

Editorial

LIFE WITH OUR EVERYDAY CRISES IS A SATANTANGO*

In his book, with a rather extensive title, *Be Very Afraid: The Cultural Response to Terror, Pandemics, Environmental Devastation, Nuclear Annihilation and Other Threats*, Robert Wuthnow looks for typical patterns of reaction to crises—patterns that, with almost universal regularity, recur in particular cases regardless of the nature of the crisis or their seemingly mutual differences. Having reached the final line of Wuthnow's book, one might conclude that all human responses to crises share a fundamentally tragicomic nature, yet Wuthnow nonetheless identifies several models of (not) resolving crises.

There are two key forms of (non)reaction to crisis in Wuthnow's typology. On one end of the psychosocial spectrum, in the relationship between a given community (or even humanity as a whole) and the threatening crisis, we find neglect and postponement of direct confrontation because the threat is too vague, too nebulous, or too complex to be grasped. In this type of (non)resolution, society turns to self-delusion and other psychological defence mechanisms: the crisis is not real, the crisis is still too far away to present a threat, the crisis will solve itself in time, or somehow, and in the end, there surely exist expert institutions and knowledgeable minds that will know how to solve it sooner or later. With such psychology, we push the crisis out of consciousness by immersing ourselves in the obligations (and entertainments) of everyday life, feeling it only fleetingly in moments of anxiety.

On the other end of Wuthnow's psychosocial spectrum lies the mobilization of organized action, with the explicit ambition of resolving the crisis through practical measures. At first glance, this appears to be the more correct, and certainly more intelligent, way of confronting a crisis compared to the first model. If the first model may be illustrated by how we respond to the alarming escalation of the ecological crisis toward potential ecological cataclysm, the second

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model can easily be illustrated by the still fresh example of humanity's response to the global pandemic caused by the COVID virus.

However, even in this second model Wuthnow identifies a series of problematic elements, above all, the feigning of concrete action so that we may at least secure psychological safety, no matter how ineffective the actions may actually be. What matters is the impression, Wuthnow says, the impression reinforced by the "seriousness" of the engaged agencies and organizations, by the "authoritativeness" of experts who can easily conceal lack of ideas behind the discourse of professional metalanguage, and by the creation and presentation of methodical, systematic, supposedly rational protocols for crisis response. Granting Wuthnow the benefit of the doubt, we may conclude that we witnessed such dynamics in the diverse, often very confusing and contradictory pandemic countermeasures, especially regarding regulations for quarantine and interpersonal contact during the height of the COVID outbreak. Balancing between the preservation of health and the maintenance of some degree of social functionality in a world that must continue its duties and necessary activities, quarantine regimes varied drastically from place to place, ranging from almost totalitarian to extremely flexible or even wholly negligent.

Of course, for none of the quarantine regimes was it clear whether they were truly effective, yet each was presented within its own community with the authority of expert knowledge and the argument that these were solutions without alternatives. It was as if more effort went into the persuasiveness of the measures, even when they were in some elements utterly unfounded or even paradoxical, more the result of improvisation and assumptions than genuinely conceived through experience and knowledge. Wuthnow reaches for more radical and bitterly humorous examples, reminding us that during the Cold War fear of nuclear attack in the second half of the 20th century, people were advised with utter seriousness to hide under a table in the event of a nuclear explosion, while Slavoj Žižek repeatedly emphasizes in his work that waste separation as a means of addressing the ecological crisis is a farcical illusion of effective action (Žižek 2010, 2012, 2013).

Regarding today's kaleidoscope of crises, it may never be definitively clarified whether we are dealing with a chain reaction in which one crisis linearly produces the next, or with a "perfect storm" in which escalations in diverse spheres coincided almost simultaneously due to unrelated causes. It is certainly worth

noting the fact that the seeds of current crises were largely sown in the 20th century itself. The roots of the previous century have thus flared into a turmoil of crises that induce new crises: recession, pandemic, migrants, neoliberal capitalism, terrorism, latent fascist populism, deepening social inequalities, tsunamis of globalization, technomedia dystopias, climate collapse, and, on top of all that, wars: one, two, three...

