

Modernism or modernity?

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One of the most complex concept of philosophical and aesthetic thinking, the term *modern* presents a dense semantic complexity, due to its vectorial functionality. The polysemy of the term is amplified by the “confusion, false synonymies, and ambiguities”¹ between the derivatives that make up the lexical family (for instance, between *modernist*, *modernism*, *modernity*).

Certainly, the essential element in the definition of the term *modern* is the *temporal* perspective considered in historically, socially, philosophically, scientifically and technically, artistically and culturally. Thus, the *Explanatory Dictionary of Romanian Language* defines the notion in terms of time², with brief references to social (according to nowadays’ fashion) and cultural issues (*modern language or education that preferably attaches importance to humanities*). A broader approach of the concept is reflected in the *Le Petit Robert* dictionary, which highlights the antinomy between the term *modern* and *ancient, old*, both in terms of historical development, and (especially) in arts and culture³. In the famous dispute, known as *La querelle entre les antiques et les modernes* (within the French Academy of the late seventeenth century), initiated by Charles Perrault⁴ (who, praising the age of Louis XIV, advocates a new art

¹ Adrian Marino, MODERN, MODERNISM, MODERNITY (Bucharest: Ed. for Universal Literature, 1969), p. 36.

² EXPLANATORY DICTIONARY OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE, Second Edition (Bucharest: Romanian Academy - "Iorgu Iordan" Institute of Linguistics, Encyclopedic Universe Publishing House, 1996), p. 645: *modern* - belonging to times close to the speaker, recent, actual, according to the current progress; which belongs to an era following antiquity. ◇ Modern history - a) (past) era of the late Middle Ages between 1453 (the fall of Constantinople) and the 1789 French Revolution; b) (actual) period between the 1789 French Revolution and the 1918 Union. *Modern language* - living language, spoken by a population actually present. ◆ (On education), which attaches importance preferably to humanities. ◆ According to the fashion of the day.

³ *Le Petit Robert: modern* - contemporary with the person who speaks or relatively recent. I. 1 - actual, contemporary [...], 2 - benefiting from technical and scientific progress [...], 3 - **(especially in the arts) that is designed, made according to contemporary rules and practices; corresponding to present taste and sensibility** [...], 4 - (referring to a person) which takes account of developments in his field, of the period of time one belongs to. [...]. II (as opposed to the terms of *old, antique*) 1 – which belongs to an era following Antiquity [...], 2 - (hist.) modern age (and by extension) modern history [...], 3 - **modern education, which includes sciences and spoken languages (as opposed to the classical ones)**. [...] **Modern Languages.**

⁴ Perrault, Charles (1628-1703), French writer, author of *The Stories of My Mother, the Goose*. On 27 January 1687 he presented at the French Academy the poem of *Louis the*

adapted to contemporaneity and new art forms) and Boileau⁵ (supporter of Greek and Roman Antiquity as an expression of artistic perfection), worsens the antithetical aspect of the two aesthetic models – one resulted from the respect of ancient art forms and regulations, as a standard of the “absolute beauty” and one of imaginative and creative freedom, of inspired, lively and contemporary art. From this perspective, the dialectical relationship between *old*, *ancient* and *modern*, the innovative elements in the aesthetic thinking of each era constitute the *modern element*, which ensures the transition to the next epoch where it will generalize (representing the dominant trait), crystallize and become routine (by excessive practice), being replaced by a new *modern element*. Relevant to this respect is Fontenelle's statement⁶ (in *Digressions sur les anciens et les modernes*, 1688) according to which “after a long series of centuries the moderns will become contemporaries of Greeks and Latins”⁷. On the other hand, according to Adrian Marino „classics are *classics* because they are *modern*, permanent, present, assimilated to one or other side of contemporary sensibility”⁸. Of the two axioms there can be inferred the “eternal variable” character of the historic dimension, “subject to continuing shifting boundaries”, of the term *modern*⁹. Referring to the term *contemporary*, Encarta Encyclopedia, assimilates it to that of *modern* which is extrapolated from its original meaning (historical) towards social, scientific, artistic and cultural areas¹⁰. One of the most complete and precise meanings of the term, considered in its three facets (historical, socio-cultural and dialectical), belongs to the Larousse Universal Encyclopedia¹¹.

Great's Century, in which he disputes the model value of Antiquity, considering the age of Louis XIV as ideal.

