

Članak je primljen: 1. avgust 2013.
Revidirana verzija: 14. avgust 2013.
Prihvaćena verzija: 19. avgust 2013.
UDC: 7.038.6 ; 141.78

dr Valentina Hribar Sorčan

University of Ljubljana, Department of Philosophy
valentina.hribar-sorcan@guest.arnes.si

Art of Crisis: Modern or Postmodern?

Abstract: According to the last book of Peter V. Zima *Modern/Postmodern* (2010) modernism/modernity, postmodernism/postmodernity is once again a subject of reflection in contemporary aesthetics. It attempts to examine those concept not only in artistic, stylistic way, but also from the other points of view: historical, political, social, ideological. I would like to reveal a thesis that a distance of last decade or two we recognise that we are more and more from the spirit of postmodernism/postmodernity and that we open some problem once again that modernity had in the centre of its reflection: identity of subject, sense of existence, the feeling of crisis: the art of crisis. Does it mean a return of some points of modernism/modernity? I will try to answer to this questions by inviting to a discussion also other contemporary thinkers (Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Rancière).

Keywords: art of crisis, modernism/modernity, postmodernism/postmodernity, contemporary aesthetics;

In contemporary aesthetics, we can observe a kind of revival of concepts, like modernism and postmodernism, which try to understand a relationship between art and the spirit of time. We'll try, first, to define the concepts of modernism and postmodernism to facilitate a research of the reason of their revival. Our analysis will expose a contribution of French philosophers to the debate.

Modernism is an artistic flow that appeared as a response to realism and naturalism in art of the nineteenth century. When we talk about late modernism, we refer particularly to the arts of a first half of the twentieth century. Modernism and postmodernism are part of social, political and economic conditions within the modern and postmodern period. A scope of modern age as a period is significantly larger than a duration of modernism as an artistic flow. But there is no single position when the modern period started. From a philosophical point of view, it started from Cartesian philosophy in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or, from a political point of view, it started with the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. During the time, modern age included a romantic paradigm in the middle of the nineteenth century.

If modernism is defined as a response to realism, which represents a response to Romanticism, it can follow from that statement that modernism has nothing to do with Romanticism any more. However, romantic paradigm of thought and creativity continues to insist in modernism: it is reflected as a glorification of the inner world, as a position of writing subject who is separated from the external, hostile world (or, this one has to be strange, exotic, bizarre, fantastic); Romanticism leads to a decline of faith in transcendence, to a growth of nihilism and utopia. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his several works, criticises modern nihilism in the last part of the 19th century either as a romantic, passive nihilism, with its resignation and a tragic feeling of absurdity of life, either through active nihilism as anarchism and other ideological utopia in the twentieth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, modernism is still attached to romantic paradigm, either in its passive form, through modern literature and painting (aesthetics of sublime), either in its active form, through avant-gardes who focused on social, utopian intertwining of art and life.¹

How could we situate a postmodernism and a postmodern period? A notion of postmodern was mentioned for the first time in American literary theory and sociology at the end of the 50th and especially in the 60th of the twentieth century. In Europe, it became present at the end of the 70th, having peaked in the 80th and 90th years of the twentieth century. But some theorists, like Jürgen Habermas, never accepted the idea of postmodern epoch and therefore those of a decline of the modern epoch. Jean-François Lyotard, oppositely, inspired by American sociologist, Daniel Bell, pronounces a concept of postmodern condition (1979), especially in the epistemological sense, but not in aesthetics, where he defines a postmodernism as a modernism in an unceasing emerging state. The contrast is particularly evident when the postmodern condition is defined as the decline of great modern narratives, including a Marxist one, but, on the other hand, Lyotard points out that in the times of low-priced, eclectic kitsch, required by the global capital market, we should not forget the Marxist heritage of avant-garde and its social and critical aspect.

