

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).  
Ovaj rad dostupan je za upotrebu pod licencom [Creative Commons Imenovanje 4.0 međunarodna](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



**Gábor BEDNANICS**

Eszterházy Károly Catholic University  
Eszterházy tér 1.  
HU – 3300 Eger  
gabor@bednanics.hu

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v12i2.1>

**Pregledni rad**  
**Review Article**

Primljeno 16. veljače 2025.

*Received: 16 February 2025*

Prihvaćeno 25. rujna 2025.

*Accepted: 25 September 2025*

## CRISES, REVOLUTIONS, AND RECURRENCES AS MODERNIST STRATEGIES

### Abstract

Are there any crises outside of modernism, or is it a notion or event of modernity itself? Several crises, in the eyes of historians, opened the door to possibilities for new efforts without making the older strategies obsolete. In the era of postmodernism, it seemed to be a common practice to make fun of those highly evaluated temporal schemes, like revolutions and crises, which eroded their use. Labeling temporality turned out to be an interplay between schisms and discontinuities instead of considering time permanent and linear. However, as the label of postmodernism became suspicious, different kinds of modernisms started to have an effect again. From a theoretical perspective, it is handy to refer to the problem of crisis in the modernist philosophical tradition. Philosophers like Husserl, Adorno, and Habermas made their way of introducing crisis as a productive possibility to change the simple flow of time. Unlike revolutions, crises can bear the importance of having something in common with the departed patterns. Thus, the recurring elements of what had to be overcome turned out to be adhered to in previous periods. In my paper, I seek the chance to regard these temporal ruptures as core structures of modernism. The crisis that tears historical moments apart helps us to understand how literary modernism can handle competitive patterns like tradition and innovation, uneven endeavors, and development.

**Keywords:** modernism, revolution, temporality, continuity, tradition, rupture in time

Crisis, like revolutions, have always been present in the development of history. Their role can be seen in the disruption of continuity when the effects of two timelines are simultaneously present in a single historical moment: the increasingly invalid interpretative frameworks of the previous period and the destructive, demolishing tendencies of the age to come. Of course, times of crisis are never perceived as critical ones. The tension between the experience and the evaluation of crisis does not allow us to treat the effects of the present and the aftermath as a single value. The signs of crisis are not the same as the subsequent meanings of crisis: those who live in critical times may experience signs of change, but they do not possess the context offered by the hindsight perspective. The crisis is a sign whose meaning is still open: it has a definite contour, it is clearly perceptible, and its causes may even be discernible, but what it refers to, or its concrete consequences are still unforeseen. Although the term 'crisis' proved to be diagnostic and predicative in the sense of indicating something new to come. Nevertheless, it is strongly connected to the historical categories of progress (Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis* 161), which can lead us to prognoses formulated by rough classifications. This roughness opens the way for mythmaking. If one does not know the future anticipated, one has to bridge the speculative gaps with conjunctions of previous and inherited interpretations. The crisis remains a fact that is apparent, but its clarifications are still open and numerous.

The role of different historical or literary periods can be described as a series of similar movements, with the difference that here, we are problematizing the diachronic nature of the periodic structure. From this point of view, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's attempt to push linear, totalizing, disintegrative concepts of history into the background by asserting the aspects of simultaneity may be interesting (Gumbrecht xii). However, the German American author, in his opposition to arbitrariness, appears to be the heir of Foucault's insight in so far as the events and phenomena he highlights during that particular year are unmasked as convergent sequences of action. To this extent, the editorial style of his book not only builds on the ad hoc chronology of the present but also engages in a hypertextual construction that refers both to the networked relations of digital culture and to the system of references that manifest themselves through the paratextual practices of book culture over the centuries. The cross-references, the indexes, and the book's structure are all a function of an insight that

its in the digital age. The one-sidedness of simultaneous events, which resists epoch-making, becomes an innovative and provocative initiative thanks to the structural principle (tradition) of the framework created by the book. Presumably in line with this, the poststructuralist program is modified since Foucault's discontinuities (Foucault 4) are replaced in Gumbrecht's work by functions of change, confronted with permanence, even eternity. The motion of rupture in the notion of crisis makes time an epochal concept that can only be regarded as the two sides of a threshold:

There are no witnesses to changes of epoch. The epochal turning is an imperceptible frontier, bound to no crucial date or event. However, viewed differentially, a threshold marks itself off, which can be ascertained as something either not yet arrived at or already crossed. [...] However, these examinations could not become "experience" of history if they did not satisfy the transcendental principle according to which the alteration of appearances refers us to something persistent [*das Beharrliche*: Kant's requirement], which, to be sure, in the case of historical consideration only needs to be something relatively longer lasting, as described earlier. This is why one of the preconditions for attaining clarity in relating doctrines to one another, and thus in differentiating them, is the possibility of demonstrating, through dissection, an identical fundamental system of elementary assertion needs, notions of the world and the self, on both sides of the threshold. (Blumenberg 469)

This unconventionally (perhaps somewhat anachronistically) conceived temporal perspective considers the marking function of the date not as a matter of its privileged limiting position but as a possibility for reordering temporal relations and their meanings.

