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Reading Joyce: Broch's Concept of Classical Modernism

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In the contemporary debate in the humanities and particularly in cultural analysis there is a strong accent on space, in both a direct and a metaphorical sense.¹ We might refer, for example, to communities that live in different geographic but in the same symbolic spaces. Alternatively, we might also speak about authors who live in the same physical territory but in another cultural space.

Discussion of modernity and modernism, similarly, tends to invoke the categories of time. Although we may live in a global world and a common space, we do not necessarily live in the same time. It is possible that we, the modern, postmodern or hypermodern people live in different times and in different narratives that refer to different times.

I think we have to integrate the debates on modernism and modernity, which were so prominent until the 1990s, into our contemporary discussions on literature and culture. This provides the frame-work for my lecture, a re-reading of Broch's essay on James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is, also in the intention of this central commentary on a famous book to interpret it as a standard work of literary modernism. With this text Broch is part of a German speaking discourse including writers, philosophers and critics as Ernst Bloch, Annette Kolb, Karl Radek, Klaus Mann, Bert Brecht, Ernst Robert Curtius, Ivan Goll, Valeriu Marcu, Willy Haas and even C. G. Jung.²

As Paul Michael Lützeler has outlined, Broch's text has a very interesting history. It goes back to a lecture Broch gave in the further education centre in Wien-Ottakring, a proletarian district of Vienna. It would be interesting to know the make-up of the audience that visited this quite complicated lecture. The lecture was given to mark Joyce's 50th birthday in 1932, but Broch published the text in a wider version only four years later, when he himself became 50. The Austrian was a well-respected, although not extremely successful modernist

¹ Cf Jörg Dünne/ Stephan Günzel /eds.), *Raumtheorie. Grundlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkam 2006, 2Bde.

² Cf Wilhelm Flüger(ed), *Dokumente zur Rezeption von James Joyce im deutschen Sprachbereich zu Lebzeiten des Autors*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2000 (represents 277 articles, essays and reviews); Geert Lermout/ Wim Van Mirlo (eds.), *The Recepton of James Joyce in Europe*; Vol. 1: Germany, Northern and East Central Europe, New York. Thoemmes Continuum 2004, 3- 88 with contributions of Geert Lermout, Robert Weninger and Wolfgang Wicht.

writer, the author of a trilogy that analyses the breakdown of the pre-modern patriarchal system in the Prussian-German Empire in 1888, - 1903 - 1918.

I do not propose to examine the plot of these novels, nor indeed the question of whether Broch's interpretation of Joyce's extraordinary novel is correct or –better – convincing and consistent. To be honest, I am not sure; I have chosen to take another approach to this famous work. It is quite clear that Joyce's example encouraged Broch to become a modernist writer himself, and also to pursue studies of Viennese Positivism with the ambition of reinstalling philosophy as a strict scientific discipline, displaying a modernist attitude comparable with Husserl's completely different project. Thus, Broch's interpretation of Joyce is not an interpretation as such but a legitimation of his own writing. Reading Joyce enables Broch to overcome his own doubts in relation to literature and its possibilities. It is no coincidence that the *Schlafwandler-Trilogie* (Sleepwalkers Trilogy) which made Hermann Broch a well-respected international author was published in the same publishing house as the first German version of *Ulysses*. With the decision, to publish in the same publishing house and suggesting a common advertising for *Ulysses* and his trilogy, Broch constitutes a specific relationship to the work of the famous older Irish colleague and claimed to be a coequal writer.

Joyce is not seen as a concurrent by the Austrian novelist, which has no fear of Joyce's influence in his work. So his literature does not compete with the Irish author. There is no need for a symbolic murder of the fore-runner in the sense Harold Bloom has laid out in his book about the fear of or for influence.³ Broch is not hindered but stimulated by the influence of Joyce and is well able to free himself from the figure of the literary father or of the elder brother.