⁵ Nicolas Boileau, also known as Despréaux Boileau (1636-1711), poet, writer and French critic, leading theorist of aesthetics in classical literature, in the seventeenth century.

⁶ Fontenelle, Berdard Le Bouyeri de (1657-1757), mathematician, philosopher and French writer, member of *Académie française*, *Académie des sciences*, *Académie des inscriptions*, *Académie de Rouen*.

⁷ Cf Adrian Marino, op. cit., p. 34.

⁸ id., p. 35.

⁹ id., p. 42.

¹⁰ http://fr.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_2016018503/moderne.html: *modern* (adj.) - 1 - representing contemporary trends (modern art), 2 - latest developments in a domain (modern medicine), 3 - recent or that has recent features synonymous with contemporary (modern society), 4 - who fully integrates his time (modern parents), 5 - HIST. - A period which lasts from late Renaissance to the French Revolution (modern history), 6 - LING. - Which reflects contemporary use of language (modern meaning of a word). *Modern* (nominal phrase) - ART - contemporary style. *Modern* (noun) - 1 - ART - artist or writer who, in his work, represents the values of his time, 2 - person representing tastes and mores of his era.

¹¹ <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/#larousse/51821/11/moderne>: *modern* - belonging to present or to a relatively recent era, enjoying the latest progress, made according to contemporary techniques, rules and taste (as opposed to *old*), that entirely adapts to

Summarizing, we can determine the functionality of the term *modern* compared to its dialectical and opposable report with terms as *old*, *classic*, in all aspects of social, scientific and technical, cultural, artistic, religious, in historical eras subsequent to the Middle Ages. Derived from medieval Latin - *modernus* (now, actual, today), and from Classical Latin - *modo* (recent), the term generates inflexion forms with subtly differentiated semantics, such as **modernism** and **modernity**.

Thus according to Encarta Encyclopedia¹² **modernism** may mean “innovation that represents or exceeds contemporary trends” (e.g. *work of excessive modernism*, sometimes with pejorative meaning), or (in art) "creative impulse to break up with the classical and to reach a freer expression (e.g. *choreographic revolutions of modernism*). Similar meanings are also found in Larousse Encyclopedia¹³ (“nature of what is extremely modern” – e.g. *city of an emphasized modernism*, or “taste, search of what is modern, actual, contemporary, as opposed to traditionalism”), or in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language*¹⁴.

On the other hand, *modernism* refers to a literary and cultural movement. Thus, the term is applied to the Spanish-American literary movement of the late nineteenth century¹⁵ (under Parnassian and symbolist influence), and also to the Brazilian one, appeared in Sao Paulo in the early twentieth century (1922). This movement rejects European academism, being focused on themes from nature or from national culture. Similar to Latin American *modernism*, *Catalan modernism* (which includes many artistic movements of the late nineteenth century, such as symbolism, decadence, or *Art Nouveau*) is a cultural trend that lasted from 1811 (year in which the first international exhibition takes place in

innovations of the time (which belongs to his time), which opposes the term: *classic* (in humanistic education - classical languages, modern languages). It is used to describe the current status of a language (as opposed to *classic*, *old*), art forms that are the most innovative in every age especially in the twentieth century (Cubism, abstract art, functional architecture, etc.), and even all arts sometimes (in the West) from the Renaissance. It also describes recent parts (addition, rehabilitation, reconstruction, generally in the nineteenth and twentieth century) of a building, a sculpture, a piece of old art. Modern History – refers to the three centuries which were so-called "classics" from Renaissance to the late eighteenth century. Modern Movement – in architecture - synonymous to *international style*.

¹² http://fr.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_2016018503/moderne.html

¹³ <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/#larousse/51821/11/modernism>

¹⁴ EXPLANATORY DICTIONARY OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE, op.cit., p. 645: *modernism* - 1 – attribute of being modern, character of what is modern: modern attitude: (exaggerated) preference towards everything that is new, modern. 2 - current or trend in twentieth-century art or literature that denies tradition and sustains new creation principles.

¹⁵ Cf <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/#larousse/51821/11/modernisme>

Barcelona, city that becomes the cultural center of this trend) to 1911 (once with the disappearance of Joan Maragall, its representative poet). Marked by anti-traditionalism and “profound individualism”¹⁶, the current aims at the revival of Catalan culture, with the intention of raising it to the level of other European cultures. The most significant aspects of this current are *Art Nouveau* style in architecture and art, symbolism, decadence, *Parnassianism* and *Nitzschean vitalism* (life force, the will to) in literature and philosophy, as well as transforming and upgrading traditional Catalan music.