On the hectic surface, it may appear that the sources of ongoing crises are polycentric and mutually unrelated, yielding a long list of diverse culprits. Or at least this is what the technocratic logic of the contemporary mind would like to dictate, delegating crisis resolution as a matter for separate disciplines and specializations. Besides wandering through such interpretations in the crisis, we also wander in defining the character of the crisis: Are we facing radically new types of crises specific to the 21st century, or are these the same old crises inherited from the 20th century, and we are simply just quick to forget? Are these unprecedented, previously unimaginable manifestations of crisis states, or are they age-old crises at a higher potency, repackaged in new discursive clothing?

Mario Vrbančić, in his book *Što nakon distopije?* [*What After Dystopia?*], says the key difference lies in the fact that the 20th century still offered some utopian narratives, whereas the 21st century almost entirely lacks them in its imaginary. Dystopias have the upper hand, while utopias have been compromised by the failures of their realizations during the last century and dismissed as mere naivety. What undeniably gives a radically new dimension to current crises, even if they are (spiralling) variations of crises already overcome in the previous century, is the technomedia infrastructure of the digital society. Above all, this is due to the epochal nature of the innovations through which the digital revolution continues to thoroughly transform society, destroy centuries-old sociocultural patterns, elude any adequate or timely regulation, and with every new gadget or application open new horizons of the unknown and the insecure.

Naturally, current crises are further exacerbated by the evolution of contemporary capitalism toward increasingly ruthless favouring of capital as the supreme value to be pursued at any cost, regardless of collateral damage. Indeed, under capitalism's very dictation, crises have become desirable as a permanent, never-ending mode of living. Although capitalism likes to claim that crises and instabilities are bad for business, the millennial capitalist system achieves and maintains power through induced insecurity, extended from the logic of the

market to every segment of everyday existence, so that “insecurity is not just an unwanted consequence of upheavals in markets; rather, insecurity is programmed into the new institutional model. That is, insecurity does not happen to a new-style bureaucracy, it is made to happen,” says Richard Sennett in *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (187).

Finally, beyond capitalist ideology as one of the key generators of crises, one must consider that crises are induced simply by the definition of modern society and the idea of modernity itself. The idea guiding Western civilization for some five or six centuries, an idea of continuous and accumulated progress, linearly oriented through time and history toward a utopian world of undefined future, an idea governed by the authority of reason and its attributes of cerebral logic, instrumental rationality, and enlightenment, an idea that “in a sense, modernity converted the religious belief in the assurance of salvation into a firm belief in progress,” as Andreas Reckwitz says in *The End of Illusions: Politics, Economy, and Culture in Late Modernism* (4), an idea that “society was imagined to be an order or an architecture based upon computation,” says Alain Touraine in *Critique of Modernity* (10), is also the idea that with each inventive moment in the name of progress not only potentially improves the quality of life for humankind, but also destabilizes the order that had by that moment consolidated as traditional.

Greater or lesser upheavals, greater or lesser problems, inevitably caused by the dynamic of modernization, not only provoke in the psychosocial dimension of society a sense of discontinuity, cognitive disorientation, insecurity, and anxiety (due to which one might claim that crisis is simply a subjective impression), but in fact destroy, often through modernization’s negligence toward existing values in the name of supposedly more advanced ones (or, more precisely, in the name of a declarative modernization-driven reckoning with tradition), or simply through an almost religious faith, to repeat Reckwitz’s words, in salvation achievable through progress. Within the ideology of modernity, progress is imperatively unstoppable, wherever it leads us. And a considerable number of artists, scientists, philosophers, and other intellectuals believe it is leading us toward dystopia.

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it,” Albert Einstein famously said.

In that sense, where can solutions come from? Where can answers come from? Where can constructive ideas come from?

But if it is naive to believe in the “arrival” of answers, ideas, and solutions from anywhere, given the proportions and the seemingly inextricable entanglements of current crises, it is already a significant step to at least begin with questions.

Can past historical experiences with earlier manifestations of crises, as well as theoretical insights into the problematics of crises, help us confront new and upcoming crises? Are we facing radically new types of crises? Has crisis-management policy so far been adequate, or at least optimal? What are our blind spots in thinking about crises and acting in crises? Do crises and “crises” exist, that is, quasi-crises induced merely by media politics of fear? Can crises also have a positive dimension, functioning as moments of new opportunities and possibilities?