Although the similarities between Broch's work and Joyce's work are not immediately obvious, Broch's work clearly displays the influence of Joyce. The nature of the subject matter, the narrative structure and the plot of the Sleepwalker trilogy or *Vergil's Death* and *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* differ a lot. It is true that both Broch and Joyce use internal monologues, and that Broch was fascinated by the idea of writing a novel with a minimal time of action in the manner of *Ulysses*. The Austrian also developed a maximal approach to storytelling as we see in the Vergil novels, as we read the testimonies of the meditations and feelings of the famous author in the last days and hours before his death. By contrast with Joyce's work, however, Broch's novels are not characterised by linguistic or generic hybridity, and fail to refer to oral or popular linguistic forms, to traditional folklore, or to the atmosphere of everyday life. The shared characteristics of Joyce and Broch are the ambitious nature of their intellectual gestures, their great knowledge of cultural heritage and their

³ Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford University Press US, 1997.

capacity to create a sublime play of intertextuality. As we shall see later, these are qualities that are mentioned by Broch himself.

As mentioned before, Broch does not feel castrated by the masterpiece of the four year older Irish novelist, but rather by the nature of modern life itself. What encourages Broch is Joyce's ability to make something possible that had become so problematic in modern times: the creation of an artwork that could symbolize its own epoch.

Although he does not mention Hegel, Broch's essay is concerned with the question formulated in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, of whether literature can still be a medium of truth amidst a modern world that is characterized by the loss of a center and – more- by a total vacuum behind the plurality and diversity of modernity. One should read the essay on James Joyce together with a couple of Bloch's other essays, such as the early essays on Culture and on zeitgeist and myth. As we will see, both zeitgeist and myth are of great importance to the discussion of Joyce. But also the reference to his reflections on kitsch may be illustrative, because kitsch as an aesthetic and cultural >effect< in its double variation – *l'art pour l'art* and pure entertainment – is the counterpart of those art works Broch interprets as representative for the modern époque.

In my close reading, I will concentrate only on a meta-level, namely on the images of modernity and modernism Broch depicts with regard to Joyce in a way that Walter Benjamin, the Marxist converter, has irritated so much. Benjamin criticizes Broch's subjective method and also his analogies between modern techniques in writing, painting and music and also with the new paradigms of Einstein's physics.⁴

⁴ Walter Benjamin, Hermann Broch, James Joyce und die Gegenwart. Rede zu Joyces 50. Geburtstag, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, III; Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1991, 509f: „Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Werk von James Joyce wird durch die Schrift Brochs wohl nur wenig gefördert werden. So zutreffend einzelne Umschreibungen sind, mit denen sie auf dies Werk Bezug nimmt, so bestätigt sie doch die alte Wahrheit, daß bloßer Enthusiasmus umso weniger Einsicht gewährleistet, je mehr Bedeutung sein Gegenstand hat. B[roch] erblickt im »Ulysses« von Joyce das »Totalitätskunstwerk« unserer Zeit. Er sucht, dieses Buch als »zeitgerecht« zu erweisen. Diesem Versuch dienen eine Reihe mehr oder minder glücklicher Einfälle, die das Verfahren von Joyce dem Leser durch Analogien in der Malerei (Futurismus), der Physik (Relativitätstheorie), der Seelenkunde (Psychoanalyse) verständlich zu machen bestrebt sind. Es spielt der richtige Gedanke hinein, daß »das Dichterische in die Sphäre der Erkenntnis zu heben«, eine gerade unserer Zeit zufallende Aufgabe sei. Hätte sich der Verf[asser] die Mühe genommen, die technische Position von Joyce innerhalb der heutigen Romanproduktion zu bestimmen, so hätte er einen Beitrag zur Lösung dieser Aufgabe geleistet. Er hat sich dagegen vielfach mit Improvisationen begnügt, wie sie z. B. der Vergleich zwischen Joyce und Picasso darstellt. Das wird teilweise in der beiläufigen Veranlassung dieser Schrift begründet sein. Es kommt hinzu, daß die methodische Schulung des Autors für die Behandlung seines schwierigen Gegenstandes nicht ausreicht. Seine Definition der totalitätserfassenden Dichtung, »die über jeder empirischen oder sozialen Bedingtheit steht und für die es gleichgültig ist, ob der Mensch in einer feudalen, in einer bürgerlichen oder in einer proletarischen Zeit lebt«, beweist das.“

This paper will focus on the text of 1936, not on the lecture of 1932. But the time-aspect is quite interesting. In 1932, the motive for giving the lecture on Joyce is seemingly the 50th birthday of the Irish author, but in 1936 the reason for the publication has changed. Although the text has the title *James Joyce und die Gegenwart. Rede zu Joyces 50. Geburtstag*, the “speech” starts with self-reflections of an author who is confronted with the fact that he is now 50 and has to legitimate his work with regard to the following generation of the 25 years old writers. In the following, I will paraphrase Broch’s argumentation.

