

# Foreword

## The Architecture of Inquiry: A Proposal

**T**HERE WERE times when the studies on alternative modernism(s) seemed as though they would never stop being a process and become, instead, a result. For the papers delivered in this collection stemmed from the boiling research activity of the academics at Babeş-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca Romania, those who are tied to the 20th century changes of paradigm in humanities with their teaching and research and are interested in the major aesthetic movements of the past century, fundamentally rooted in the world of our modernity. Early on, researchers showed their immense potential in local/ national publications and abroad. However, the complex historical, cultural and theoretical operations that are required to generate and comprehend even the most minimal aspects of modernism(s), in the increasing globalized world, requested for new forms of expression. Therefore, a new platform of the European Centre for Modernism(s) Studies (CEMS) has been created, under the auspices of the European academics project, instituted by Perugia University. The authors of these papers are co-founders, joining the CEMS network in 2014 and their contribution in this volume is somehow dedicated to the first World Conference of CEMS (Perugia, December, 2016). Broadly, the papers we are presenting to the reader are written in accordance with the aims of CEMS to engage a wide international network of researchers and scholars of Modernism(s) and contemporary literary and artistic phenomena that can be said to carry on the heritage of Modernism, but these collected papers attempt to reshape western, central and eastern European Modernism studies against the global studies, challenging and supplementing mainstream accounts and narratives of Modernism and working towards an even more context-specific contouring of *modernisms* in their specificity and uniqueness.

The participants shared the scope and aim of the present volume's theme, as it was suggested to us in its first pronouncement, which was framed out as a premise by a major conference on international modernisms ("Alternative Modernisms," Cardiff University, May 2013). We have all shared the vision that modernisms can be viewed as part of *a network of alternatives*—to tradition, realism, representation, mass culture or even to each other. Similarly, we have traced the very same idea haunting intelligent minds in the latest versions of historical and theoretical approaches to Modernism in the European

and Anglo-American scholarly background as in the recently published books about the theme. We have also accepted that the turning of modernism studies into Modernism(s) Studies requires complex cognitive operations and that, apart from the synergistic relation with such changes in research intelligence, modernism studies remain a vital, self-renewing area of research because of its potential for highlighting in more and more refined ways the interpretive skills required to tell and make sense of human time and how it was given clear and obvious forms throughout centuries. Modernism(s)—irrespective of the term employed to name them—is/are such forms. We have written these papers in the hope of contributing to the same ongoing effort: the effort to identify new (unrecognizable) details, the effort to characterize, in even more precise ways, what modernism was/is and how people go about understanding it today, at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In its second voicing, the theme of this collection of papers appeared as conveyed in the content of the outstanding project of the proposed scientific journal of CEMS, the contribution of the academics of Cluj-Napoca Babeş-Bolyai University to the CEMS platform organization. We partially owe the theme to those who authored the journal proposal, our colleagues Dr. Erika Mihálycsa (the Department of English) and Dr. Szabó T. Levente (the Department of Hungarian Literature) from the Faculty of Letters at Babeş-Bolyai University, also members of the CEMS network of Cluj-Napoca. We relied on their enthusiasm and friendship and decided to let ourselves be inspired by the content of their project. Besides, we were tempted to consider the major topics of Modernism(s) debate and we wished this collection of papers to embed an important transversal forum of interdisciplinary approach on the expanding field of “modernisms studies” (vs. Modernism studies), favouring a comparative (inter- and transnational) approach, while also concentrating on peripheral or even paradoxical, literary and cultural phenomena connected to Modernism: its history, canonization, aesthetization, ethicalization and theorization, with several other perspectives envisaged by the necessity to renew, revise, or create discourses, theories and approaches which are meant to do justice to it.

Ideally not only literary historians but also experts in frontiers of narrative, not only literary critics, but also world literature scholars and, not only literary theorists, but also story recipients with ethical concerns, whether readers or interpreters, who interpret fiction and the diverse narratives by reconstructing the mental representations that have (in turn) guided the writers’ production, will view the studies gathered in this collection as a *forum* in which to present and debate their findings. This amounts to claiming, rather unspectacularly, that analysts of any aesthetic literary program try to understand, first, the narrative, be it written or visual, by figuring out what particular interpretation of circumstances, actions, and events informs the design of a context (story) and how, in actual fact, a number of extremely complicated issues are concealed and revealed within its surface simplicity. It would be hard to dispute which of the papers have had a major impact. This is for the future to decide. Their wide range of topics is testimony to the participants’ enthusiasm and knowledge. From the historicized version of Modernism(s) chronologies that are tailored to Anglo-American literary modernism (Erika Mihálycsa) to the complicated issue of terminology roots (Rareş Moldovan),

from the inception of modernism literary canonization (Sanda Berce) and the fundamental European contribution to the Modernist canon construction by an (apparently local and yet cosmopolitan) Irish author like James Joyce (Elena Păcurar), many authors of the volume's papers decided to explore how human beings draw on fiction (and narrative altogether) as one of the primary resources for structuring and comprehending their experience, no matter the historical age. Furthermore, the collection of papers offers a brilliant analysis of the utopia's avatars in modernity (Corin Braga), an illuminating perspective on ways of facing totalitarian regimes as considered in the literature of communist Romania and as individually experienced in a post-traumatic version by a German born in communist Romania (Ruxandra Cesereanu and her paper about the Nobel Prize winner, Herta Müller), the subtle slide of the post-Gothic into the Irish contemporary postmodernist novelistic regime (Carmen Borbély), the outstanding analysis of the role and function played by the special issue *Cahiers du Sud*, published in Marseilles, in disseminating the artistic production of the apparently marginal central and Eastern Surrealists—the Romanian, Hungarian and Czech writers (Balázs Imre József) and the renewed ethical concerns of both the reader and the writer as reconsidered in the first person narrative transmission of Ford Madox Ford's English Modernism, a topic that has lately introduced shifts of focus in the investigation of the idea of “story-worlds” in all “forms” of modernism(s) (Petronia Popa Petrar).

However, for better and for worse, the only measure for success will be the degree to which the Romanian academic human resource, of the CEMS co-founder members at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, may contribute to a larger, ongoing process of research in this renascent field of contemporaneity and into an increasing globalized world. The papers we are presenting to the readers will probably display the diverse and valued academic research potential. Exceptionally, they are designed to provide an interdisciplinary context for the study of modernism understood either as a historical event or as creative adaptation to cultural and geographic circumstances and, similarly, new productive re-visitations, beyond the traditional chronology, under the umbrella of a set of textual practices. They are what they were really meant to be, an *examination*, *inspection* and *exploration* of a range of practices and of their respective cultural geographies, rather than an investigation of a temporally neat construction of an aesthetic program, within and without a network of alternative modernisms.



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