The chronological notion of time, as Burkhart Steinwachs calls it, does not refer to a longer interval but to an event symbolically linked to a date, which the "peripetic" approach is intended to dynamize by conveying a threshold experience that measures the relationship between "before" and "after" and between discontinuity and continuity for a given breakthrough event, thus avoiding the one-sidedness and totalizing demands of developmental concepts and holistic philosophies of history (Steinwachs 312–315). However, the singular moment appears in the historical projection as a category of relations. For this reason, historical thinking is suspicious of descriptions that emphasize the singularity-

ty of the event. Therefore, the epoch as an essential expression refers simultaneously to the facticity of the historical event and the possibilities (meanings) that unfold from the event. In this way, it avoids the arbitrariness of the role of accident (Marquard 120), which also makes the narration of history possible, and the paranoia of the gesture of meaning-making, which permanently asserts itself, leveling all events and interpreting them without end:

Action takes place within the horizon of the historically possible; but its effect is not arbitrarily, accidentally “totally other,” either. The effect also occurs in a context of the reciprocal interaction of synchronicity and non-synchronicity, of integrative and destructive interdependence. An epoch is the sum total of all the interferences between actions and what they “make.” In this sense – that actions and outcomes are not capable of unambiguous coordination – we have to recognize that history “makes itself.” What we grasp in the patterns of history is more the outcomes than the agents. (Blumenberg 478)

For this reason, questioning the actors at the event—who are not the same as the witnesses of the threshold experience—becomes an acute issue in the historical narrative.

The event, inseparable from the structure, is confronted with the illusion of simultaneity in the repetition arranged by the conceptual framework. Concepts, though ex-post constructs, function as signs that create meanings in the process of repetition, whereby events and structures can mutually determine each other (Koselleck, *Futures Past* 112). In Koselleck’s description, therefore, structures are no less essential than the “space of experience,” which never exists in its immediacy, yet to wish for its indirect immediacy is not a mere illusion. However, unraveling chronological sequences of events through detours is reduced to further explanations or participating elements. Alongside the grand conceptions of history, it is worth turning to the approach of the time in literary history that conceives of events and structures about one another because it brings the event into play in a way that sometimes escapes this description. According to Gumbrecht, the traditional conception of the event presupposes a complex structure. However, the representation of historical simultaneity attempts to stage the way resistance to the organization or logic of structure is established, focusing on event-like understanding as the interference of contingencies. The

**324** subversive event, which threatens structures without activating their interpreta-

tions and conceptual frameworks, emerges from the conflation and fragmentation of influences and cultural codes (Gumbrecht 433–434). The Gumbrechtian concept of the event thus attempts, in its structure and foundations, to capture the former temporal perspective of practical experience and thus escape the meaning—constituting constraints of historical structures. However, as a result, it again brings into play the category of indirect immediacy.

The questions of cultural modernity have repeatedly confronted the role of event, structure, momentariness, contingency, effect, and retrospectively in shaping temporalities through the operation of multiple mechanisms of effect. In this context, the notion of modernity itself has been questioned. If time is understood as an ever-changing sequence, in terms of interpretative oppositions, the “old” and the “modern” always emerge as mutually referential concepts. In this case, it would not be possible to speak of modernity as an epoch marker since the notion of a relationship in constant motion cannot be fixed even for approximate intervals. Modernity, conceived as a historical structure, is not opposed to its event-like latency but to temporal horizons that happen to be the birthplace of an age that called for a reinterpretation of temporality in terms of internal and physical time.