In the second, very long and difficult sentence of the essay, Broch identifies the connection between his own work and that of Joyce: both are well known writers of an older generation, who face pressure from succeeding generations of writers. But the deeper problem behind is another, namely the question, if their works will remain representative for the mind of their époque; there is the claim that they are not only trendy with regard to the surface of contemporary time, to the zeitgeist in the ocean of time. Broch makes extensive use from oceanic metaphors of time. With other words already in 1936 he is making the point, if something is possible what we call classical modernism today. Moreover, he poses the question, if this new classicism is really possible or if modernity may be characterized by the impossibility of creating representative works that are capable of representing (“imaging”) the “historical reality” (“historische Realität”), that means here the deep structure of modern Western culture and society.

The term “historical reality” is namely not understood in a positivist or empirical sense, but in a more or less Platonic way. The question is whether it is possible to write a modern novel capable of creating a “Wirklichkeitstotalität” (a totality of reality) in which all the myriad forms of everyday life experiences are concentrated in what Broch calls “concrete reality” (a potentially Hegelian phrase). Joyce is an exemplary author in this regard, insofar as *Ulysses* describes the everyday life of a city over one single day. 16 hours in 1200 hundred pages, 75 pages for one hour. (SL 1, 70)

What makes Broch’s essays and novels so interesting and symptomatic, is the way they combine both conservative and progressive ideological patterns. Quite clearly, Broch’s statement of the value-implosion, which dates back to the time of his first essay on Culture (1908) is genuine conservative including the idea that in the Middle Ages there was a symbolic power centre that made it possible to generate representative art-works. Value implosion also means that there is no longer a reliable and binding central system in culture which is accepted and internalized by all its members.

Broch’s polemical reaction to Adolf Loos’ manifesto “Ornament und Verbrechen” (“Ornament and Crime”) takes issue with Loos’ reductive rationalism and with the *l’art pour l’art* of the belle époque. (13) He argues that art has always been the sexuality of Culture, because the sexual moment in life involves an increased acceptance of life (19), but also

states that in the contemporary époque, this sexual *elan vital* has come to an end. Modern culture can be described in this pessimism of culture by exhaustion. It has lost its primary symbolic energy and is not able to develop a new binding and authoritative value system as it was the case in pre-modern Christianity.

Literature and the arts are seen in Broch's later essay as the media of representing the reality of an époque as a whole ("Wirklichkeitstotalität"). With regard to modern times, the author denies the possibility of an internal vision of self-representation in modern times, because it is understood as one of the historical époques of value-implosion. There is, as I have worked out in another essay, Broch's work bears the influence of the post-Nietzschean philosopher Oswald Spengler, who in his work *The Decline of Occident* uses a mechanistic four-phase-model (spring-summer-autumn-winter) to analyze culture, arguing that every single culture passes through these four phases. Broch's argumentation, however, differs from that of Spengler, because for Broch the decline of Western world is linked to the crisis of binding values, but the structure, the dramatic and radical tragic plot-construction (in the sense of Hayden White's rhetorical narratology) is nearly the same. It is for example evident, that Broch's option for human rights and democracy cannot be legitimate by his conservative cultural critics, because the acknowledgment of a an open and pluralistic world without this kind of a central value system Broch has in mind, is precondition of human rights. Therefore he will try to legitimate it later ex negative, from the metaphysical horizon of what we call today Shoah as the absolute negative.

But Broch makes an interesting modification which opens the way to a more >progressive< understanding of modern arts. In contrast to many other cultural conservatives there is no damnation of modern culture in Broch's work. This is why his interpretation of *Ulysses* is so extraordinarily important. In époques of value-implosion, art and literature that represents the whole of a culture in an empathic sense is no longer possible, at least in a >natural> or >naturalistic< way. It means that a traditional way of representation ("imaging") of the social and cultural reality is no longer possible.

