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In: *Moderna - avantgarda - postmoderna*. Kšicová, Danuše (editor); Pospíšil, Ivo (editor). 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2003, pp. 147-160

ISBN 8021031182

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/132611>

Access Date: 27. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

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MODERNISM AND THE CRISIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

JOLA ŠKULJ (LJUBLJANA)

The event of modernism was discussed in view of several crises. As a movement of movements with an inscribed sense of rapture, it was interpreted as an issue in the crisis of language, crisis of culture (Beebe 1973, Bradbury and McFarlane 1976, Calinescu 1977, Luft 1980), or crisis of identity (Le Rider 1990, 1993). Rejecting established notions of art, repudiating accepted values ("including those aesthetic values that kept life separate from art"), modernism was understood as "a revulsion against the limits set by rationalism" (Collier and Davies 1990:xiii). Modernism was scrutinized in terms of European unconscious (as Malcolm Bowie, knowing that the phrase is "piquantly absurd" suggested as the title of Collier and Davies' book (1990:3). The emergence of new models of mind, of changes in scientific paradigms, no doubt, bring about Freudian views of unconscious, but the modernist turn was, as far as I know, never discussed in terms of Husserl's comments on the crisis of consciousness. We can agree with Kermodé that both faces of modernism – paleo-modernism and neo-modernism – are "equally devoted to the theme of crisis" (1971:46). Behind the modernist proclamation of "an historical licence for the new" actually lies "a stimulating sense of crisis" (Kermodé 1971:40).

Modernist art and the simultaneous crisis of consciousness, as Husserl elaborated the problem later in the thirties in his well-known Vienna lectures on the crisis of European existence, were parallel historical events. We miss the point of modernist art by interpreting it only as innovative form. Behind the apparently formal strategies in the poetics of modernism one should recognize their strong existential involvement, their often-disregarded artistic commitment. Self-reflexivity in modernist art manifests the very innate character of artistic engagement. Modernism, no doubt, subjected artistic competence to scrutiny. But the self-reflexivity of modernist forms should actually be comprehended as that reorientation to existence in itself, or to being as such, which European thought in its limited version of rationalism, had completely forgotten, as Husserl reminds us in his lecture. Although there is a long list¹ of qualified studies of modernism, the logic of modernist art resists

¹ Spender (1935, 1954) pointed out "destructive" and "creative" elements of Modernism, Shattuck (1963) stereoptics of time or the stereoscopic principle, Ellmann and Feidelson (1965) "the ambiguous essence of modernity", indeterminacy, fluidity, elusiveness, Levin (1966) "double mirror, reflecting infinity", Howe (1967) among other features particularly nihilism.

traditional conceptual frameworks. Any discussion of modernism based only upon a description of modernist material will necessarily fail to embrace the very idea of various modernist achievements. Modernism in its essence represents a responsible art in the strict sense of the word. As expressed in lyrical, narrative and dramatic literature, modernist forms of involvement disclose their responsive move towards new ways of apprehending the world and the human self. Modernist art exhibits a de-centred logic or, to put it differently, truth, the self, and the factual, as modernist methods testify, are not apprehended as something identical to themselves, but as non-finalized or inconclusive entities open to otherness, always in a dialogic relation. The modernist self is defined through dialogism. The modernist self is an entity with an inscribed will to differ in itself. The Cartesian ego, as well as Western logo-centric ways of thinking, is subverted by the art of modernism. Both the logic of dialogism and the overcoming of logo-centrism open doors to a multilingual reality, as well as views of other cultures. Manifested on the background of different cultural traditions modernist art, an unfolding of artistic will in the coming world of globalization must be exceedingly heterogeneous.

