

**2ND CALL FOR PAPERS: *TEMPORALITIES OF MODERNISM*
THE 2ND CEMS CONFERENCE
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA
2-4 MAY 2018**

We are not only “the last men of an epoch” (...): we are more than that, or we are that in a different way to what is most often asserted. We are the first men of a future that has not materialized. We belong to a “great age” that has not “come off.”

(Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 1937)

There is little doubt that modernism emerges as first and foremost a temporal concept: not only because it has been most often defined in terms of periodisation (Friedman, 2006), or because it unabashedly styles itself as the product(s) of the time(s), but also because it takes time as the central category of experience, an essential cognitive tool, and as the

paramount structuring device underlying its ideological and aesthetic programmes. Modernism self-consciously shaped itself as both an event in time – most often under the guise of rupture or revolution – and as a comment on time. It relies on the valorisation of the *now*, always accompanied by the awareness of the insubstantiality of the present as a foundational mode for consciousness. Its paradoxical temporalities are revealed in the permanent conflict it stages between the past and the present, or between the competing images of a future that is at once promissory and apocalyptic. Such antinomic temporality reflects the contradictions of “a modernity that is



by definition never contemporaneous with itself, since it constantly projects, anticipates and returns to mythical origins, but that also teaches us more about the ‘present’, which it historicizes” (Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Ghosts of Modernity*, 1992, 3). Its conflictual temporality reflects major shifts in cultural geopolitics whose impact resulted in a diverse cultural geography creating central categories of experience and cognitive tools through aesthetic programmes, as the case of “marginal(ized)” literatures such as those of Central and Eastern Europe proves. Therefore, the modernist sense of time continues to offer fresh ground

for reflection and constant sources for understanding ourselves, even after almost a century has passed since its heyday.

The fragment in the motto, extracted from the autobiography of one of the founding figures of British modernist art, captures an essential contradiction lying at the heart of the modernist creative impetus: a baffling sense of living through a time that feels both apocalyptic and inaugural, of refashioning the tradition of a heroic past into the explosive figure of a revolutionary avant-garde bent on erasing that past in order to install a brave new reality whose defining feature may well be its impossibility. Lewis' self-description does not seem far from Walter Benjamin's image of the "angel of history," facing both past and future but caught in the maelstrom of a catastrophic present from which there is no escape. Benjamin's angel and Lewis' men (simultaneously "last" and "first") illustrate a conflictual ethos whose central trope is constant renewal, endless creation that hopelessly "shores fragments" against the ruins of progress, and that revitalises the energies of psyche in response to the homogenisation and disintegration produced by life in the modern metropolis. Messianism is doubled by the terrors of degeneration in modernist thought, and the resulting tensions gave rise to the fascinating energies of its poetics. The rapid changes occurring in the world at the turn of the twentieth-century – including the introduction of standard time, the advent of mass media, the invention of technologies that did away with distance, or the calamitous disruption of the war – had produced a particular version of the "time-mind" (a term borrowed from the editor of the recently published *Cambridge History of Modernism*) as "the establishing circumstance of the sensibility" of the age (Sherry, 2016, 28). As Ronald Schleifer has argued, modernist time echoed a "logic of abundance," materialised in the multiplicities and constellations of public and private experience that had become overwhelmingly available. Rather than the empty, universal and abstract container theorised by Newtonian science, time modelled itself on the irregular structures of memory and the unconscious (haunted by the threat of technological reproduction and automatized interruption), to become "a constituent element of explanation and experience," (Schleifer, 2000, 17), so that several key terms that can shed light on our own relation to the contemporary world are rooted in the turbulent modernist times: relativity, originality, reproducibility, irreversibility and the threat of the future.

We invite papers focusing on the following possible topics:

1. **Inventing modernism:** the avant-garde moment – the relation between modernism and the avant-garde. Contexts of the avant-garde: geographical, economic, social, historical, cultural. Cosmopolitan and/vs. local modernisms: the modernist experience and the changes in the canon.
2. **Catastrophe and "the sense of an ending":** the politics of the avant-garde. The utopia of the avant-garde – messianic promise and the disruption of history. Modernism and the spectre of authoritarianism. Theorising the politics of modernism (Benjamin, Adorno, Broch). Reconsidering modernism after the Holocaust.
3. **Modernist poetics:** rupture and event. Reinventing tradition: anti-modern modernism. Revolution as return, revolution as passage, endless revolution.
4. **Modernism and history:** histories of the present, histories of the future. Historical explanation and historical nightmare. Regional histories versus global catastrophe.

5. **The legacies of modernism:** modernisms in the age of “post-”. Institutionalising modernism: modernism as canon. Late modernism: continuities and the culture of opposition. Modernism in the 21st century.
6. **Divergent temporalities, fuzzy, complementary chronologies:** modernisms across Europe (including the Eastern/Central European scene).
7. **Transmission – circulation – dissemination.** Modernists translating/translating modernism: (a)synchronicities, interfaces, influences. Translation and canonization. Disseminating the avant-garde: media and manifestoes: magazines, journals, performances, films, broadcasting – economies and politics of modernism.

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Jean-Michel Rabaté, University of Pennsylvania

Randall Stevenson, University of Edinburgh

Declan Kiberd, Notre Dame University and University College Dublin

Péter György, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Rarița Zbranca, AltArt Foundation/Cluj Cultural Centre

Christian Moraru, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Panel proposals (max. 500 words) for themed sessions and **abstract proposals** (max. 300 words) for 20-minute papers with a short biographical note (max. 150 words) should be sent to the conference organizers at cems.conf.2018@gmail.com.

Extended deadlines for submissions: **15 November 2017 (panel proposals)**

30 December 2017 (abstracts).

All proposals will be rigorously peer-reviewed.

Acceptance confirmation: 15 January 2018.

Further information will be available on the conference site (<http://tempcems.conference.ubbcluj.ro/>).