So, there are two principal possibilities in and for aesthetic modernism. It claims to be >classical< under circumstances in which possibility of creating a mimetic image of the époque is no longer possible. It opens new doors for a non-naturalistic and non-positivistic gesture of arts and literature. The first option of modernism is therefore creating an image of the époque that is no longer connected with naturalism and traditional mimesis. The second option is the symbolic work on the experience of a permanent state of "organische Unbekanntheit" (organic strangeness). In the époque of value-implosion, the artist must wait until his or her time becomes visible in its totality from outside. Only a literary work, which entails this experience of "organic strangeness", can claim to be the representative symbol of an époque. Modernist literature as it is represented by Joyce, Musil, Thomas Mann, and Broch himself, fulfills this enormous quality in a paradoxical way by referring to

the impossibility of traditional representation. The mirror is broken. In a further neologism, Broch names this high pretension in the essay on Joyce “zeitgerecht” (it is the direct contrast to “fashionable”), which is in line with time, but crucially, is not up to date, the pivotal criterion in Broch’s formulation of being a classical modernist.

With regard to the idea of “organic strangeness”, Broch creates another neologism: “vorausseilende Realität” (reality hurrying ahead). The work of such authors and artists as Beethoven and Goethe is seen as both a mirror and a symbol of this effect; this is – in Broch’s eyes – the very reason why neither Goethe’s nor Beethoven’s late work has been understood by their contemporaries. With regard to the passage of generations, it means that the importance of authors as Joyce and Broch is revealed exactly at the threshold of the generational change. This argument is a high pretense that goes hand in hand with his permanent doubt because of this central problem: a world characterised by permanent value-fragmentation must renounce its total understanding by the art-work explicitly and therefore cannot be represented. This problem is linked with the question of the very possibility of literature, and of a literature which is a medium of historical truth, symbol and mirror.

As I have suggested, Broch does not refer directly to Hegel, but it is quite evident that here we enter a discourse that can best be characterized by the formula *death of literature*. In Hegel, this prognosis was based on the idea of the end of history in a dramatic sense. In Broch it is connected with a theory of values and a tragic philosophy of history, the decline of Western culture, which undergoes a dramatic implosion and fragmentation of its key symbolic issues.⁵ The Austrian author mentions and appreciates not only the anti-mimetic and anti-naturalistic aspects of Joyce, but also praises Joyce’s complicated apparatus of representation, the nearly rational yet simultaneously esoteric elements of his great novel and finally – in this sense *Ulysses* foreshadows Bakhtin⁶ - the polyphony of a work with ten languages and idiolects, but Broch also states that poetry in Joyce becomes more and more absurd. *Ulysses* is seen, in this respect, as the last grand literary gesture, in which poetry carries itself to its own grave. This is because the death of literature takes place most emphatically in the case of poetry itself.

Broch’s essay is full of paradoxes and it seems to be – I only mention two other authors dealing with the kernel of classical modernism, namely Jakob Taubes and Octavio Paz – , that modernism can only be adequately understood in its paradox structure. Broch mentions the hypertrophic capacity of expression which symbolizes in the same way the incapacity of a world that is damned to symbolic muteness; behind diversity there is emptiness and silence.

⁵ „Doch wird damit nicht eben auch schon ersichtlich, daß in einer Epoche der Wertauflösung jegliche Kunst ihre Daseinsberechtigung verliert? Ist das, was den bildenden Künsten widerfahren ist, nicht auch Schicksal der Dichtung?“ (SL 1, 82)

⁶ Michail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays*. Austin/Texas Univ. Press 1981.

He also refers to the successful non-mimetic representation of the modern world, that goes hand in hand with hostility against imagining, which one could interpret as a hidden renaissance of the Christian element of hostility against images and pictures, the bilderverbot (image ban) (Taubes).

In Broch's essay, Joyce's oeuvre is characterized by the longitudinal section, by amalgamation, by the heterogeneity ("hybridity") and mix of genres, styles and idioms, by the longing for simultaneity; and on the transversal section by an inter-textual procedure that is esoteric and allegoric. Here Joyce's use of myth comes into play, when Broch argues that the wandering of the protagonist Bloom through Dublin is at once an odyssey and a masquerade which repeats the journey of the antique sufferer in all its parts and stations. But for Broch, who is clearly an attentive reader of Stuart Gilbert's commentary on Joyce⁷, *Ulysses* also includes rich symbolic material about the history of Ireland, about the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Age and a significant amount of cosmogony and esoteric issues.