These are only some of the many questions within this thematic corpus, from which emerged the organization of the international interdisciplinary scientific conference *Rethinking Crises: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities*, organized by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, and the Department of German Studies of the University of Zadar, financed by the Croatian Science Foundation, and held at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek from 27 to 29 June 2024. Moreover, the conference was one of the highlights of the many activities of the multi-year research project under grant number UIP-2020-02-3695 titled *Analysis of Systems in Crisis and New Consciousness in the Literature of the 21st Century*, financially supported by the Croatian Science Foundation.

Granted, the project title emphasizes literature as the domain that, with its specific sensibility and potential avant-gardism or even visionary quality, can offer invaluable insights into all the aforementioned questions. In short, the project questioned whether literature can be anticipatory in thinking about crises, and even in their potential resolution, or whether literature has been reduced to mere reaction, to lagging recording of critical reality. However, in the spirit of defining the scientific conference as interdisciplinary, in order to form a network of knowledge, experience, and collaboration, and certainly to examine the complexity of the phenomenon of crisis from multiple perspectives (how else?), *Rethinking Crises: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities* was programmatically open to scholars, experts, researchers, intellectuals, and authors from all areas, fields, and disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, and beyond.

Given the number of participants, even the narrowest qualitative selection of submitted papers resulted in a considerable volume of texts, with part of this curated output directed to the edited volume of the conference *Rethinking Crisis: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities*, and part to the pages of this special issue of the journal *Anafora*. Before the reader now stands a set of ten thematically diverse texts, all dedicated to reflections on crisis, whether contemplating crisis in general, i.e., phenomenologically or conceptually, or examining a specific type of crisis with a precise designation (ecological, political, social, etc.).

In his paper *Crises, Revolutions, and Recurrences as Modernist Strategies* Gábor Bednancics reaches for the root, fundamental causes of crisis and finds them, unsurprisingly, in the process of modernization as the guiding idea of Western societal development, which is simultaneously destructive and the cause of destabilizing order to the point of crisis. Each rupture in history appears to open new paths of thought and creation, enabling modernism to balance tradition and innovation in continuous exchange. As thinkers such as Husserl, Adorno, and Habermas have shown, crisis does not merely destroy—it transforms, linking remnants of the past with emerging forms of the present. Modernism is therefore not simply a historical period but an ongoing process that continues to shape our understanding of time and cultural development. It is through crisis that both modernism and tradition find meaning, each defined by the tension and renewal such moments produce.

This is followed by an intriguing piece *The Crisis of the Humane in Hermann Hesse's Novel Das Glasperlenspiel* by Veronica Alina Buciuman, analysing Hesse's classic *The Glass Bead Game* as a still relevant work, applicable today through the concept of “the game” in relation to contemporary practices of video gaming and virtual reality. The author ultimately offers an inventive speculation on the analogy between the concept of the game and the nature of crisis. Through her research, the author notes that the crisis of the human condition is a chain crisis that transcends the individual level and calls into question traditional world orders.

Next, in her paper *Crisis and Self-Destruction: Ambivalent Figures of the Turn*, Hajnalka Halász analyses, from a linguistic perspective, how the word *crisis* is discursively embedded in our rhetoric and what implications rhetorical and stylistic figures have for labelling crisis in relation to the actual condition of crisis. She combines the conceptual history of three key terms—*creative destruction*, *death drive*, and *autoimmunity*—and examines crisis as a figure of turning

points. Like the term *crisis*, the notion of *self-destruction* resists being confined to a single evaluation or direction unless it is contextualized. The ambivalent character of these concepts persists over time and remains unpredictable. The figure of the turning point thus appears central to modern discourses on crisis and self-destruction.

In the tangle of crises currently ravaging the world, this special issue continues with urban crisis, more precisely, the media and artistic representation of dehumanized living conditions in one of the peaks of modern progress: the city. Marijana Erstić's paper *Berlin, Milan and Zagreb in the Light of the Metropolis or German-Italian-Croatian Film Relations in the Era of Neue Sachlichkeit* examines how early cinema of the early 20th century depicted cities and how these visual media representations (in)advertently portrayed fears and crises stemming from the rapid growth of cities into monstrous megalopolises.