We are still far from achieved consensus whether the modern epoch and modernism as its flow were interrupted and exceeded by the postmodern age and postmodernism. When contemporary philosophy attempts to define a postmodern spirit of time, its pluralism and particularism, it tries to find its predecessors and initiators. Often, Nietzsche and his theory of perspectivism are mentioned, but at the same time, violent, yet very modern concepts of *Übermensch* and will to power are neglected. I would like to recall Martin Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's philosophy as remaining metaphysical. On the other hand, it's hard to accept that contemporary philosophy often disregards the contribution of Heidegger's philosophy to an emergence of the postmodern spirit of mind. Probably, Heidegger's philosophy is still paying the tax for his belief in Nazi goal.

An examination of the postmodern period has to remember a contribution of some French philosophers, especially Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other important representatives of the French postwar philosophy: Michele Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and, in the last decades, Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. It was particularly exciting to read Badiou's text "Troisième Esquisse d'un Manifeste de l'Affirmationisme" (2004) which is an upgrade of the text "The question of art in the Third Millennium", pronounced ten years ago (2001), where he attacks postmodern art. He rejects postmodern proclamations of the end of art and of metaphysics² and he's convinced that philosophy must continue to reflect its main concepts, especially a classic concept of truth. He also disapproves

¹ It is interesting that Nietzsche's warnings about dangers of nihilistic utopia, already in the two last decades of the nineteenth century, had no significant impact on avant-garde's utopia. Also, at the time of existentialism, in the 50th of the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre ignored or dismissed all warnings of Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on Stalinism.

² Alain Badiou, "Troisième Esquisse d'un Manifeste de l'Affirmationisme", in: *Circonstances 2 : Irak, foulard, Allemagne/France*, Paris, Édition Léo Scheer, 2004. 83.

of Lyotard's thesis of the postmodern decline of the idea of emancipation, because its failure would lead to a non-critical indifference. Badiou criticises a postmodern thesis of particularity: "Postmodern' is what attests to the whimsy and unlimited domination of particularity."³ With this he has in mind both the collective particularity (ethnic, linguistic, religious, sexual) and biographical appraisal of the self and its egotistic subjectivism. Badiou is bothered by the fact that contemporary art doesn't possess the critical sting in its relating to the world, which is the source of its inspiration. Art is romantically unwilling as long as it passively withdraws into sophisticated vegetation, which is none other than postmodern nihilistic delight in powerlessness. On the other hand, the numerous artists of the 20th century created true artistic configurations and they entirely renovated the thinking of the previous century: "Pessoa for poetry, Picasso for painting, Schönberg for music, Brecht for theatre, Zadkine for sculpture, Chaplin for cinema, Faulkner for fiction, Cunningham for dance..."⁴, and we could go on and on. The essence of their artistic configurations is supposed to be their rejection of Romanticism through the critical affirmation of this world. So, it's obvious that Badiou doesn't connect modernism with romantic paradigm, on the contrary, it is postmodern art that is romantic and nihilistic. What kind of art does Badiou propose for future? Art should first of all be emancipated from every particularistic approach. This project is "the modern method of a holistic affirmation of the universal."⁵ Art should turn to an anti-romantic, unphysical and impersonal attitude.

Badiou emphasises the artwork, but not its author, like Foucault, Barthes and Heidegger before him, because the author is subject to particularity. Artist is nothing than a medium of truth and its universal message, but not its cause; so that from the moment when the artwork becomes reachable, we are supposed to leave its author. The only true subject of the artistic truth is therefore the artwork. Only when art gets freed from biographical particularities, will it truly become the impersonal and disinterested creation of truth by communicating itself to everyone, to the community, and not only to a limited, particular audience. Badiou recognizes postmodernism, but, obviously, he doesn't like it.