The features of modernist art in poetry, novels and dramatic genres developed against the background of a "crisis of consciousness", a phrase, which should be understood in the strict Husserlian sense. In two lectures in the 1930's – in preliminary version called *Das europäische Menschentum in der Krisis der europäischen Kultur* – when modernism was more or less a *fait accompli*, Husserl thematized a problem that had been present ever since the days of the great World Exhibition in Paris (1900) as the issue of the "crisis of European existence". His explanation locates the origins of "the crisis of consciousness" in the apparent collapse of rationalism; however, it does not see "the reason for the downfall of a rational culture ... in the essence of rationalism itself, but only in its exteriorization, its absorption in 'naturalism' and 'objectivism'" (Husserl 1989:39)². According to Husserl, the history of European mind as an absorption in "naturalism" and "objectivism" should be understood as a "naïve exteriorization [of the mind]" (1989:36-37), which had, as he ascertains, "a lack of genuine rationality" as its far-reaching consequence, and was also – and this is key to modernist phenomena, because it influences their subject matter, as well as their form – the "source of what has

Kermode (1968) "an order", "hypothesis and fiction" as simulacrum of unity, Bergonzi (1968) provisional or "anti-teleological" order, Johnsen (1974) "coincidence", "partial, temporary order without totalizing", Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) the principle of incompleteness, Calinescu (1977) "modernistic experience of difference and otherness" as a principle of aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, Fokkema (1980, 1984) hypothetical nature of truth. (Cf. Škulj, 1991, 245-260).

² The English text is quoted from the web version of Quentin Lauer's translation of Husserl, published in 1965. The page numbering follows the Slovenian translation.

become for man an unbearable unclarity regarding his own existence and his infinite tasks" (1989:36). The modernist turn with its radical changes in artistic languages and the refurbishing of the poetics of its movements and currents actually began to signify a responsibility taken on by the creative mind, which, through its basic attribute, i. e. the ability to exercise self-questioning, "returns to itself from its naïve exteriorization, clinging to itself and purely to itself" (1989:37). The point of view that modernist art escaped the tradition of mimetic aesthetics is to be understood only in this sense. Modernist literature was mainly concerned with itself, and the different poetics pondered the issue of how art exists. Or, as Rée claims, "Modernism is not so much a particular style, as a particular kind of historical self-consciousness about style" (1991^b:974).

"The crisis of European existence", according to Husserl, "can end in only one of two ways: in the ruin of a Europe alienated from its rational sense of life, fallen into a barbarian hatred of spirit; or in the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism" (1989:39). The uncertainty evident in his 1930's exposé as to which of the two ways out of the crisis would prevail was no doubt due to the threatening pre-war political reality on the march, so Husserl does not forget to issue a warning that "Europe's greatest danger is weariness" (1898:39). At this point we should not forget that the same dilemma, "barbarism or spiritual rebirth", was also part of uncommonly persistent critical responses to modernist art. But at the time of Husserl's statement, in the most outstanding works of modernist art at least, such a "rebirth of Europe ... through a heroism of reason that will definitively overcome naturalism," had already happened. It was precisely this "heroism", or the critical disclosure of "its rational sense of life", that many analyses of modernist art apparently failed to see – Sheppard's included, although he himself cites the Husserl's lectures in his chapter on this period, which he describes as "the response". Instead, they only discern "the subversion of the most fundamental assumptions and conceptual models on which the liberal humanist epoch had been based" (Sheppard 1993:13). If we recognize in the different modernist poetics and in their often overlooked existential involvement, what Husserl calls the "heroism of reason that will overcome naturalism", and accordingly read the key strategy of modernist aesthetics, i.e. self-reference (in the sense of the autotelic, or what Riccomini in 1980 called the principle of the self-reflexivity of modernism) as "the phoenix of a new inner life of the spirit" (Husserl 1989:39), as art which had perceived the "crisis of consciousness" at the turn of the century, and through the adversarial actions of the creative spirit carried out its artistic battle with the "essential core" of the phenomenon "Europe" that had been manifesting itself until then "as the historical teleol-