Therefore, the two trends, Latin American and Catalan *Modernisms*, reject European academism and reconsiders themes of nature, national cultures, individualism, by integrating the current in the universal cultural contemporariness.

Likewise, in the same line with the formal upgrading and inclusion within the social and cultural contemporariness, *modernism* also appears in religion as a “Christian movement which proposes a new interpretation of traditional beliefs and doctrines, in agreement with modern exegesis” (*Le Petit Robert*) or as a “body of doctrines and trends with the aim of renewing theology, exegesis, social doctrine and Church leadership role to reconcile them with what is considered to be contemporary necessities” (Larousse Encyclopedia). In theology *modernism* is an intellectual movement generated by social changes of the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The 1848 Revolutions (after which Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary are unified, and the Papacy loses temporarily its state autonomy), the period between the two world wars (1870 and 1914, during which the conflict between the three state empires emphasizes) and the appearance (in 1859) of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (which moved creationist theory) are events that lead through the conceptual conflict with traditional doctrines and spiritual education, to the *modernist crisis* of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In fact, in 1864 Pope Pius IX published the *Syllabus*¹⁷, a list of 80 "modern errors", in which he attacks *liberalism* in all its forms, and thus ideas emerging modern spirit of the age (political democracy, liberalism and socialism in economics, scientific and technical rationality, freedom of culture).

It is to be noted that from the multiplicity of cultural and aesthetic movements, considered within the whole historical evolution, the papacy is involved in only two of them: the *Baroque* and *Modernism*. If *Baroque* is sustained and developed by the church, being defined as an “art of Catholicism” (the Council of Trent, 1545-1563), due to its arts “dramatic” style that promote

¹⁶ Cf <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernisme>

¹⁷ Cf <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllabus>

the implementation of religious ideas with a “direct and emotional involvement”¹⁸, papacy has a rather reserved, even stiff, attitude towards the phenomenon of *modernism*, considered as a danger to public order or authority of the Catholic Church. Starting with the pontificate of Pius IX and culminating in that of Pius the Tenth (1903-1914), the papacy condemns *modernism*, which hampers research into religion. Thus modernist crisis arises from the conflict between “traditional and fixed” dogmas ecclesiastical education, intersected by “modern science and its positivist methods”¹⁹.

Moreover, the intrinsic meaning of *modernism* contains both the idea of *new*, *innovative*, and the denial (and therefore cancellation) values considered *classical*, *traditional*, *academic*. Originally appeared as a positivist, progressive attitude, modernism degenerates through an excessive and perpetual experimentation and by exacerbating a negative attitude towards these values of the past, in aesthetics of *ugliness*, *non value*, *amorphous* and *expressionless*. The continuous search of adapting modern ideas and values to the „spirit of the time” gives a specific dynamics to *modernism*, which becomes an active and aggressive creation principle, nurturing shocking effects “spectacular novelty”, stupefaction (which, incidentally, is “one of the earlier modernist principles” - after Giambattista Marino²⁰ “he poet’s goal is to marvel”)²¹. Relevant in this respect is Apollinaire's²² statement that “new is surprise only”²³. Thus, the continuous experiment generates a lack of stylistic consistency and the *modernist* attitude, defined by harshness, extreme individualism, exorbitance, theatricality, through challenging classical values and growing fashion and snobbery, and especially through affected, precious expression, can be determined as a pseudo-modernity.

Considered by Larousse Encyclopedia as synonymous to *modernism*, **modernity** is explained by other bibliographic sources in a vaguer and thus more comprehensive way. Thus, *Romanian Explanatory Dictionary* defines *modernity* as „the nature of what is modern”, *Le Petit Robert* dictionary nuances, adding “especially in art”, and Encarta Encyclopedia considers *modernity* as “all contemporary trends” or “specificity of elements that outrun contemporary art rules”. In fact, *modernity* includes the essence of both the idea of *modern* and

¹⁸ Cf <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baroque>

¹⁹ Cf <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/nom-commun-nom/modernisme/7081>

²⁰ Giambattista Marino, (1569-1625), poet of the Italian Baroque period.

²¹ Cf Adrian Marino, op. cit., p. 107.

²² Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), French writer and poet of Polish origin, poet and theorist of the *Esprit Nouveau*, precursor of surrealism.

²³ Cf. <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/personnage/Apollinaire/105814>

that of *modernism*, with flexible time limits, defining the *nature of what is modern*, but the term itself appears much later. Although the concept of *modernity* appears once the work of Balzac²⁴ (Zola says that „the title of the modern epic, set in France, is *Human Comedy* and its author is Balzac”), the term is “invented” by Chateaubriand. It was first used time in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, published between 1849-1850. The semantics of the term is nearly equivalent to that of its linguistic source (the frame-term of *modern*), because “its main constituent is the meaning of *unrepeatable time*”²⁵. For Baudelaire, the concept of *modernity* is the continuous search for the beauty of the ephemeral, which, preserved and revealed by the artwork remains in eternity. He argues in his essay *On Modernity* (from the collection of essays *The Modern Life Painter*, XIII, 1863), that *modernity* is “the fugitive, the transitory, the unpredictable, the half art, the other half being the eternal, the immutable”. The artist’s aspiration to capture the ephemeral, to offer classical values to the snapshot captured by the artwork sets clear bounds between *modernity* and *modernism*, an attitude specified by denying classical values. Adrian Marino admirably expresses the essence of *modernity*, in his study *Modern, Modernism, Modernity*: “To rise to the universal, through transfiguration and creative crystallization the modern ephemeral - this is the real and profound modernity of art and literature and, at the same time, the technique of achieving this *modernity*”²⁶. From this perspective, *modernity* is an essential principle of creation, with universality value both historically and conceptually.

If the term *modern* is framework-concept and *modernism* - an attitude marked by exaggerations and experimentations, *modernity* is both a creative concept and a stylistic era that encompasses post-romantic aesthetic trends. In fact, modernity has some similitudes with Romanticism, as the assertion of extreme individuality, “the reaction against the fundamental claims of classicism”²⁷, freedom of imagination or subjectivism. Matei Calinescu believes that in terms of the denial of traditional values, the aesthetic *modernity* appears from the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, „disguised as *romantism*”²⁸. Placed, conceptually, within the interface between the two aesthetic models, Baudelaire emerges from the classical model, by including *modernity* as a poetic reason. The beauty of *ugliness* (*Les fleurs du mal*), violence and sensuality (*Une Martyre*), ecstasy and horror (*Mon coeur mis à*

²⁴ Cf http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honor%C3%A9_de_Balzac # Balzac_inventeur_du_roman_moderne

²⁵ Matei Calinescu, FIVE FACES OF MODERNITY (Iasi: Polirom, 2005), p. 39.

²⁶ Adrian Marino, op. cit., p. 118.

²⁷ Matei Calinescu, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁸ *ibid.*

*nu*²⁹), protest apology³⁰ and discovery of modern sensibility³¹, these shocking juxtapositions, make Baudelaire one of the precursors of *symbolism* and *surrealism*, and will be reflected in the aesthetics of twentieth-century *modernity*.

Treated as a stylistic period, *modernity* in literature and arts starts in the early nineteenth century and continues until the second half of the twentieth century, reaching its peak expression by the *Dada movement* (Tristan Tzara) and *abstract art* (Wassily Kandinsky). In music, however, the split with tradition is not so abrupt and permanent, for musical *modernity* in its stylistic diversity has different and sometimes contrary aesthetic features, developing on the triad *tonal music – modal music - atonal music*. The generic title of "modern music" refers to the music of the first half of the twentieth century, that of the second half of the century being called "contemporary music". The multitude of experimentation and diversity of aesthetic guidelines lead to a lack of stylistic unity, which determines the regrouping of composers of different genres (such as Debussy, *The Group of the Six*, Stravinsky, Bartók, Richard Strauss, Enescu, Ravel, Sibelius, Schönberg, etc.) under the name of "modern composers". According to J.J. Nattiez "the music of the twentieth century represented a profound transformation, not only because of stylistic changes it underwent from Debussy to Boulez (symbolically speaking) in terms of classical tonality, but also because the *long road* of musical modernity has not yet reached the stability of a new universal musical language"³². Essentially, musical *modernity* primarily involves the separation of the expressive semantics of the stress-relaxation arc, generated by harmonic and tonal functionality, and also the renouncement at thematic elements which is a fundamental creation principle in tonal music.

