

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISMS IN PORTUGUESE

KRISTA BRUNE

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

TANIA MARTUSCELLI

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER

The past decade has marked a critical moment in the rethinking of modernisms in Portuguese as key anniversaries have invited scholars and artists to reconsider the histories and the ongoing legacies of these avant-garde movements. In 2015, publications, conferences, and exhibitions celebrated the centennial of the short-lived literary magazine *Orpheu* with nuanced readings of its historical context, the aesthetic and poetic experiments of its contributors, and its lasting impact.¹ More recently, the centenaries of the 1922 Week of Modern Art in São Paulo and the 1924 publication of Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto of *Pau-Brasil*/Poetry” have sparked scholarly and artistic reflections on the meanings and legacies of Brazilian modernism.² These reevaluations confirm what Portuguese poet and critic Fernando Guimarães elucidates as the intrinsic connection between the avant-gardes and the overarching paradigm of modernism. Within the rich tapestry of the Portuguese language, seminal avant-garde movements—such as Brazilian and Portuguese modernisms, the Cabo Verdean *Claridade*, the Angolan *Mensagem*, and the Mozambican *Msabo*—were pivotal in shaping the artistic and literary landscape during the twentieth century. Moreover, the unprecedented works by Fernando Pessoa, Oswald de Andrade’s *Pau-Brasil* and *antropófago* manifestos, and Patrícia Galvão’s multi-artistic experiments

¹ See the volumes edited by Dix and Dix and Pizarro for examples of this renewed scholarship on *Orpheu* and Portuguese modernism more generally.

² See Cardoso, Fischer, and Sterzi for thoughtful studies of the legacy of the 1922 Week of Modern Art, the repercussions of modernism, and expressions of *antropofagia* in Brazilian culture. For multiple perspectives on Brazilian modernisms, see the volume edited by Andrade. Efforts to reexamine Brazilian modernism resulted in the series *1922: Modernismos em Debate* at the São Paulo Pinacoteca, the Instituto Moreira Salles, and the MAC-USP; dialogues at Itaú Cultural; and exhibitions including *Modernismo expandido* at the Museu Nacional da República, *Semana de arte mundana* at the Galeria Kogan Amaro, and *Brasilidade pós-modernismo* at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil. See Paiva 169-84 for more on the reappropriation of the 1922 event from a decolonial lens. In the artistic realm, *ReAntropofagia*, which Denilson Baniwa and Pedro Gradella curated at the Centro de Arte of the Universidade Federal Fluminense in 2019, featured Indigenous reinterpretations of the modernist concept of *antropofagia*. See Esbell’s “Makunaima, o meu avô em mim!” and Baniwa’s “ReAntropofagia” for examples of Indigenous engagement with canonical modernist texts.

exemplify the distinctiveness inherent in modernist discourses emanating from Portuguese-speaking writers and artists.

However, in discussions of Global Modernisms, a limited number of these expressions and movements in Portuguese receive attention. For instance, *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, published in 2012, does not include a single chapter dedicated to modernisms in Portuguese. *Modernism/modernity*, the journal of the Modernist Studies Association, has addressed Portuguese-language modernisms with articles on Dada in Portugal, Pessoa's poetry, *antropofagia* and Brazilian literary modernism, avant-garde theater in Brazil, Blaise Cendrars's Brazilian travels and writings, and Brazilian Oscar Niemeyer's architecture. These topics represent only a sliver of the diverse range of modernisms in Portuguese; in particular, contemporary interpretations and rewritings from Indigenous perspectives as well as literary and artistic manifestations from Lusophone Africa remain overlooked. Recent translations and re-translations into English of essential modernist texts—including Mário de Andrade's novel *Macunaíma: The Hero with No Character* and travelogue *The Apprentice Tourist*, and Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*—have introduced innovative works of Luso-Afro-Brazilian modernisms to Anglo-American readers and, in the process, generated discussions about how works in Portuguese contribute to Global Modernisms.