ogy of infinite goals of reason" (Husserl 1989:39), then we may better interpret other tendencies and features of modernist poetry, novels and plays, and make better value judgments as to their historical justification. This allows us to approach the fundamentals of modernism more easily: the complexity of its manifold poetics; the not easily discernable common core behind their diversity; the conflicting issues of modernist fragmentation³; incompleteness; the re-interpreted understanding of totality as inconclusiveness; and the vast spectrum of contradictions in the poetical ideas of individual movements – e.g. non-representational tendencies, abstraction on the one hand, and "factuality", "verism", "lyrical phenomenology" (Sartre's phrase) on the other – all of which, in modernist poetry, novels and plays, are due to what Husserl implies with his phrase "the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy". It is this new understanding of totality as inconclusiveness in modernist literature (cf. Škulj 1997) that constitutes the "heroism of reason", or the reaction of the "rational sense of life" of Europeans to the collapse of rationalism, which the art of the beginning of the 20th century could perceive and express on the poetical level as existential responsibility.

In this context, one can imply Husserl's views to draw attention to another essential dimension of modernism. Not without relevance to the advance of modernist art were the implications of his statements when he himself, being aware of "a total transformation of the task of knowledge", predicted the possibility of "transcendental phenomenology" (Husserl 1989:38) as a consequent "analysis of spirit" or, in other words, as "spirit understanding itself in a really universal, really radical manner, in the form of a science whose scope is universal" (Husserl 1989:37). At the same time he put special emphasis on establishing "an entirely new scientific thinking ... in which every conceivable question, whether of being, of norm, or of so-called 'existence', finds its place" (Husserl 1989:37-38). With their own tentative sensibility and responsibility, forms of lyrical, narrative, and dramatic genres at the turn of the century had apparently already put forward questions about the meaning of their own existence among other forms of human deeds. That is, the questions modernist art raises about its own existence, about its artistic language, are simply signs of a renewed self-questioning of the human spirit, and it is this very self-questioning and the re-orientation to existence as such that one should recognize in the inflated invasion of the autotelic language in modernist poetics – a feature that, incidentally, misled many towards seeing the beginnings of the period in Baudelaire, while overlooking the fact that he had based his views on Poe and his understanding of the retrospective principle. In the autotelic poetics of modernist art one should recognize the modernist responsibility of form. In calling our attention to "precisely this lack of genu-

³ Cf. Husserl's statements about the "spiritual being [as] fragmentary" (1989:33).

ine rationality on all sides [as] the source of what has become for man an unbearable unclarity regarding his own existence and his infinite tasks" (cf. 1989:36), Husserl emphasized that the turn which came about in the 20th century – and as we can see, also in modernist art – actually signifies the rediscovered issue of existence, and also the freshly asked question of how to understand the availability of the world and ourselves, of what happens to the ideas of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" in view of the fact that "determination comes only with concrete pursuit" (1989:29). Husserl's view already brings us to the possible answers regarding modernist multi-perspectivism, the basic "collapse of a coherent idea of the self" (Rée 1991^b:975), and the modernist disclosure of the inconclusiveness of truth, which is what individual poetics of poets, writers and playwrights introduced either with restraint or with more bravado, but nevertheless with undeniable tenacity, be it in their form or their subject matter. In their consistent self-questioning, which implies research into their own specific "language" as an option for their own artistic existence, the broad variety of modernist poetics, based in a specific self-consciousness of the temporal or the historical⁴, that is, in a Baudelairean modernity, which is focused on the *presentness of the present*, were able to thematize the paradoxical issues of human existence and truth, and therefore unlock the complex questions that throughout history were dealt with by "philosophy that at any particular time is his historically actual [and as such can only mean the] more or less successful attempt to realize the guiding idea of the infinity, and thereby the totality, of truths" (Husserl 1989:29). On this factor of temporality, which the positive sciences at the turn of the 20th century also began to take into account, Husserl could write the following comment: "The spirit is essentially qualified to exercise self-knowledge, and as scientific spirit to exercise scientific self-knowledge, and over and over again" (1989:36). The key derivation Husserl produces in this context is that "then, too, the ego is no longer an isolated thing alongside other such things in a pre-given world. The serious problem of personal egos external to or alongside of each other comes to an end in favour of an intimate relation of beings in each other and for each other" (1989:37). This observation, indirectly, only indicates the specific modernist awareness regarding transitoriness and the traits of modernist corollarity or recursiveness⁵, which one can also explain by the postulates of the logic of dialogism. Accordingly, in the light of Husserl's explanations of "the European crisis [with] its roots in a mistaken rationalism" (1989:28), at least some of the five modernist features as identified by Everdell (1997) become much more evidently grounded: recursiveness and self-reference, radical subjectivity, multi-perspectivism, sta-