This interpretation fits neatly with Broch's idea that the modern novel is the heir of myth and its literary genre the epopee, firstly because of its narrative and secondly – more importantly, because of the novel's totalizing function of endowing meaning. It is quite clear that Broch's thinking about myth is part of a specific German and Central-European discourse. The fight for myth, in this formulation, is a battle between right and left. In the 1920s the liberal and progressive approach is best encapsulated by the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, whose books and theories Broch has carefully studied. Following the German tradition of Idealism, especially as it was advanced by Schelling, myth in Cassirer is not seen as an inferior stage of knowledge but as an independent symbolic form giving people a unique access to the world – as do science, language and art too. Each of these main symbolic forms creates an independent access to reality, and as such they are incompatible with each other. In his text on myth, Broch argues that modern literature is the heir of myth and its symbolic validity. The question in regard to Joyce is therefore to what extent his work can contribute to a new myth, the myth of the modern world.

In *Geist und Zeitgeist* Broch evokes the necessity of a new myth that would be a myth of human existence as such, a myth of nature and its human-divine phenomenality. This myth would be the salvation not only of poetry and its eternal worth, but would also be a sign of mercy and consolation, because it would be a sign of belief, of a new junction of values which is necessary to bring the bloody fragmentation of values to an end. Broch adds that this myth does not yet exist.⁸

⁷ Stuart Gilbert, *Ulysses. A Study*, London: Faber & Faber 1930.

⁸ Broch SL 2, 197: „Gäbe es diesen Mythos, er wäre nicht nur die Rettung der Dichtung und ihrer Ewigkeitsgeltung, er wäre ein Zeichen der Gnade, er wäre ein Zeichen des Trostes, denn er wäre ein Zeichen des Glaubens und eines neuen Wertzusammenflusses, jenes Zusammenflusses, der notwendig ist, um der blutigen Wertzersplitterung ein Ende zu bereiten.“

In the essay from 1934 Broch clearly differentiates his position from the anti-democratic right-wing movements such as German *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) or French >Populisme<. What he has in mind, instead, is a new myth that would overcome relativism, the muteness of skepticism and a scientific positivism, and would be at the same time an answer to fascist and national-socialist myths. New myth is seen here as a grand and binding narrative after Enlightenment.

Although Broch criticises Romanticism repeatedly, his longing for a new great and fundamental post-scientific narrative bears evident similarities to historical German Romanticism and its idea of a new myth to overcome the social and symbolic division of the developing modern society. Octavio Paz has characterized occidental Modernism by at least two central aspects, on one hand its tradition of rupture and – on the other hand – its longing to return to another time, the time before political and economic modernity: namely, the time of myth. Literary modernism is to some extent in opposition to the political and social constellations of modernity. As Paz points out, the longing within modernism for another >authentic< time goes hand in hand with the idea of reconciling human being with nature. This attitude is constitutive for Western and later for non-Western modernism at least in the four decades of the twentieth century.⁹ The work on myth – to quote the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg¹⁰ – and by extension, on European and non-European symbolic material, becomes a fragile centre of reference and a rich resource for modernist art and poetry.

Evidently, Broch might be identified with the narrative movement of European modernism that includes such authors as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Paul Valéry or Fernando Pessoa. What is specific to Broch, however, is that in his formulation, myth is seen as the fundament for and legitimation of a newly reconstructed and binding value system. Broch, in other words, is not a proponent of a “revolutionary past as a masquerade for future” (Paz)¹¹, but is rather interested in myth as a source for a metaphysical and ethical fundament of values. It is not a myth of reason as in the first *Systemprogramm* of German Idealism; it is a myth of a new ethos.

The work on and the fight for myth, however, is a common discourse in which all the actors and representatives of classical modernism at least in the German speaking field took part. It is an uncomfortable but irrefutable fact that also the ideological proponents of Fascism and radical nationalism are intimately bound up with this discourse. For this reason, Broch tries to maintain a distance from all the positions of the right camp. He articulates this effort through two arguments: firstly, he argues that myth will not come on command, and

⁹ Octavio Paz, *Die andere Zeit der Dichtung*, Frankfurt/Main. Suhrkamp 1989. 55 (chapter 2)

¹⁰ Hans Blumenberg, *Die Arbeit am Mythos*, Frankfurt/Main. Suhrkamp 1979.