These conversations extend to galleries and museums where artists from the Lusophone context have become more recognized within global art circuits. For example, retrospective exhibits on Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral have appeared at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the MASP in São Paulo, and the Musée du Luxembourg.³ Moreover, recent biennials in São Paulo and Venice have emphasized how Indigenous and Afro-descendant artists based in—or working between—Brazil, Portugal, Angola, and Cabo Verde respond to earlier avant-gardes. Similarly, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon is hosting the exhibit “Complexo Brasil,” which examines multiple facets of Brazil's cultural history—from colonization to deforestation, from modernism to contemporary Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous artistic practices.⁴ More than emphasizing Brazilian culture, the display of postcolonial, decolonial and anti-colonial art in Portugal is another example of the relevance of thinking

³ The exhibit “Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Brazil” was on display at the Art Institute of Chicago from October 2017 to January 2018 and at the MoMA from February to June 2018. A similar exhibit, “Tarsila Popular,” was featured at the MASP from April to July 2019. More recently, the Musée du Luxembourg displayed Tarsila's works in the exhibit “Peindre le Brésil moderne” from October 2024 to February 2025.

⁴ “Complexo Brasil” is on display at Calouste Gulbenkian Museum from November 14, 2025 to February 17, 2026.

“Modernisms in Portuguese” as a critical framework for understanding the transnational, multilingual, and historically layered dynamics of Lusophone artistic production. By rewriting and reappropriating Indigenous and African myths and stories, contemporary artists like Jaider Esbell and Jota Mombaça offer innovative ways to contest Eurocentric visions and imagine other worlds, as Pedro Daher and Kaimé Guerrero Valencia illuminate in their articles for this issue.

In light of this vibrant heritage of Luso-Afro-Brazilian modernisms, this special dossier offers a scholarly assessment of the multifaceted dimensions of modernist literature and art across Portuguese-speaking territories. The contributors’ pieces explore themes of indigeneity, transatlantic dialogues, multi-arts expressions, national identity, decolonial gestures, and trans perspectives to reinvigorate our reflections on the multiplicity of modernisms in Portuguese and their ongoing reverberations in literary and artistic works today. Within these interdisciplinary approaches that offer a new critical outlook on Portuguese-language modernisms, with a few celebrated names and their well-known literary works, as well as other figures who need more attention.

The dossier opens with two essays that focus on Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa and his 1934 seminal poem *Mensagem*. The study of Idalina Maia Sidoncha and Urbano Mestre Sidoncha examines the themes of prophetism and *saudade*, advancing the notion of a cultural—indeed, potentially spiritual—reconstitution of Portugal. In what may be understood as an occultist interpretation, consistent with Pessoa’s own esoteric interests, the authors suggest reading the section “The Warnings (The Prophecies)” (as titled in Martin Earl’s translation) as Pessoa’s deliberate construction of Portuguese historical figures as divine messengers—namely Bandarra, Vieira, and, ultimately, Pessoa himself. Furthermore, they argue that the book’s tripartite structure, with its internal subdivisions, mirrors a Christian trinitarian framework (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), thereby linking the poem’s architecture to Portugal’s own spiritual destiny. Meanwhile, in her analysis of *Mensagem*, Andreia Miriam Fernandes concentrates on the book’s mythic dimension, arguing that Pessoa’s work dismantles a commonly distorted patriotic vision by recasting national identity through a framework of mythical salvation. Fernandes also situates *Mensagem* within the context of Portuguese modernism and contends that its tripartite structure reflects Pessoa’s heteronymic ingenuity.

Brazilian polemic writer and self-proclaimed *antropofagista* Oswald de Andrade and Brazilian writer and musicologist Mário de Andrade appear in two articles that offer a contemporary analysis of the place and space occupied by the modernists. Jean Carlos Colombo

posits a comparative reading of sixteenth-century travelogues of German Hans Staden and Oswald de Andrade's concept of *antropofagia* through a decolonial lens. Whereas Colombo frames Brazilian modernists as appropriating what European travelers had observed and documented, Pedro Daher focuses on contemporary Indigenous reappropriations of modernist characters. By analyzing how Makuxi artist Jaider Esbell activates Makunaimê as a thinker, subject, and being who is inside of all of us, Daher invites us to think with Indigenous artists rather than accessing their cosmologies and stories via modernist mediations. Another key figure of Brazilian modernism of the 1920s and 1930s receives renewed critical attention in Ícaro Carvalho's article. Carvalho turns his attention to avant-garde writer and artist Patrícia Galvão, who was better known as Pagu. Through close readings of her comic strips appearing in the short-lived 1931 newspaper *O Homem do Povo*, Carvalho argues that Pagu was a pioneer for using this intermedial genre in Brazil to focus on women's experiences while offering broader critiques of bourgeois Brazilian society.