⁴ For Rée (1991:974) modernism is "streamlined historicism".

⁵ Instead of the concept of auto-reflexivity, Jakobson also refers to the principle of reiteration.

tistics (as in the law of large numbers or as a problem of probability) and stochastics, and discontinuity. Certainly better grounded becomes the key element of the invasion of the so-called moment of "genuine rationality" in modernist poetics, which prompted critics to identify it as an "intellectual" or cerebral art and as a certain kind of elitism.

Nietzsche already critically assessed the idea of Europe as understood by Husserl, when he claimed that European history promoted the illusion of *telos* or final causes, so that European man had his own teleology, his own purposes, goals, his volition. When Sheppard discusses the shift into modernism through Nietzsche's ideas of the "transvaluation" of all values, he pointed to its three different aspects: (1) a change in the concept of what constituted reality; (2) a change in the concept of what constituted human nature; and (3) a change in the sense of the relationship between Man and reality (cf. 1993:13-14). Already in the early modernist works of art, such implementations of historical changes were manifested and were the reason the period was described as a break with tradition, whereas shifts in the development of form and subject matter in literature during the following phases of modernism made these changes even more evident. More importantly, modernism discovered infinity or inconclusiveness in a new sense – and this, too, could be well explained in connection with Nietzschean idea of the transvaluation of all values, or understood in the context of Husserl's statement about iterativity – which is manifestly demonstrated by modernist structures, as accomplished in individual forms of literature and in their distinctive "modern" traits, with their "open form", which is in total contrast to traditional art. We must not forget, however, that Nietzsche's idea of transvaluation originated from a new focus on humanity, that is, on existence as the only true value, which could not be denied. This implies that the modernist idea of the infinite does not relate to anything unreal, idealistic, but only to what is given directly, to the factual. In this sense the modernist position was radically empirical. Therefore, modernism was able to grasp the issue of the real (and the issue of truth) only as *becoming* (Ger. *Werden*), as something inconclusive, as an endless totality, or in Husserl's formulation, as "the totality of infinite horizons" (1989:30). This also explains why in modernist representation – in each genre of literature in its own specific way – the fragment as an endless totality is the key; the compositional levels of poetry, narrative forms, and drama were thoroughly influenced, and the communicative level of art underwent a radical change towards a much more active role in the reception of modernist works on the part of the reader. To modernists, human nature too ceases to be an externalized rationality, but rather becomes radically subjective in its intentionality to the object (the given), incomplete, and fragmentary in its being. This re-defined concept of self and comprehension of the real (the

given), which are both unfinalized (inconclusive) in themselves, also affects the change in relations between Man and the real, in which because of their quality, their inherent incompleteness, no entity can be superior to the other. With modernism abolishing the option of the hierarchical relationship, never before so controversial in traditional art, every presentation of the real (the given) in modern poetry, novels or drama must be understood merely as a product of construing, as something unfinalized, as an ongoing changing relationship with factuality, always in the process of being construed and formed, always open to otherness. Factuality constitutes everything that is conveyed by the individual's consciousness, not only impressions of the outside world, but also the substance of the psyche and one's own imaginary constructs. This diverse field of the factual in turn constitutes a layer of representation that even in modernist literature cannot be denied.