Jürgen Habermas, in his famous lecture on the occasion of the Adorno Prize, outlined a project of modernity in which both the progressive program of progress and the moment of decadence that Adorno added to it were given space (Habermas, *Modernity: An Incomplete Project*). This dialectical model of the Enlightenment, which played a role in the German aesthete-philosopher’s thought in several stages, encoded the possibility of closure. Habermas warns that closure is not the Enlightenment’s actual program in a world of fragmented forms of knowledge. However, the perspective offered by this project can be used to expose and exploit destabilizing minework. Although for Habermas, this appears as an aberration and is thus eliminated, the apparatus on which his concept is based tells a different story. Indeed, the concept of the project presupposes an experience of time that emphasizes the primacy of openness to the future but considers it to be characterized by the fundamental prescriptions of the past. The project is a program conceived as a process of a finite number of signs, creating a series of specific elements. While the project of modernity is unfulfillable, its development always carries the promise of fulfillment. This is how repositioning the nature of temporality can reinforce the temporal fixations of modernity. As Habermas argues elsewhere:

Because the new, the modern world is distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future, the epochal new beginning is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new. Thus, it is characteristic of the historical consciousness of modernity to set off “the most recent [*neuesten*] period” from the modern [*neu*] age [...] A present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal*. (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 6–7)

As the spokesman of modernity, he thus emphasizes the separation from the past and the future available in the present.

Moreover, this gaze toward the future invokes concepts necessary to achieve the projected present. For Walter Benjamin, the metaphors of progress and development (or their opposite equivalents) are also used in the context of revolutionary steps interrupting the past’s continuity. In his view, the French Revolution “evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago” (Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” 261). Just as modernity is revealed as a figure claiming itself as new and yet appearing as a repetition of the older, so the revolution, as a singular event, remains a specific imitation of the New Age (again, a category that includes radical innovation!) at its central point and because of the modernist program of the Enlightenment. Although the relation to the past is replaced by an apparently future-oriented perspective, the project, which presents revolutionary events as an almost unprecedented starting point in the projection, continues to operate according to patterns of continuity and iteration. For Benjamin, the revolution would be the moment of return, which calls for homogenization of the drift of history when it considers the events and experiences of the past as reconfigurable and revivable. Nevertheless, the program of modernity can hardly be called revolutionary in this sense: it both denies and revalidates the past by always clinging to the present:

But these forward gropings, this anticipation of an undefined future and the cult of the new mean in fact the exaltation of the present. [...] The new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefined, immaculate and stable present. (Habermas, “Modernity: An Incomplete Project” 5)

The perspective that opens toward the future reveals the duality of cultural modernity and aesthetic modernism. The anticipation of the unmade is only projected forward as a program if it realizes in its transcendence, in its pastness, the repetition of what is somehow familiar. As pure innovation, modernity either mobilizes the unexpected and, to this extent, cannot be anticipated, or it is interested in rearranging past experiences (interpretations) open to the expected (oriented) future.

1936 saw the first publication of Husserl's late main work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Apart from its relevant effects on phenomenology, I refer to this book as a crucial link in the reflections on modern crises. Husserl found himself in a personal crisis in the 1930s in Germany, but his work was also seen as a familiar reaction to the disillusionment of the Post-War era. Like Spengler's famous book on *The Decline of the West* (1918), Husserl's *Crisis* emerged from finding that standard solutions are highly unsuitable for well-known dilemmas in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Husserl focuses on the effects of positive sciences with a deflected impact on humanity. The prosperity of sciences and the optimism of the Enlightenment went awry because of their use for society, especially after the Great War. The hope for perpetual development, which also fueled the rise of positive sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fired backward and became instead a burden. What Husserl saw as a tension between transcendental subjectivism and physicalistic objectivism was expressed in terms of rupture instead of renewal or revolution. Being modern meant for the people (as Husserl formulated it: for "humanity") of this period a possibility to reorientate themselves towards the "lifeworld" of experiences that escaped from the realm of reasoning. The crisis of scientific evolution was the cause that alienated humanity from philosophy and reasoning and divided the world into subjective experiences and objective facts. In its original sense, crisis is "krino," which means *dividing* and *choosing between two things*. Here, for Husserl, crisis means a rupture in human *Existenz* that is not peculiar but a common state of humanity and, as such, is inevitable for all of us:

the whole historical process has a remarkable form, one which becomes visible only through an interpretation of its hidden, innermost motivation. Its form is not that of a smooth development, not that of a continual growth of lasting spiritual acquisitions or of a transformation of spiritual configurations—concepts, theories, systems—which can be explained by means of the accidental historical situations. A definite ideal of a univer-

sal philosophy and its method form the beginning; this is, so to speak, the primal establishment of the philosophical modern age and all its lines of development. But instead of being able to work itself out in fact, this ideal suffers an inner dissolution. As against attempts to carry out and newly fortify the ideal, this dissolution gives rise to revolutionary, more or less radical innovations. [...] Thus, the crisis of philosophy implies the crisis of all modern sciences as members of the philosophical universe: at first a latent, then a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total “*Existenz*.” (12)

