that redefines creative processes, reading practices, distribution methods, and critical reception. Especially the interpersonal relationships

involved in its production steps (between authors, publishers, agents, critics, readers, etc.) are being turned upside down by digital technologies: the literary gesture is spread across different platforms, the book is detached from its physical medium, the author may disappear in the face of the possibilities offered by automatic generation (artificial intelligence), and editorial hierarchies and mediations are questioned. Digital issues and practices affect fundamental notions of literary studies. But how are these changes reflected in the novel itself? How has this new context redefined relations with the political sphere (if at all)? What kind of political novel is possible in the digital age?

The workshop will focus on three main topics:

1. How do digital technologies redefine the links between the novel and the political sphere?

- Do they displace the dependency of the political sphere on the economic sphere?

  We know that most of these technologies are owned by private companies: what is at stake regarding these ownership situations?

- What opportunities do (or don't) they offer to, for example, resist or bypass censorship?

- How does the digital sphere interact with the physical space of states, institutions, and geopolitical zones? And how are these interactions reflected in literary writing in general and in the political novel in particular?

2. To what extent and in what concrete ways is widespread digitisation having an impact on the ways in which literature is created and read?:

- Collective creation, encouraged by a writer or solicited by a community of fans versus the myth of the genius creator. Should we address democratisation in this context?

- To what extent is artificial intelligence redefining the notion of the author—and that of the reader?

- What are the linguistic implications of digital technologies for novel writing? Is it possible to conceive of an algorithmic political novel?

- Widespread digitisation is redefining the subject matter of literary studies: for example, is a writer's blog part of their work? Does a work published by a publishing house remain relevant and, if so, in what ways?

- How are editorial hierarchies renegotiated through digital publishing practices? Do these renegotiations question the established division between centres and peripheries?

- What (new?) communities do these digital technologies facilitate?

3. How does the political novel of the 20th and 21st centuries represent and question digital issues? We not only consider novels written at the advent of digital technologies: many of the new possibilities that came with the most recent tools had already been foreseen or called for by writers who wanted to break with narrative linearity and the book format (i.e., Borges).

- Conspiracy theory, paranoia, propaganda: what place does the political novel assign to the linguistic and narrative manipulations that proliferate on social networks and other platforms?

- Does the political novel allow for a potential subversion of the disinformation on social networks?

- How does the PN deal with digital piracy, both thematically and practically?

- What can we learn from political novels regarding the political challenges posed by digital technologies? To what extent can the political novel help us reflect and deal with these issues?

Submission Instructions

This workshop is part of the European Union-sponsored Horizon Europe-project "The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe." It is organised by the ZfL Berlin in cooperation with the University of Nicosia.

https://www.zfl-berlin.org/project/the-cartography-of-the-political-novel-in-europe.html

It will take place on January 16th and 17th 2025 at the Leibniz Centre for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin **as a hybrid event**. Since we are unable to cover travel and accommodation expenses, the facilities at the ZfL offer a stable and reliable way to participate online if you are unable to attend in person.

We are looking forward to short input presentations (no longer than 10 minutes) based on pre-circulated papers that consider and engage with the proposed topic from theoretical or

methodological angles and perspectives, through analyses of novels or studies of literary fields. Each presentation will be followed by a response, leaving plenty of room for discussion.

Please send your abstracts of approximately 300 words and a short bio-bibliographical note to the following addresses: artemis.r@unic.ac.cy; caponeu@zfl-berlin.org. The deadline is **September 15th 2024**.

Applicants will be informed of the decision in October 2024.

Full papers should be sent no later than December 10th 2024.

We plan to publish the input presentations as working papers on the CAPONEU website (www.caponeu.eu). Workshop participants will also be invited to submit individual text portraits, i.e. short presentations of one political novel each that illustrate a selected problem of the workshop. In this way, participants will make an important contribution to the Map of the Political Novels in Europe, a digital repository compiled by the CAPONEU Consortium.