The very multiform factuality of what poetry, novel or drama represent, put through different approaches and focuses under a magnifying glass of the modernist poetical self-reflexivity in modernist movements and avant-garde phenomena, enabled the diversity of modernist poetics (in terms of form and style, as well as of themes) and therefore triggered many inaccurate and wrongly deduced conclusions in literary criticism. The most obvious case represents Brechtian theatre, which – despite its origins in collage and in strategies of radical juxtaposition – many failed to recognize as representative modernist or refused to do so on ideological grounds (cf. Lukács, Szabolcsi). The reason can be found less in its "political dimension", which is an inherent form of late-modernist existential involvement, but more so in the layers of its verism. *Neue Sachlichkeit* with its modernist gestures of irony and, in painting, Balthus with his language of figurality were comparably misleading. The uncertainties regarding the late modernist art of Italian neorealism and the undecided views whether literary existentialism is part of modernism no doubt had the same ground. Lodge solved the quandary with these tendencies – which became quite numerous already in the 1920s and 1930s, after the first wave of modernism, when some interpretations identify the beginnings of social realism – with the term anti-modernism. However, Lodge did understand anti-modernist tendencies strictly as an integral part of modernism. In his views on modern poetry, effectively discussed through the concept of void transcendence, Hugo Friedrich put a hasty conclusion that the poetry of the 20th century always amounts to the same thing, to the refusal or devaluation of the objective world⁶. It is a rather unstrict worded view, irrespective of his initial comments that modernism, focusing on art as device, erases any subject matter (cf. 1971:18).

⁶ "Das Weltverhältnis der Lyrik im 20. Jahrhundert ist mehrfacher Art. Doch bringt es das stets gleiche Ergebnis hervor: Entwertung der wirklichen Welt." (Friedrich 1971⁴:196)

What redirected modernist art to suggestive meaning rather than to faithful representation, that is, to ultimate abstract form and, most radically, to presenting the evidence of the given or merely fragments, even to presenting the most commonplace elements of everyday life as a quality or attribute of the artistic or poetic (cf. ready-mades in Duchamp, Constructivist poems, the technique of collage in Dada poetry, the *Merzbau* of Kurt Schwitters, as well as elements of Brechtian plays, or in painting, the ironic portraits of Otto Dix, a representative of *Neue Sachlichkeit*), and in certain currents of modernism merely to bizarre, poetic recording of the unconscious, to crude manifestation of the subconscious? To put it differently, how to grasp the common factor behind the different modernist poetics or to explain the meaning of their poetic principles: the idea of a dry, hard image, the idea of the direct treatment of the thing, of direct perception (Imagism), the idea of expression (Expressionism), the idea of the immediate present, of dynamism, velocity, of the mechanical (Futurism), the idea of *zaum*, abstraction, artifice, construction (Constructivism) of conceptualized reality or creative reality (Cubism), the idea of neoplasticism, the idea of the art of technology, of elementary form (De Stijl), the idea of the functional in the minimalist aesthetics of the Bauhaus, the idea of randomness of dreams, the unconscious, of the automatism of words (Surrealism), the idea of unmotivated act (*l'acte gratuit*) in Gide, the idea of involuntary memory in Proust, the idea of epiphany in Joyce, of vortex in Wyndham Lewis, of "undissociated sensibility" in Eliot, the dynamic concept of truth or the dynamic conception of mind as the "principle of the internal necessity" (cf. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, 1911; his views were of key significance for modernist abstraction)? If we understand modernism as the aesthetics of transitoriness (as a re-orientation to the *presentness* of the present)⁷ and keep in mind all the implications this idea brings about through the Baudelairean re-interpretation of modernity (cf. de Man), then it is possible from the point of view of literary history to employ the term to encompass all of the poetical conceptions above. The idea of transitoriness is apparently the basis of various poetics defined by "a logic of concept" (cf. Eliot in preface to translation of *Anabase* (1930) by St. J. Perse) or – in Apollinaire's words – poetics whose art borrowed not from the *reality of sight* but from the *reality of insight* and as "an art of conception" represents "conceptualized reality or creative reality" (quoted in: Harrison and Wood 1997:182). It may seem even more complicated to explain those tendencies of the modernist movements that can be defined as non-representational. Despite the fact that the element of abstraction is highlighted, it is nevertheless possible to claim that it is about strict phenomenalism, namely about portraying reality and the given in a new way, "with great purity" (Apollinaire

⁷ See Škulj 1995.