If crisis means division and decision between separate entities, reasoning is no longer a universal answer but a historical stage of understanding the world. It became obsolete by losing the universal spirit of progress and prosperity. Besides his existential crisis, Husserl was pressed by a philosophical challenge made by Heidegger and his *Daseinanalyse*. Lifeworld could be his attempt to react to the crises he found himself in during the 1930s. The crisis forced him to reassess his philosophy once and for all and lay down the foundations of a new phenomenological approach.

After World War II, Adorno found himself in the same crisis that made him reconsider his view of modernity. For Adorno, the modern was not only a historical period but a chance for perpetual displacements and crises. Modern arts are firmly anchored to the ground of tradition, but in searching for the new, they are highly variable and innovative. Adorno and his followers (like, in a certain way, Habermas or Jauss) believed in modernism as a position that enables one to grasp together diverse and opposing tendencies of time, history, and radical progress:

Talking of “modernisms” (or maybe “modern-isms”) in the plural could enable us to recognize the continuing transformations of art about the process of permanent change brought about by the ongoing crises in culture, society, and the capitalist economy. In view of all this, I suggest that “modernism” can be said to refer to a changing set of artistic practices and aesthetic discourses that are inextricably part of what Habermas calls “the unfinished project of the modern” as a response to the condition of modernity. It is precisely because of its relative autonomy that this artistic and aesthetic response finds itself in perpetual conflict with, on the one

hand, the process of modernization and, on the other hand, nostalgia for tradition and the dream of an imagined past. I suggest that these are the tensions that characterize all “modernisms.” Adorno, however, goes further: he not only sees “modernism” (including the plurality of its “-isms”) as a subset of “the modern” but also makes a critical distinction between them. (Paddison 11)

Modernism (and, in a broader sense, cultural modernity) can, therefore, be regarded as a proposal by which one can name a period after romanticism and before postmodernism (Jauss 27–32). It is more historical than a mere temporal notion but cannot be a sole label for its fundamental dilemmas. Perhaps the proposal, according to which the widespread use legitimizes the application of “modern” as a concept of a period, seems too practical and simplified. The expression used in the sense of “novelty, actuality” contradicts the claim of widespread use. As such, it gives reason to those who criticize its role in art and literary history. In his debate with Hans Robert Jauss, Paul de Man investigated this duality to support his (substantial) objections to historical elaboration. In the

classic essay, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” in which novelty is achieved only by a “deliberate forgetting,” [that is] an erasure of the past in the hope of arriving at an absolute present. The more a writer renounces the past, however, the “greater the dependence on the past,” especially on those forebears who had themselves attempted the impossible task of self-creation. (North 149)

Modernism is a historical figure that states itself but also clears itself to identify the goal of aesthetic compensation as a wish for perfection. The characteristic of modernism that is permanently defeated in the fight to reach the unavailable proved productive. Innovative initiatives in the arts field cannot be characterized only by novelty but also by continuity. This kind of reciprocity unveils modernism as a crisis period in which the appearance of different values submerges the request of saying farewell to other values. The divergent structures and the claims of unification wake up the suspicion of literary historians. The encouragement to use the concept conventionally remains blind to productive self-contradictions appearing in modernism regarded as a period. The deconstructive approach that double-crosses modernism and its different meanings asks about the rhetoric of an epoch by mixing time, history, and writing history: **329**

Could we conceive of a literary history that would not truncate literature by putting us misleadingly *into* or *outside* it, that would be able to maintain the literary aporia throughout, account at the same time for the truth and the falsehood of the knowledge literature conveys about itself, distinguish rigorously between metaphorical and historical language, and account for literary modernity as well as for its historicity? (de Man 164)

