



‘Étant donnés’:

Questioning the material and marginal givens of modernisms scholarship

(A Meta-Modernist Symposium)

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University College Cork



An Irish Research Council
'New Foundations' Project

Plenary Speakers:
Dr Sara Crangle, University of Sussex
Dr Ruth Hemus, Royal Holloway

This is an invitation to interrogate how we think and do modernisms scholarship. It is a call to examine assumptions about the materiality and marginality of modernisms and an appeal to evaluate how criticism responds to the format of formalism.

The aim of ‘Étant donnés’ is to provoke a critical (re)evaluation of the lines we draw around and between modernist practices. Embracing a chronologically broad conceptualization of literary, plastic and performative ‘modernisms’, it seeks to generate self-reflexive scholarly investigations across disciplines.

We welcome proposals for papers from students and scholars of modernism(s) across the humanities, as well as from editors, archivists, translators, publishers and curators of modernist cultural artefacts. Proposals for challenges to the critical consensus on topics material or marginal will be especially well received, as will proposals to treat the potential impact of new technologies and reports of explorations from virgin and fallow territories within (or around) the field.

Abstracts of 300 words can engage with, or extend from, the following questions:

Testing the margins:

What is the margin of modernism? Where is it? Who generates it? What is the value of redeeming marginalized modernists? Or is modernism itself inherently marginal? Decades of recuperative scholarship have sought to undermine the notion of a single, hegemonic modernist canon. In this newly decentralized context of heterogeneous modernisms, does the concept of marginality still have currency? The social dynamics of modernist collaboration are roundly acknowledged, but how do we

determine (or challenge) the borders of what constitutes a friendship, a group, a school or a movement? What once (or never) popular strands of modernist scholarship have been marginalized, and why? What political, ideological, formal and pedagogical forces determine the boundaries of this field?

Prodding the material:

To what degree is the materiality of modernist artefacts significant? Do we unduly fetishize the encounter with the thing itself, or are we guilty of undervaluing or overlooking the matter of modernism? In our eagerness to analyse works which often—in a context of small print runs, coterie publications or one-off performances—reached only minuscule audiences, can (or should) we pay more attention to issues of rarity and rarefaction? How can the scholarship best deal with the materialisations and dematerialisations of modernist processes? How do critics treat collaboratively authored or deliberately de-authored work? In the absence of artefacts, how can critics analyse anecdotal (and potentially apocryphal) accounts of events? What of the materiality (and the materialism) of modernist scholarship itself? How might (or do) we attempt a modernistic reading of modernism?

Making modernist things (a)new:

If translations can be said to de-marginalize works by largely polyglot modernists—making them available to an increasingly monoglot readership—how can they de-materialize, or hypermaterialize those same texts? What ambitions, failures and successes are peculiar to practice of such translation? What do the best and worst translations of modernist works do? What is the potential for cross-media translation? Do scholars of modernist texts have a responsibility to reading texts in the original language? Are there advantages to encountering deliberately alienating works via an alien language?

Matter precious and modernism public:

What is the status of the archive in modernisms scholarship now? To what degree is the scholarship of modernist literatures still rooted in that notion of a geographically localized (arguably sacralized) space? What are the economic and ethical issues at stake in archival economy? With the advent of digital archives and databases, materials once available to a privileged coterie are now open to the world at large. What does the increased accessibility of modernist materials—especially little magazines—mean for modernisms scholarship? Is it time to reimagine the archive? Will pilgrimages to archives always be necessary?

Please email modernismsucc@gmail.com by January 30, 2012.

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