¹¹ Paz, *ibid.*

secondly, he denies the anti-modernist attitudes of the earth and soil movements. Neither Oedipus nor Faust, he points out, were practical farmers actually.

Broch is not alone in identifying a circle in the cultural crisis. On the one hand, the creation of a new common myth needs literature and the arts as a medium, but on the other hand, literature and the arts cannot survive without the connection to myth.

My reference to Faust and Oedipus just now is quite illustrative. This example also constitutes a reference to Goethe and Freud. To some extent, the fight for Goethe between right and left or liberal is also a fight for the interpretation of the new common narrative that grounds in myth. Psychoanalysis, however, is only a great narrative for one side. It is unacceptable for all conservative or revolutionary conservatives. It is interesting that Broch, who himself underwent a psychoanalytical therapy that opened the door for his becoming a writer, does not conceive of psychoanalysis as a new myth of modern man and woman.

Having drawn on the example of Faust, Broch does not discuss the importance of the ancient Oedipus for modern people, but instead seeks comparable examples in modernist literature. Broch thus goes on to evoke the new concept of the mystic wanderer Jakob in Thomas Mann and the mystic wanderer in Joyce's *Ulysses*. In Broch's argumentation, neither of these novels entails a real new myth. Broch praises Thomas Mann's psychology and Joyce's symbolic power. However, Leopold Bloom, the man with a typical Austrian Christian name and a Jewish-Hungarian background¹², the relativist and nihilist, is never a mythic configuration, because he lacks consolation and religion. Whereas Mann's humanistic position remains defensive, Joyce, by contrast, is compared with a military metaphor: "Brückenkopf" "bridgehead".¹³

Broch's statement suggests that Joyce is an author, who is attacking. He reads Joyce as the author who is capable of demonstrating the deep crisis within modern culture and the total vacuum at its heart in the same way as his Austrian counterpart. Joyce's novel that refers to a central occidental myth (the Odyssee) is seen at the threshold between the empty symbolic world in modern times and a new myth. But Joyce is not seen as the poet who will create and constitute this new narrative after the emptiness of modernity.

There is a clear difference between Joyce's and Broch's work on myth. While Joyce uses mythic material as a symbolic >slide< and intertextual material, Broch is preoccupied in his mountain-novel *Die Verzauberung* (*The Enchantment*) with the political story of an attempt to reinstall archaic blood and soil myths in the alpine periphery of a modern society. Broch's *Virgil*-novel is also, however, focused on the topic of myth, in its consideration of the moment when the famous Roman poet decides to burn his Aeneas because the mythic story

¹² Meinhard Rauchenstienr, Leopold Bloom – ein echter Österreicher Der Standard/Album 12th of June 2009.

¹³ SL 2, 197f

he has created serves to legitimate the dictatorial power of the Roman Empire . This indicates a certain contradiction in Broch: in his essayistic writings he postulates the necessity of a new myth, while in his literary work he warns of the precarious aspects of a myth that might work hand in hand with authoritarian and totalitarian powers.

It is a consequence of his concept of myth that for Broch the meaningful is the result of mirroring and symbolizing.¹⁴ And the so-called original and real can be at the beginning or at the end of the mirroring series. This sounds quite similar to Lacan and implies the doubt that the real and the very beginning can be ever found. Broch does not explain his two central categories, mirror and symbol, but it is quite evident that he understands both in a platonic sense and with reference to the discourse on myth discussed above. In my interpretation, myth is seen here as the explicit narrative form of symbolizing and mirroring.