1997:182). The reality of insight abstract art brings us is marvelously clear in its complex intertwining existence. Why can we claim that even the Cubist paintings of Picasso or Braque, or Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* as a dissociation of the ideas of things in their bizarre abundance of contradictory "unified sensibility" (Eliot's term) still imply the presentation of the potentially factual, just like Pound's Imagist haiku *In a Station of the Metro* or Arp's poems of abstract word games or a surrealist poem? Baudelairean modernity promotes the contingency of the real and of the *presentness* of the present in its pure quality of immediacy, and this is what modernism can encompass through a whole specter of its very diverse poetical principles. Modernism as self-consciousness of style, as a movement of movements concentrating on the possibilities of art, and through its complexity of poetics, self-questioning their creative potentialities, brings into focus *being* and *its ever-elusive quality*. The maze of modernism – which is interpreted by Friedrich as well as by Adorno or Benjamin through the concept of void or negative transcendence, no doubt still from a position of nostalgia for the totality of the world, a standpoint which prevents us to grasp the essence of its modernity – can be correctly comprehended only through a strict interpretation of the crisis of European consciousness that clashed against "the source of what has become for man an unbearable unclarity regarding his own existence" (Husserl 1989:36). Sheppard (1993), who also failed to articulate a more integrating view on modernism despite actually mentioning this Husserl's lecture, has grasped the essence of the period, as well as the key to the characteristics of modernist poetry, novels and dramas in nine answers: nihilism, ecstatic irrationalism, mysticism, aestheticism, leftist utopianism and rightist nostalgia, primitivism, modernolatry, irony or ambiguity, and the acceptance of anarchic plurality.

THE MODERNIST RESPONSIBILITY OF FORM

What are the consequences of the modernist turn in poetry, novels and dramas, if it represents the first signs of responsibility of a creative spirit, which through its most crucial characteristic, the ability for self-questioning, "returns to itself from its naïve exteriorization, clinging to itself and purely to itself" (Husserl 1989:37)? Why does modernist self-reflexivity manifest itself as an abstraction and as artistic autonomy or as the autotelic language of art? What is the meaning of this turn in modernism, which results in the re-examination (self-questioning) of the language, in the dominance of the poeticality or rather in a programmatic emphasis on the aesthetic (in the original sense of the Greek word *aisthesis*, of the sensuous, the evident)? Or to put it in other words, what is implied in the Husserlian shift away from "naïve exte-