Modernism is a two-faced concept, or as Zygmunt Bauman puts it: it is fundamentally ambivalent. Moreover, this quality is not independent of an essentially non-intellectual experience of time, i.e., one shaped by technical means. Although Baudelaire, who is a point of reference for the modern, did not draw up his concept of *modernité* according to the subject's (poet's, lyrical self's, or the inhabitant's of the new metropolis) spatial actions, it is already clear from Benjamin's influential analyses that walking around and experiencing the city is connected to technology and its associated media. This also means a starting point for Jauss, who interprets Baudelaire's poetry by focusing on the relationship between modernism and modernism's novelty and technicity (anti-naturalism) (Jauss 50–52). The flâneur not only gives a voice to hitherto silent social levels, but the metropolitan environment, shaped by new transport networks, teaches an unheard-of way of seeing and encourages innovative expression (Benjamin, "Paris of The Second Empire in Baudelaire" 61–62). However, Baudelaire's definition of modernism is contradictory in several respects: the dichotomy between the ancient and the modern, the opposition between the temporary and the eternal, raises several logical problems concerning the poet's much-cited writing (Compagnon 42). As the French literary scholar denies Baudelaire the possibility of clear thinking, Benjamin also assumes the famous description of *modernité* to be relatively meaningless ("Paris of The Second Empire in Baudelaire" 50). Nevertheless, it would not be necessary to dismiss the impact of the definition of modernism in one go (and Compagnon himself does not do so) because it is clear from this that Baudelaire sought to delineate the boundaries of modernism as an aesthetic epoch, according to *The Painter of Modern Life*. Concerning the same topic, in his famous essay, Paul de Man traces the contradictions between historical time and modernism. The Belgian-American literary scholar sees the essence of Baudelaire's thought in the moments of action and performativity, which he, of course, associates with the fictionality of a structure that determines the formation of historical time. Modernism is

**330** not a historical stage but rather a potential of literature. However, precisely in

its constantly reflected interrelation of time and action, it becomes remarkable: “Modernity turns out to be indeed one of the concepts by means of which the distinctive nature of literature can be revealed in all its intricacy” (de Man 161). The inherent tension of modernism brings forth the notion of alienation on the one hand and reveals an irresolvable fragmentation on the other. This quality allows us to mobilize *modernité* as a signifier of an age that proclaims the indissoluble multiplicity of the intersections of irreconcilable contradictions—in Baudelaire. Therefore, it is perhaps not philosophical ineptitude manifested when he speaks with a fallible logic about modernism. Cultural modernity in Bauman’s categories is the alienation that balances the framework of dualities or, on the contrary, tends to dismantle them (Bauman 145–146). De Man’s description can be criticized because of the generalization of language, from which literature benefits in a Platonic way, and it cannot be responsible in an omnipotent way for the relations of time and history (Calinescu 52). Once again, the performativity of literature brings us to the unpredictable play of temporality, and it does not operate exclusively with the rhetorical performance of texts but strictly against it. Although it is undeniable that the signs of revolution and change are presented to us as texts, modernism can stage its instability, which is the result of the tension between event and historicity, which in turn points to the ambivalences inherent in the creative nature of modernism. For this reason, the use of the term should not necessarily be rejected but instead considered further, especially when one believes that modern literature is no less concerned with the linguistic shaping of time and history than with the temporal contexts of the texts themselves, which are capable of allowing the same work to take on several forms, even within a single year (not to mention centuries of transmission).

Literary historiography, in the process of historical categorization, has already drawn up several concepts that have been incorporated into our interpretations despite the many attacks and doubts that have accompanied them since their appearance and dissemination. Literary modernity is a contested and often questioned term since many arguments have been against its use. Questions of modernism have been repeatedly and inevitably confronted, from various perspectives, with the role of event, structure, moment and unexpectedness, and impact and retrospectivity in shaping time frames. As time is understood as an ever-evolving linear chain subject to the mutually interpretative counteractions of opposing concepts, the categories of the old and the modern are also shaped by this interrelation. As Terry Eagleton formulated:

Modernism, one might claim in too glib a formulation, is fascinated by time but disenchanted with history. In fact, the former becomes often enough a surrogate for the latter. There are modernist artists who seek a victory over time by compressing it to an infinite singularity, a timeless instant which is the closest one can approach to the Absolute. [...] The modernist attraction to the void or vortex, “vertical” irruptions into the forward flow of time, belongs with this vision. (xxiii)

In this case, it would not be possible to speak of modernism as an epoch marker because the concept of a constant-motion relationship cannot be divided into approximate moments. Modernism, however, conceived as a historical structure as proposed by Koselleck, is not opposed to the ability to fragment events but to temporal horizons that happen to be the birthplace of an age that called for a reinterpretation of temporality in terms of both internal and physical time.

