

Alternative Modernities in Europe.

Edited by ANDREI BODIU, RODICA ILIE, ADRIAN LACATUS and GEORGETA MOARCAS. Pp. 366. Cluj Napoca: Casa Cartii de Stiinta. 2013. Paperback. ISBN: 9786061704538.

Alternative Modernities in Europe consists of a collection of articles presented at the 2013 homonymic conference held at Transylvania University of Brasov, Romania. The volume is organized topically into seven sections devoted to different phenomena accompanying modernity and modernism. Despite being cross-cultural in its aim and heterogeneous in methodology, the anthology draws its consistency from shedding light upon less explored or latent areas in the study of modernity.

The first chapter offers a valuable notional framework by retracing the modernist expressions on different cultural backgrounds such as interwar Romania and totalitarian or contemporary society. Such mutations are convincingly captured in studies dedicated to modernity perceived as a temporary paradigm – to employ a formula put forward by Adrian Lacatus to describe the flow of ideas in closed literary systems, on one hand – and to features of global and neo-global societies as conceptualised by Jean-Pierre Dubost and Güncel Önköl, on the other hand. Autonomy, human rights, and dignity are just a few of the theoretical concerns cross-cutting these discussions. The section is designed as an eclectic assembly of approaches that shape a nuanced picture of invariants, but also of local and temporal variations circumscribed by European modernity.

The next set of articles broadens the scope of inquiry into alternative modernities by shifting the interest to technology and the emerging challenges of its instrumentalisation. All these papers maintain a general focus on the cultural or literary background underlying these issues. The social impact of German nuclear science and technology community is analysed by invoking the prestigious metaphor of the Kafkaesque trial, production systems are examined by means of Hofstede's terminological device in cultural dimensions theory, and the paradigm shift in agricultural traditions is addressed with a particular emphasis on community values.

No discussion of modernity would be complete without a turn to popular culture. Papers centring on the televisual playground, mountain cultures and cathartic carnival rites engage into a deep exploration of extreme modernism and the dynamic of resisting and/or embracing alternative legitimacy mechanisms.

Under the title of 'Fringe Literatures: Challenges to Localization', Zsuzsanna Mónika Tapodi and Vilma Irén Mihály provide an overview of modernity in Hungarian literature, while Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu tries to determine whether the English poets of the '50s are an illustration of evolution towards post-modernity or are just another instance of alternative modernity. Oana Soare and Cătălin Badea-Gheracostea give engaging accounts of two different facets of modernity in Romanian literature: the "noocratic" revolution taking place in inter-bellum and the contemporary rise of the steampunk genre, respectively, which are equally animated by a spirit of radical change.

By reference to the seminal work of Antoine Compagnon, *Les Antimodernes*, the character of these discourses is subject to deep relativisation, as the ambiguity of the modern and anti-modern simultaneously channels and calls into question any attempt at unravelling a neat and definite typology. This line of argument is best embodied in Georgeta Moarcas' paper on 'poetic strategies toward a Romanian alternative modernity'. The hypothesis advanced by Moarcas draws its inspiration from the philosophical *topos* of the autonomous subject understood, seen from Robert Pippin's perspective. She argues that the aesthetic modernism of Lucian Blaga, Tudor Arghezi and Ion Pillat is offset by a 'peculiar tendency toward a rural communitarian ethos that would shape an autochthonous imaginary'. The paper further indicates that the best way to overcome the binary model employed in representing 'the forces at work during the Romanian modernization process' is to denounce the image of the poet as the epitome of autonomy, a view reminiscent of Romanticism. The Kantian desideratum of reaching a balance between autonomy and heteronomy is reinforced by Charles Taylor's claim that authenticity is reconcilable with, or even contingent on, the ability to articulate 'something beyond the self'.

Although the achievements of individual studies are not to be neglected, the real strength of the volume derives from being able to both exemplify and consciously explore the ways in which the vocabulary of modernity can reproduce itself so as to absorb without antinomy a great variety of cultural and creative exercises.

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