riorization", in the ability to "self-question", in the return of the mind "to itself ... clinging to itself and purely to itself"? Why the modernist fragment, why the semantic dislocations of representations in poetry, and why the narrative dislocations in modernist novels (cf. V. Woolf) or plays (cf. Brecht's *A-effect* or *Verfremdungseffect*), why the repetition of the same patterns or scenes (the serial technique), or why "encyclopaedic style" (cf. Joyce's *Ulysses*)? Why the *zaum* words, why the Dadaist collage, why the chaotic and incomprehensible automatic writing of Surrealism as a "research" of the subconscious, why the "hard", "direct" images of Imagism, why the modernist tendencies "to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists" (Lyotard 1986:78)? To interpret correctly how modernism, with its focus on the *presentness* of the present and its principle of the transitoriness and the unfinalized (the principle of inconclusiveness), actually put forward the question of existence, the question of being as such, the question of "norms", one needs to interpret the direct word of the Imagists or the *zaum* word of Kruchenykh or the Surrealist automatic writing of the unconscious or what the Futurists understood with "words in freedom" (*parole in libertà*), and to recognize how – in their original, existential sense – its poeticality (gr. *poiesis* in the sense of production, of bringing something into being from nothing) and aestheticism (gr. *aisthesis* in the sense of something evident, apparent, sensuous) represent an intersection of the truth of the presented, the sudden openness of the real or the disclosing of the "factual", the unspeakable, unrepresentable, unfinalized totality or, as Lyotard puts it, "to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists", which sparkles in a special kind of lighting in the transitoriness of the present. The Imagist or Futurist image or an abstract painting or modernist serial technique presents the unrepresentable and communicates the (also linguistically) almost intangible, indefinite, elusive, but the very real to the experience of our consciousness. Or in Eliot's words: it communicates the "undivided sensibility", the "amalgam of divergent experience", the bringing into life of a "new wholeness", and is able to bring forth evocations. A unique modernist insight into the factual communicates through the mass of linguistic material of a poem or narrative (cf. Proust, Joyce) or a scenic presentation (cf. Pirandello, Brecht) the immediate transitoriness of the present, which consequently empowers our own existence to be confronted with a dislocated, in auto-reflexiveness doubled, tropological view; it renounces the exhausted universalistic standpoint, but anyhow remains close to the outline of concrete reality, to its complexity (cf. Eliot's concept of "objective correlative"). In modernism the traditional universalistic viewpoint is substituted by the point of view of the existential openness, by the view into the ongoing event of creative process; the change implies an unfinalized (inconclusive), transitory standpoint of the truth about the factual ever-coming-to-light, the

truth as *becoming*. According to Lyotard, it is the unrepresentable (or what Eliot called the "amalgam of divergent experience") that modern art tests and gives us insight into. The only way it can confront the unrepresentable is by intervening in its own form or in its own process of creating, in the materiality of the work of art and its *literariness*, in the very act of constructing itself, by making us entangled in its logos. With their specific poetical inventions of self-reflexivity, the lyrical, narrative and dramatic forms of modernism introduced the reader or the viewer to their own procedures of writing and made them confront the point of ever-redefining truth, the truth ever-coming to light from a new angle. Only in this sense, it is appropriate to apply to modernism and its concept of modernity the idea of the Baudelairean view that "poetry is sufficient to itself" (cf. "*La poésie se suffit à elle-même*" Baudelaire 1861, quoted by M. Hamburger 1972:5), or as Baudelaire writes in his essay on Gautier, that "the object of poetry is not Truth, the object of poetry is Poetry itself" (cf. "*Elle n'a pas la Vérité pour l'objet, elle n'a qu'Elle-même*", *L'Art romantique*, Paris 1923:97; also in: M. Hamburger 1972:4).

Some distinctive features of modernism manifested in lyrical, narrative and dramatic genres appear to be fundamental throughout modernist movements. Extreme density of expression and complexity of representation are the most common tendencies; concentrated meaning can be found even behind apparently scarce, but harsh words of Futurist, Dadaist and Constructivist poems or in austere qualities and ascetic practices of some of the poets. The modernist movements that promote the poetics of simplified expression (cf. Dada, Constructivism) are no less elitist and no less hermetic. The true meaning of modernist art is difficult to grasp. In discussion of its poetics, even the label of "primitivism" was quite frequently used (Howe 1967:32-33; also Sheppard 1993) and the first wave of modernist painters – with their tendencies of spatiality – were derogatively called Fauvist. But even apparently less "cerebral" works never really gave up their modernist complexity, which is due to the modernist focus on the factual, to perceiving the transitoriness of truth, its inconclusiveness, its constant changes, its fluidity. The uncertainties regarding the foundations of Imagists and Expressionists, or regarding the relations between Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and dilemmas regarding certain avant-garde movements, were also the result of the inability to grasp the true sense of modernist complexity, determined in Imagism as well as Expressionism or *Neue Sachlichkeit* or in Futurist movements through modernist self-reflexivity. Self-consciousness of modernist style is, according to Kermode, possible (1) as a de-creation or technical introversion, or (2), as ironic self-awareness of the form.

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