Austrian philosopher and literary critic Peter V. Zima argues against such one-sided discussions of modernism and postmodernism, which only consider certain criteria, while others are ignored. On the other hand, some theoreticians still discuss if the modern epoch ever ended and they refuse an emergence of the postmodern epoch; accordingly, they reject the postmodernism as an artistic flow. How, then, aesthetics could define the present moment, especially since in last years, as is it clear from Badiou's view of art, we are witness of nostalgia for modernism? In political and social philosophy, as again demonstrated by Badiou, in association with Slavoj Žižek, the nostalgia for the modern ideals reintroduces the idea of communism and utopia.

Contemporary art, for example literature, doesn't follow the path, proposed by Badiou. Artists, writers, poets still insist on their particularism, their works even show the increasing importance of autobiography (with a social, political and cultural framework or not), even though it is often fictional, when writers choose the first person narrative only for giving as an impression that they offer us their own life experiences. Similarly, we can watch more and more documentary films and reportage photography. It is to avoid the naïve realism that a very real source of narrative ensures its authenticity and an artistic value, without thinking of the fact that any approach to reality, especially to the past, is a result of one's subjective interpretation. However, we really have more faith to the first person narrative and to the so-called real experience.

3 Ibid.

⁴ Alain Badiou, "Troisième Esquisse d'un Manifeste de l'Affirmationnisme"..., op. cit. 94.

⁵ Ibid. 96.

Autobiographical trends in art and literature are also present in contemporary philosophical debates which try to understand a self and a personal identity, for ex. in works of Antonio Damasio. A great attention is given also to some philosophers from the past who expressed sincerely their own experiences of life, connected to their vocation for philosophy (from Augustine, Pascal, Montaigne, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre, etc.). Contemporary affinity to the autobiographical approach has reaffirmed some authors, as Albert Camus, for instance, who described the times of the crisis provoked around the Second World War through the feeling of absurdity and revolt in a very personal way. When reading him, we hope that his solutions will help us to resolve our own crisis. Contemporary approach to philosophy often seems to treat it as a life manual. There is no doubt that such a reading is too simplifying. However, it is worth to consider a symbolic return to the past by means of philosophers from the past periods, like Camus's modernity. In such a way, modernity remains in us also in postmodern epoch.

Literatura:

- Badiou, Alain, *Circonstances 2 : Irak, foulard, Allemagne/France*, Paris, Édition Léo Scheer, 2004.
- Badiou, Alain, *Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique*, Paris, Seuil, 1998.
- Melehy, Hassan, *Writing Cogito, Montaigne, Descartes and the Institution of the Modern Subject*, New York, State University of New York, 1997.
- Ramond, Charles, *Une vie humaine, Récits biographiques et anthropologie philosophique*, Pessac, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008.
- Woodward, Ashley, *Nihilism in Postmodernity*, Colorado, The Davies Group, Publishers Aurora, 2009.
- Zima, Peter V., *Modern/Postmodern*, London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

Umetnost krize: moderna ili postmoderna?

Apstrakt: Prema poslednjoj objavljenoj knjizi Petera V. Zime, *Moderno/Postmoderno* (2010), modernizam/modernost, postmodernizam/postmodernost su ponovo postali problemi refleksije savremene estetičke misli. Ovi koncepti se posmatraju ne samo sa umetničkog i stilskog aspekta, nego i iz drugih uglova tumačenja: istorijskog, političkog, sociološkog, ideološkog. Nastojacu da dokažem tezu da sa distance od decenju ili dve, uvidamo da smo sve dalje i dalje od duha postmodernizma/postmodernosti, te da ponovo otvaramo određene probleme koje je modernost imala u centru svoje refleksije: identitet subjekta, smisao egzistencije, osećaj krize: umetnost krize. Da li to znači i povratak određenih odlika modernizma/modernosti? Pokušacu da odgovorim na ova pitanja pozivajući se na diskusije i nekih drugih savremenih misilaca (Žana-Lika Nansija, Alena Badijua i Žaka Ransijea).

Ključne reči: umetnost krize, modernizam/modernost, postmodernizam/postmodernost, savremena estetika;