In the relationship between linguistic and visual-cultural signs, it is worth bearing in mind Derrida’s remark that a “sign is never an event, if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. A sign which would take place but ‘once’ would not be a sign; a purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign” (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 50). Thus, the text and the event seem to be a mutually exclusive pair of oppositions at first sight. The text is similar to the historical structures of Koselleck to that extent. As such, it is even interpreted in a position of anticipation. The event would be unique if it did not carry the possibility of repetition if it remained unexpected and had an unknown outcome. The examples in Derrida’s late work (donation, confession, forgiveness, invention) function as performative acts or events only when they bring the impossible and the unavailable to the surface. “The event’s eventfulness depends on this experience of the impossible. What comes to pass, as an event, can only come to pass if it’s impossible. If it’s possible, if it’s foreseeable, then it doesn’t come to pass” (Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event” 451). The epochalization of programmatic events, the modern demand to anticipate the future, is to substitute some meaning for the possibility of signs. Nevertheless, the present does not come directly before us, even in live transmission. If an event is assumed to be revolutionary, it prescribes (pro-grammatizes) the future codes, and the event itself is also shaped, which is a function of pre-recorded

From a different point of view, postmodernism can help to understand modernism backward, as it makes fun of its highly evaluated temporal schemes, like revolutions or crises. However, even the apostle of postmodernism, Lyotard himself, considered the renowned prefix in a non-temporal sense:

neither modernity nor so-called postmodernity can be identified and defined as clearly circumscribed historical entities, of which the latter would always come “after” the former [...] Rather we have to say that the post-modern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself (25)

If postmodernism is influenced or inherited by modernism, all recent attempts to reconsider it through postmodernism are controlled by strategies or modernism. Labeling temporality, therefore, turns out to be an interplay between schisms and discontinuities instead of considering time permanent and linear. Nevertheless, as soon as the label of postmodernism becomes suspicious, different kinds of modernisms start to act again. Contemporary literature has much to do with the recurring issues of modernism: meta-modernism, late modernism, neo-modernism, post-postmodernism, remodelnism, or new sincerity all state a special kind of continuous modernism still at stake. These (re)formulations seek what they have in common with modernism: the crisis that disrupts modern situations seems to belong to the core structure of modernism. Furthermore, reading backward reveals the signs of temporality as tropes and figures by their inherent rhetorical tension. A crisis does not only terminate something but unveils something new: an era comes to an end to give birth to another one. Modernism contains crises of schisms and decisions as well as solutions of reoccurrence. That is why it can be regarded as a sole historical category. Unlike revolutions, crises can bear the importance of having something in common with the departed patterns. Thus, the recurring elements of what had to be overcome turned out to be adhered to in previous periods. The crisis that tears historical moments apart helps us to understand how literary modernism can handle competitive patterns like tradition and innovation, uneven endeavors, and development.

The relationship between crisis and modernism is not limited to ruptures between time and history. Choice, an inherent part of the crisis, is complemented by the experience of the unpredictability of crisis, its ominous foreboding, and, 333

hence, its openness to the future. The desire for novelty inherent in modernism does not compete with the recurrent structures of history (Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories* 148). The experience of crisis in the future is not dominated by meaningful structures but by undefined intuitions that work against positive notions of unfolding (development, expansion, prosperity). The negativity that thus emerges is not only counteracted. It becomes part of the space of experience in which the language that provides meaning does not seek to exploit communicative possibilities:

In Mallarmé's poems of the 1890s, any simple correspondence between word and world disappears; language operates in these works not so much referentially as musically, by way of evocation rather than description, suggestion rather than nomination, while making of the referential function an almost irresistible lure. (Weller 18)

Mallarmé's example is also significant because it seeks to explain the phenomenon of the crisis of the poem from a modern perspective. For him, the experience of time coincides with the rigorous linguistic experience of literature. The way to this is not through the romantic idea of poetry but through the formal character of the poem. The primary field of language here is the poem, that is, the poetically shaped ordering that prescribes (pro-grams) the unforeseeable according to its own rules:

Verse, which, out of several vocables, makes a total word, entirely new, foreign to the language, and almost incantatory, achieves that isolation of speech; negating, with a sovereign blow, despite their repeated reformulations between sound and sense, the arbitrariness that remains in the terms, and gives you the surprise of never having heard that fragment of ordinary eloquence before, while the object named is bathed in a brand new atmosphere. (Mallarmé 211)

The ambiguity of cultural modernity also exists in aesthetic and, within that, literary modernism. However, it is modified so that linguistic performance makes the opposition between the new and the traditional more prevalent. The increasing liberation of poetic, negative, and privative, as well as limiting linguistic manifestations, has called into question language's referential and semantic coefficients. Furthermore, if poetic signification is only achieved in its