Continuing, Bernadetta Matuszak-Loose's paper *The Inevitability of Crises: Literary Images of Crisis and Catastrophe in Christoph Ransmayr's Works* analyses the literary opus of Christoph Ransmayr with regard to his focus on natural disasters. The key terms in this analysis—*crisis*, *catastrophe*, *exploitation*, *technology assessment*, and *crisis awareness*—are used to demonstrate the characteristics, functions, and motivations of a comprehensive approach to the term *crisis* in Ransmayr's literary works *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* (1984), *Die letzte Welt* (1988), *Morbus Kitahara* (1995), *Strahlen der Untergang: Ein Entwässerungsprojekt oder Die Entdeckung des Wesentlichen* (1982), *Der Fallmeister* (2021), *Der Weg nach Surabaya: Reportagen und kleine Prosa* (1997), and *Geständnisse eines Touristen: Ein Verhör* (2004). More precisely, the chapter explores how catastrophe—more broadly, natural disaster—is represented in his texts and how its relationship to and influence on human existence are articulated.

In her paper *Navigating Academic Crises: Insights from Literary Narratives*, Evelina Miščin examines three British and American academic novels, Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, John Williams's *Stoner*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, as “cultural samples” from the genre of academic fiction, literature that portrays life within the “academic” or “university ghetto.” She identifies various crises experienced by professors and students and offers illustrative examples that illuminate the cultural, social, and ethical dynamics of academic life, providing

an overview of significant case studies within the campus/academic novel genre and the issues these works address.

Sara Miščin's paper *Beyond the Belfast Peace Walls: Examining the Implications of Their Demolition on Society*, meanwhile, explores the implications for local community life brought about by the constructed wall in Belfast, Ireland, as a sort of solution to intercommunity conflict in that region. In addition to providing a brief historical context of the conflict between Catholics (nationalists) and Protestants (unionists) in Northern Ireland that led to the construction of the so-called Peace Walls, the paper also examines local community initiatives and surveys concerning attitudes toward the Walls, with particular emphasis on the perspectives of younger generations born after the end of open conflict.

In his paper *New Phenomenology as a Possibility for Literary Reconciliation Between Aesthetic Experience and Mood*, Viktor Pataki explores the history and philosophy of the non-semantic approach to reading and understanding literature as well as the "phenomenology of mood" ("structure of feeling," as Raymond Williams would say) in relation to the (non)feeling of crisis. Following the complex relationship between aesthetic experience and mood, Pataki identifies some of the core issues in manifestations of crisis in current literary theories, whether one labels it postmodern, post-postmodern, or metamodern. According to Pataki, the transformation of aesthetic experience into a literary phenomenology of mood not only links understanding and perception but also signals a crisis in the material-hermeneutical foundations of literary history.

Krešimir Šimić and Robert Stubičar, in their paper *Harold Bloom and the Crisis in Literature* take up Harold Bloom's views on the threat to the Western literary canon posed by new theoretical approaches. Where Harold Bloom left off, Šimić and Stubičar continue, inscribing into the framework of Bloom's theses and claims the latest trends in literary theory, which likewise potentially endanger the Western canon. The paper presents Bloom's critique of what he termed the "School of Resentment," encompassing Marxist, feminist, and post-structuralist approaches that, in his view, threaten the foundations of Western literary tradition. By revisiting Bloom's ideas, the authors shed light on enduring debates over the role of the literary canon and the value of humanistic perspectives in modern literary theory.

Finally, Sanja Tadić-Šokac, in her paper *Political Crises in Nedjeljko Fabrio's* **316** *Jadranska trilogija*, examines the "politics of literature" in relation to the poli-

tics of crisis and political crisis in the turbulent political-historical space of the city of Rijeka, through the work of Croatian literary classic Nedjeljko Fabrio. Grounded in the theoretical works of Jacques Rancière and Jacques Derrida, the paper examines Fabrio's literary techniques to address the politics of literature, exploring how his texts reorganize narrative conventions and reshape the reader's perception of the literary work.

Through this sequence of works, ten distinct perspectives on crisis are offered, ten outlooks, ten warnings, ten coordinates in the mapping of crisis. Ten, precious ten, voices in a time when we are up to our necks in crises.

GUEST EDITORS:

Igor GAJIN, Marijana JELEČ, Stephanie JUG, MARIJANA MANDIĆ,
Sonja NOVAK, Philipp SCHLÜTER, Iris SPAJIC, Katarina ŽERAVICA

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