The final two articles in this dossier concentrate on writers less studied within the framework of modernisms but deserving of more attention: mid-twentieth-century Angolan writer Ernesto Lara Filho and contemporary Brazilian trans artist and theorist Jota Mombaça. In her study of Lara Filho's *crônicas*, Regina Castro McGowan identifies influences from Brazilian modernists and intellectuals in the work of the Angolan writer in the 1960s. The analysis of the *crônicas* centers on how this hybrid genre balances aesthetic concerns with ideological positions about the construct of race and Angolan national identity in dialogue with Gilberto Freyre's Lusotropical argument. Finally, Kaimé Guerrero Valencia proposes an insightful reading of Mombaça's writings and visual art that engages with the legacies of Brazilian modernism and the experience of creating as a trans person from a perspective outside of the nation. More specifically, Valencia's article focuses on the intervention processes mobilized in the Black trans world as *embodied* (as in body and word) in the book *Não vão nos matar agora* (2019). Their work proposes a rethinking of ontology, epistemology, art, literature, and politics, mapping the transitions within these practices and identifying the processes that contribute to racist, cis-heterosexual, and colonial world production.

Together these articles invite us to consider the continued relevance of modernist poetry and prose in Portuguese. Despite being published nearly a century ago, texts like the "Manifesto Antropófago," *Macunaíma*, and *Mensagem* still circulate widely and generate critical reflections and creative engagements, as the articles in this dossier illustrate. The early-twentieth-century

modernisms in Portugal and Brazil were influential in subsequent Portuguese-language literary and artistic developments, especially in the African context as Castro McGowan's study of Ernesto Lara Filho's *crônicas* exemplifies. Modernism remains a touchstone for many contemporary artists and scholars as they reinterpret its legacies, question the coloniality of its expressions, and offer their own interventions into the critical histories and aesthetic practices of the avant-garde.

Works Cited

- Andrade, Mário de. *Macunaíma: The Hero with No Character*. Translated by Katrina Dodson, New Directions, 2023.
- . *The Apprentice Tourist*. Translated by Flora Thomson-DeVeaux, Penguin, 2023.
- Andrade, Gênese, editor. *Modernismos 1922-2022*. Companhia das Letras, 2022.
- Baniwa, Denilson. “ReAntropofagia.” *Concinnitas*, vol. 23, no. 44, May 2022, pp. 32-34. <https://doi.org/10.12957/concinnitas.2022.71520>
- Cardoso, Rafael. *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890-1945*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- Dix, Steffen, editor. *1915: O ano do Orpheu*. Tinta da China, 2015.
- Dix, Steffen, and Jerónimo Pizarro, editors. *Portuguese Modernisms: Multiple Perspectives in Literature and the Arts*. Routledge, 2017.
- Esbell, Jaider. “Makunaima, o meu avô em mim!” *Illuminuras*, vol. 19, no. 46, 2018, pp. 11-39.
- Fischer, Luís Agosto. *A ideologia modernista: a Semana de 22 e sua consagração*. Todavia, 2022.
- Guimarães, Fernando. *Poética do Modernismo. Entre a modernidade e a pós-modernidade*. Afrontamento, 2022.
- Jackson, K. David. “Three Glad Races: Primitivism and Ethnicity in Brazilian Modernist Literature.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1994, pp. 89-112.
- Martuscelli, Tania. “Between Modernism and Surrealism: Dada in Portugal.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2012, pp. 277-86.
- Maunsell, Jerome Boyd. “The Hauntings of Fernando Pessoa.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 115-37.
- Pessoa, Fernando. *Message*. Translated by Martin Earl; introduced and annotated by António Apolinário Lourenço. Shantarin, 2023.
- . *The Book of Disquiet: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa and edited by Jerónimo Pizarro, New Directions, 2017.
- Read, Justin. “Alternative Functions: Oscar Niemeyer and the Poetics of Modernity.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2005, pp. 253-72.
- Sterzi, Eduardo. *Saudades do mundo: notícias da antropofagia*. Todavia, 2022.
- Townsend, Sarah J. “Total Theater and the Missing Pieces of the Brazilian Avant-Garde.” *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2009, pp. 329-55.
- Wollaeger, Mark, and Matt Eatough, editors. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*. Oxford UP, 2012.