**334** state of appearance, the crisis in modernism, that is, the interplay of categories

acting against each other, becomes constitutive. In Mallarmé's work, this can be seen most strongly in the world of his late experimental poems:

The threat posed by contingency, by a world that exceeds the power of both thought and language, is such that *A Throw of the Dice* might seem to present us with language on the point of complete disintegration, subject to the power of a negativity that leaves nothing but linguistic flotsam and jetsam in its wake. (Weller 20)

The crisis of language is, on the one hand, a lack of confidence in the expressive power of ordinary language. On the other hand, it is also the inadequacy of language's performance. It is through language that the framework of modern literature becomes perceptible; time and history, tradition and innovation, meaning and arabesque writing reveal their roots in crisis through linguistic ambivalence:

What is stressed in defence of the historicity of modernism is how the medium of modernist poetry, even when it seemingly withdraws from history, is nevertheless a transfiguration of the historically determined language of tradition or the everyday. (Rabaté and Spiropoulou 23–24)

If modernity is in a state of permanent crisis, literary modernity is characterized by a similar permanent crisis by its ambivalence between tradition and innovation. This unstable movement allows the crisis to be configured not as a paralyzing, ultimate moment but as an opportunity for modernist or avant-garde endeavors that criticize time to become historical themselves:

Within the context of the chronic crisis of modernity as Koselleck lays it out, however, a considerable portion of the avant-garde also consciously seized upon the anachronic nature of art to put forth alternative (pre) conceptual models and aesthetic experiences of time and history, made attempts, in other words, to escape the dominant philosophy of crisis in modernity. (Bru and Kangaslahti 14)

The crisis is not simply a part of the experience of modernism but also its main driving force. The crisis in modernism is responsible for referring to a certain period, mainly one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only as an experience of the past, a dead tradition, but also as a dominant tendency that still has its effects. Modernism is not just an epoch but also (or so it seems for now) a formative phenomenon nowadays. The rupture inherent in the crisis plays a significant **335**

role in the evolvment of configuring historical time. Without the crisis, there should not be any modernism or tradition because one could not place oneself on both sides of the breach of the remnants of the passing time.

### Works Cited

- Bauman, Zygmunt. "Modernity and Ambivalence." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2–3, 1990, pp. 143–169.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Paris of The Second Empire in Baudelaire." *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Belknap Press, 2003, pp. 3–92.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 253–264.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. MIT Press, 1985.
- Bru, Sascha, and Kate Kangaslahti. "Preface to the Crisis and Critique of the Avant-Garde." *Crisis: The Avant-Garde and Modernism in Critical Modes*, edited by Sascha Bru, et al., De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 3–23.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity*. Duke UP, 1987.
- Compagnon, Antoine. *Baudelaire devant l'innombrable*. Presses Universitaires de la Sorbonne, 2003.
- de Man, Paul. "Literary History and Literary Modernity." *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., U of Minnesota P, 1983, pp. 142–165.
- Derrida, Jacques. "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2007, pp. 441–461.
- . *Speech and Phenomena*. Northwestern UP, 1973.
- Eagleton, Terry. "Foreword: Modernism, Time and History." *Historical Modernisms: Time, History and Modernist Aesthetics*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté and Angeliki Spiropoulou, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, pp. xix–xxvii.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse of Language*. Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*. Harvard UP, 2009.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity: An Incomplete Project." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-modern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, Bay Press, 1983, pp. 3–15.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance." *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Polity Press, 1987, pp. 1–22.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Northwestern UP, 1970.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. "The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 11, 1988–1989, pp. 27–61.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*. MIT Press, 1988.

- . *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Columbia UP, 2004.
- . *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*. Stanford UP, 2018.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Polity Press, 1991.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Divagations*. Cambridge, Belknap UP, 2007.
- Marquard, Odo. “In Defense of the Accidental.” *In Defense of the Accidental*, Oxford UP, 1991, pp.109–129.
- North, Micheal. *Novelty: A History of the New*. Chicago UP, 2013.
- Paddison, Max. “Adorno and Beyond: The Modern as Critique of Modernism.” *Understanding Adorno, Understanding Modernism*, edited by Robin Truth Goodman, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, pp. 7–19.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel, and Angeliki Spiropoulou. “Historical Modernisms: Introduction.” *Historical Modernisms: Time, History and Modernist Aesthetics*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté and Angeliki Spiropoulou, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, pp. 1–32.
- Steinwachs, Burkhard. „Was leisten (literarische) Epochenbegriffe?: Forderungen und Folgerungen.“ *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, edited by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Ursula Link-Heer, Suhrkamp, 1985, pp. 312–323.
- Weller, Shane. *Language and Negativity in European Modernism: Toward a Literature of the Unword*. Cambridge UP, 2019.