Following Broch's programmatic concept of modernism, built upon the fundament of his reading of Joyce, one can argue that it diverges into two different directions. On the one hand, the reader of *Ulysses* may focus on all those elements within the novel that confirm its author's ambition to create modernist literature as a modern impossible myth about a world in fragmentation. Joyce is seen, in this interpretation, as a post- and hyper-naturalistic writer, in whose work all the heterogeneous elements are fit together in an act of concentration. (SL, 70) On the other hand *Ulysses* entails on the level of the protagonists (Bloom, Dedalus, Molly, which together constitute a unit in Broch's interpretation) all the elements of the value-implosion that is so problematic for Joyce's Austrian colleague and reader: the return of primitivism and animalistic muteness of human beings, nihilism, an emphasis on irony, and an explicit rhetoric of disgust with regard to rationality and to contemporary culture. Speaking with Freud, this is the manifestation of an "*Unbehagen in der Kultur*", discomfort in civilization.¹⁵ All these moments refer to a break-through of a kind of irrationalism that is for Broch symptomatic of the crisis of culture. As he will work out later in his post-Freudian theory on crowds and their delusion, this kind of irrationalism means the inability to integrate irrational elements of human existence in a consistent symbolic and rational form.¹⁶ What is wrong with irrationalism as such is not the irrational and unconscious, but the lack of a systematic symbolism.

For Broch, Joyce's novel is the evidence of all these moments of cultural crisis, each of which is inherent in the structure of the novel. The novel is at the same time a symbolic format that makes all these critical symptoms explicit. *Ulysses* is the symbolic work on modern culture. It

¹⁴ „Denn alles Sinnhafte entsteht in Spiegelung und Symbol, und das Ursprüngliche und Wirkliche kann ebensowohl am Anfang wie am Ende der Spiegelreihe stehen.“ (SL 1, 72)

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur und andere Schriften*, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer 1994.

¹⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *The Architecture of Modern Culture. Towards an Narrative Cultural Theory*, New York: De Gruyter 2012, 173-203.

is characterised, therefore, by the dominance of the acoustic element over language, and by a symbolic machinery in perpetual movement and fluctuation. The novel is no longer stable. It has no stable place. What disappears in the self-image of modernism is not time, but space.

Broch's concept of modern thinking and modernist arts and literature is integrative. In his interpretation of Joyce's famous novel, therefore, he refers to music and to fine arts from Impressionism to Picasso, whom Broch admires a lot, to modern physics and to psychoanalysis. Freud's theory offers a new departure in this field, the fascinating world of the unconscious that is such an important issue in modernist literature, whether in *Ulysses* or in the *Sleepwalkers*. Broch also sees Einstein's new theory as a part of modern culture. As Paul Michael Lützeler has pointed out, Broch makes use of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in his abandonment of the idea of a reliable objective observer. Einstein's theory contains the idea to link time and space in a totally new way as two aspects of one complex issue. So Einstein's concept is wandering into another context. The space-time-raft is a metaphor for the radical relativity of modern times and life.

Broch mentions the disappearing of the object in painting since Impressionism and the atonality in modern classical music. All these new phenomena in modern arts and in modern sciences are highly productive manifestations of the implosion and decline of a symbolic world with a clear centre and a common and binding value-system. Following Broch's idea that a writer has the capacity to speed up reality, one could argue for the continuing importance of Broch's text, primarily because it makes a rupture that is constitutive of a form of modernity in which we live until today, but also because it leads us beyond the pathos and the hope of classical modernism. Broch did not believe in a symbolic world that was fragmented and decentralized, a world in plurality, a cosmos in fragments. He had, instead, a clear understanding that this situation provokes the danger of collective irrationalism. These social changes took place in Broch's life-time and led to the development of human rights –as a social and liberal political thinker, Broch was part of this discourse.

A further characteristic of modern novels stakes a claim for the symbolic representation of >historical reality<. Broch does not make use of Musil's formula of *Essayism* (which is paradoxical or at least ironic because it implies in the *ism* a strong totalizing and systematic effort that is neutralized by the idea of essayistic writing and thinking). As the breaking in of theory and sciences into literature and writing, essayism¹⁷ implies an ambivalent phenomenon. It undermines the traditional close form of writing (as is the case especially in the third volume of the *Sleepwalkers* Trilogy), it destroys the simple form of linear

¹⁷ Cf. Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *Erfahrung und Experiment. Studien zu Theorie und Geschichte des Essayismus*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1995.

storytelling; but it demonstrates at the same time the pretention of modernist literature to be a medium of truth, and to mirror and represent >reality< in a pathetic sense.

In an interesting passage of his text, Broch compares André Gide and James Joyce, arguing that Gide integrates modern scientific discourses on the manifest semantic level, while in contrast, science in the work of his Irish counterpart is part of the complex aesthetical procedure of the novel and of its narrative syntax. Using science in literature is thus a symptom of the crisis in the arts in the era of value-implosion and at once an ambitious attempt to defend the claim of literature to be a serious symbolic discipline / creative medium? In another part of the text Broch argues that the integration of science into literature seems to constitute a form of "*Zeitgerechtheit*" which relates only to science and does not need a literary form of representation.