In the late nineteenth century, the complexity of tonal-harmonic relationships increases in proportion to the introduction and development of the chromatic total, consecrated in instrumental music by Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms, and in opera by Richard Wagner. The tonal-harmonic magnetism is

²⁹ CF. http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Baudelaire - in *Mon coeur mis à nu*, in 1864, Baudelaire says: "As a child, I felt in my heart two contradictory feelings: ecstasy and horror of life."

³⁰ In the introduction to the three poems of *Paris Saloon* from 1846, Baudelaire wrote that "an artist's first concern is to replace *man* with *nature* and to protest against it."

³¹ In the 1859 Saloon, he asserts that "the beautiful is always bizarre (strange)".

³² Jean-Jacques Nattiez, „Comment raconter le XXe siècle”, in: MUSIQUES - UNE ENCYCLOPÉDIE POUR LE XXIÈME SIÈCLE, 1, sous la direction de Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Ed. Actes sud, 2003), p. 48.

firstly dissipated by the *ambiguity that suspends the need for ties* (according to Pascal Bentoiu)³³ and then by the transfiguration of the whole harmonic concept. The four directions of the evolution of modern harmonic concept (modalism, the chord transfer from harmonic to melodic, atonalism and polytonality), having a generative nature, corresponded either to experimental steps, or to stylistic influences, or to defining features (but not exclusivists) in the creation of modern composers. Schönberg, for instance, begins as a romantic composer following the tradition of German music (being a great admirer of Wagner, Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart and Bach) and then becomes the “father” of dodecaphonism and Serialism, to return to tonal writing in the Chamber Symphony no. 2 (started in 1906 and completed in 1939). In addition, he states (referring to tonal writing) that “there are still so many beautiful things to be written in *C Major*”^{34 34}. Also, the work of Debussy, essentially impressionist, includes all other aspects (modalism, polytonality and even atonality). A conclusive example is Stravinsky’s work structured into three periods - Russian (marked by modal folk), neoclassical and serialist periods.

The dissipation of tonal-harmonic magnetism (an intrinsic component of the classical and romantic music) is associated (in the modern era) to the transfiguration of two other creation principles characteristic to tonal music – *thematic elements* and *extensive developments* leading to the reformulation of architectural principles.

Original, rhythmic and architectural melodic compositions, characteristic to the new aesthetics, coexist in the modern era with classical, romantic and baroque elements, exactly as the harmonic concept. Thus in music, unlike in literature and fine arts, the break with tradition and academism is not complete and does not occur aggressively. Moreover, the stylistic plurality that exists in this period is experienced or adopted by most composers, so that we cannot certainly assert exclusive affiliation of a particular composer to a certain trend. On the other hand, one of the defining features of *modernity* is a reaction against existing values. In music, each trend either opposes an anterior or a parallel one. Thus, Neoclassicism (and Impressionism) appears as a reaction against Romanticism, and includes composers such as Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Ravel, Hindemith, Reger, Bartok, but also Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud who belong to the *Group of the Six*. Expressionism which includes composers of the Second *Viennese School*, but is also found in Ravel's or Stravinsky’s works, is an attitude against Impressionism (as the *Group of the Six*). Therefore Ravel has both impressionist and expressionist influences, while Eric Satie (joining the

³³ Pascal Bentoiu, *MUSICAL THINKING* (Bucharest: Music Publishing House, 1975), pp. 126-134.

³⁴ Cf. http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Sch%C3%B6nberg.

Group of the Six) presents impressionist influences. The coexistence of different, even opposable trends in a composer's work proves once again the flexibility of aesthetic thinking regarding musical *modernity*, imbued in a stylistic and conceptual plurality.

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Abstract

If the term *modern* is framework-concept and *modernism* - an attitude marked by exaggerations and experimentations, *modernity* is both a creative concept and a stylistic era that encompasses post-romantic aesthetic trends. Adrian Marino admirably expresses the essence of *modernity*, in his study *Modern, Modernism, Modernity*: "To rise to the universal, through transfiguration and creative crystallization the modern ephemeral - this is the real and profound modernity of art and literature and, at the same time, the technique of achieving this *modernity*". Essentially, musical *modernity* primarily involves the separation of the expressive semantics of the stress-relaxation arc, generated by harmonic and tonal functionality, and also the renouncement at thematic elements which is a fundamental creation principle in tonal music.