# KRISEN, REVOLUTIONEN UND WIEDERKEHR ALS MODERNISTISCHE STRATEGIEN

## Zusammenfassung

---

**Gábor BEDNANICS**

Katholische Eszterházy Károly Universität

Eszterházy tér 1.

HU – 3300 Eger

gabor@bednanics.hu

---

Gibt es Krisen außerhalb der Moderne oder handelt es sich um eine Vorstellung oder ein Ereignis der Moderne selbst? In den Augen von Historikern gab es mehrere Krisen, die die Tür zu mehreren Möglichkeiten für neue Anstrengungen öffneten, ohne die älteren Strategien obsolet zu machen. In der Ära der Postmoderne schien es üblich zu sein, sich über diese hoch bewerteten zeitlichen Schemata wie Revolutionen und Krisen lustig zu machen, die ihren Nutzen untergruben. Die Bezeichnung „Temporalität“ erwies sich als ein Wechselspiel zwischen Spaltungen und Diskontinuitäten, anstatt Zeit als dauerhaft und linear zu betrachten. Doch als das Etikett „Postmoderne“ suspekt wurde, begannen verschiedene Arten von Modernismen wieder Wirkung zu zeigen. Aus theoretischer Sicht ist es nützlich, auf das Problem der Krise in der modernistischen philosophischen Tradition zu verweisen. Philosophen wie Husserl, Adorno und Habermas haben auf ihre eigene Weise die Krise als produktive Möglichkeit eingeführt, um den einfachen Fluss der Zeit zu verändern. Im Gegensatz zu Revolutionen können Krisen die Bedeutung haben, etwas mit den alten Mustern gemeinsam zu haben. So stellte sich heraus, dass die wiederkehrenden Elemente dessen, was überwunden werden musste, in früheren Perioden beibehalten wurden. In meinem Vortrag möchte ich die Möglichkeit untersuchen, diese zeitlichen Brüche als Kernstrukturen der Moderne zu betrachten. Die Krise, die historische Momente auseinanderreißt, hilft uns zu verstehen, wie die literarische Moderne mit konkurrierenden Mustern wie Tradition und Innovation, ungleichen Bestrebungen und Entwicklung umgehen kann.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Moderne, Revolution, Zeitlichkeit, Kontinuität, Tradition, Bruch in der Zeit

# KRIZE, REVOLUCIJE I PONAVLJANJA KAO MODERNISTIČKE STRATEGIJE

## Sažetak

---

**Gábor BEDNANICS**

Katoličko sveučilište Eszterházy Károly

Eszterházy tér 1.

HU – 3300 Eger

gabor@bednanics.hu

---

Postoje li krize izvan modernizma ili je riječ o predodžbi ili događaju same modernosti? U očima povjesničara postojalo je više kriza koje su otvorile vrata brojnim mogućnostima za nove pothvate, a da pritom starije strategije nisu postale zastarjele. U eri postmoderne činilo se uobičajenim ismijavati ta visoko cijenjena vremenska shematska određenja, poput revolucija i kriza, koja su time gubila svoju vrijednost. Pojam „temporalnost” pokazao se kao međudjelovanje između podjela i diskontinuiteta, umjesto shvaćanja vremena kao trajnog i linearnog. No kad je oznaka „postmoderna” postala sumnjiva, različite vrste modernizama ponovno su počele dobivati na značaju. S teorijskog se stajališta korisno pozvati na problem krize u modernističkoj filozofskoj tradiciji. Filozofi poput Husserla, Adorna i Habermasa na svoj su način uveli krizu kao produktivnu mogućnost za izmjenu jednostavnog tijeka vremena. Za razliku od revolucija, krize mogu imati zajedničke elemente s prijašnjim obrascima. Tako se pokazalo da su se ponavljajući elementi onoga što je trebalo prevladati zadržavali iz ranijih razdoblja. U svom izlaganju želim istražiti mogućnost promatranja tih rascjepa u vremenu kao temeljnih struktura modernizma. Kriza, koja razdire povijesne trenutke, pomaže nam razumjeti kako se književna moderna može nositi s konkurentnim obrascima poput tradicije i inovacije, neujednačenih nastojanja i razvoja.

**Ključne riječi:** modernizam, revolucija, temporalnost, kontinuitet, tradicija, rascjep u vremenu