For Broch, there is, however, no doubt that literature which claims to be more pretentious than kitsch must have a claim for general trans-social knowledge and cognition, something that cannot be articulated by single academic disciplines. Following Goethe, this function is more or less holistic or integrative. With a side glance to Schelling, one could say that poetry is an intellectual view (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) which is concentrated on the concrete.

When literature, which denies being simple entertainment, has such a huge responsibility and enormous cultural function, it becomes clear that this kind of literature must be ethically constituted. Without this ethical input, which may not be mixed with morality, literature no longer has any importance or validity. Therefore, the poet is not allowed to write as he or she simply wants any longer. The most important regulation of modern writers is to be the conscience of a society and/or culture. This is an opinion he shares with Hannah Arendt, who had a correspondence with Broch and has written a couple of hymnal articles about his work.

What Broch had in mind is aesthetic ethics. All the complex aesthetic methods in Joyce are in this interpretation not the consequence of *l'art pour l'art*, but the rather of the gigantic pretense of writing a novel as a representative symbolic format that is able to work out the often invisible experiences of modern human being beyond the cultural and historical differences in time and space. One might argue, however, that Dublin, in the days of *Ulysses* a post-imperial but peripheral place, delivered very specific observers and observations. In this sense, Joyce may have anticipated the idea, familiar today, that modernity is a cultural macro-phenomenon, which can be better seen and described later but also from a liminal perspective. We do not have only to wait; we must get out of the central places. This is to some extent the topic of *Virgil's Death*.

I want to close with a short observation about the structure of Broch's essay, which I hope to have shown is much more than a portrait of his famous Irish contemporary and colleague. Following Hayden White's narrative tropology, one could describe this as a text with a strong

mechanistic argumentation, and with a clear tragic gesture that is never broken by irony and satire. Generally speaking, what is attractive in Broch is his honesty, his unflagging efforts to understand modernity and modernism. His essay is a theoretical and literary odyssey, an unceasing attempt to find a way out of the crisis that defines modernity. Ideologically, Broch's essay is polyvalent, encompassing conservative, radical and, on the meta-political level, also liberal tendencies. I do not think that Broch can be described as a lonesome traveller with those narrative and argumentative attitudes. These traits belong to the kernel of European modernism.

What is specific to Broch and what makes his case so stimulating is the minimal but important difference to others theorists of modern literature and culture, his strong attitudes when it comes to big words, his deep philosophical approach the tragic attitude, the progressive conservatism or conservative progressivity. Broch describes the modernist novel of James Joyce using similar categories as Mikhail Bakhtin (such as heterogeneity, plurality, simultaneity), but these manifold characteristics of Joyce's novel are not a problem for Russian literary theory but rather represent the openness of a more or less global modern culture. In many aspects, Broch shares Adorno's pessimism, as he also does to some extent with that of Benjamin. Broch is, however, not a hidden Marxist Gnostic in the same way that Adorno is, who suffers in the hell of modernity because he finds himself in a completely wrong world. As the war-metaphors in the *Zeitgeist* essay from 1934 make clear, there is a moment of hope and offensive gesture that brings him to the conclusion to fight for a new myth on the one side, for human rights on the other. And in contrast to nearly all Marxists and post-Marxists, who only want to talk about social interests, he insists on the necessity of sharing common values that are in the centre of a phenomenon that is so prominent at the moment: Culture/culture.

The overriding rhetorical trope behind the text is, in my view, one of metonymy, although there is an interesting romantic longing for an organic world of the synecdoche, in which all single elements are part of the whole. This does not imply, as it would in a Marxist reading, socialism, which is a functional social mechanism but a socially reliable, more or less organic world with a central binding value system: St. Augustine instead of Marx. Broch knew that he did not live in this world and had few hopes that Western human beings would enter it soon. Broch makes an interesting reference to Ernst Bloch, praising the German heretical Marxist as one of the most important philosophers of his époque, because Bloch – in contrast to Freud, who discovered the power of the past – recognized the power of future.