The commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Ch. Baudelaire's death is yet another reminder that his conception must not be excluded from interpretations of different conceptions of modernity.

In his text "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire views modernity as a property of modern life itself and a new subject of artistic endeavour. To a painter of modern life, these properties relate to conceptions of the New, naivete, which becomes a conscious goal of artistic production. We also find this in later texts by W. Benjamin. The issue is not beauty alone, but the novelty of the present, the properties that are occasional, temporal.

Art consists partly of the conditional and the relative, but its other half is the eternal. This other half is not the utopian dimension focusing on the future but on the past, on the eternal. The painter has the special role of the observer, Flaneur, the philosopher who is the painter of the moment. At the same time, he is the one continuously searching for modernity, who discovers and alone successfully releases the beauty of modern life's triviality. The power to create the new is the power of the weakness to understand all in the light of novelty, the painter is the centre of the world as a mirror before modern life and the crowds of the metropolis.

He frees the modern aesthetics from the timeless past, not replacing it with a timeless present; the aesthetic reveals the barbarism of the civilization. W. Benjamin will also regard cultural products as products of barbarism. Habermas takes a different approach from the Baudelaire's and Benjamin's. He addresses the concept of time and its significance for modern aesthetics. We are dealing here with aesthetic modernism; and the modernity itself is understood on several levels.

To Habermas, modernity expresses the spontaneous actuality of that which appears as the new in the spirit of the times and the novelty of the styles that follow; a conception of time exists, defined particularly in the avant-garde which is open to shock, the breach into the unknown. This cult of the new is followed by an anticipation of the future, and the concept of time itself is an experience of a discontinued everyday life.

The conception of a discontinued reality acknowledges the concept of film montage, notably described by Ernst Bloch. Namely, the very concept of history tends to an entirety determined by the future. Yet, Habermas has at the same time a relation to the timeless, almost classical (just as Weber, too, believes that science is susceptible to becoming obsolete, but art is not.)
Modernity expressed through the aesthetic area is based on Max Weber and his definition of the cultural modernity that assumes a modern distinction between the previously inseparable spheres of science, art and morality. Thus is possible to separate the aesthetic sphere from other aspects of life.

Unlike Habermas, Simmel – for example – does not base his theory of modernity primarily on M. Weber but to a much larger extent on Baudleaire, and Benjamin in his *Pasagenwerk* relies more on Simmel than Weber. Simmel's work *The Philosophy of Money* is also an aesthetic theory, because the totality can only be understood aesthetically. Modernity is the totality of fragmentary directions and subject to serious maladies.

In his essay on Rodin, Simmel claims that Rodin embodies the path to the new monumentality, the monumentality of mobility. According to Simmel, it is a work of art that provides insights into modernity, but modernity itself is based on the monetary economy.

The modernity as a whole continues to intensify its theoretical and political self-questioning. Within the concept of rationalization as the modernization in the Modern Age, numerous conceptions cease to provide answers to questions of communal life, solidarity and social boundaries. The crisis of the present – and the crisis of culture – are not exclusive concerns of postmodernity, but have been present in discussions since the beginning of the 20th century. For around fifteen years, we have been witnessing a recontextualization of modern practical philosophy in general, and the increasingly larger demands on philosophy in particular. Ethical discussions focus on ethics of virtue (as opposed to ethics of duty) and ethics of happiness, going back to questions raised in premodernity, by – for example – stoicists, or Aristotle, thus questioning the universal paradigms of praxis in modernity. We are not dealing within forgetfulness of modernity here, but with the fact that the search for anthropological foundations of traditional ethics established the need for new approaches to questions occurring as problems in modernity.

We observe the same in the understanding of the praxis of modernity and aestheticizing elements found in the very foundations of modern mythology, above all the concept of autonomy. On the other hand, there is also the need to correct rationalistic and theoretical one-idealness of morality – and not just morality, but the Cartesian dualism in general. From various conceptions of modernity I now wish to single out a different one, a conception that is yet to receive proper recognition.

The reflection on imagination played a prominent role in the foundation of modernity. In his theory of history, Vico is introduced as a forerunner in this area of thinking, all too often without proper recognition by the history of philosophy. The discussion about the significance of Vico’s philosophy opens the possibility to raise the issue of rethinking modernity.

In problematizing the concept of imagination and determining the place of such thought in history and the present-day state of discussions, and equally so in investigating the possibilities of art theories, the aesthetic insights of Wolfgang Welsch may come across as especially interesting.

Welsch claims that the philosophical relevancy of the aesthetic reflection and its applied social function have increased – starting from the assumption that today, the aesthetic
conception is capable of understanding reality in a special way. In other words, Welsch believes that the modern thought, starting with Kant, realizes that the foundations of what one calls reality are in fact fictional in nature.

Reality is increasingly being constituted as “aesthetic”, not “realistic”. Thus the aesthetics loses its character as a special discipline and becomes a common medium to understanding reality on which the present-day meaning of aesthetic conception is based.

Furthermore, I find that Welsch rightly states that the metaphysical conception has always been stirred by the aesthetic. The idealistic and the romantic conception have sought the completion of man and the world in the sphere of the aesthetic and only through the aesthetic have they found it possible to rise up to the state of the complete humanity. The foundation of the modernity is thus closely linked with the thesis that a philosophy of the spirit must be an aesthetic philosophy, since the great act of the mind is by its nature an aesthetic act.

The metaphysical conception bears a signature of an unacceptably coercive society; the aesthetics becomes the banner of freedom. This is the aesthetical dream upon which the modernity was founded.

The path to salvation, which had been metaphysically constructed in the past, was reformulated as the aim to reach the apex of human potentials, to develop an individual into the universal human being and the society into a state governed by the aesthetics.

This aesthetic absolutism of the modernity never came to its fulfilment and ultimately underwent fragmentation. The aesthetic conception, as referred to by Welsch, is not a reflection upon an object, but strikes at its own core of thinking; it is the aesthetic, not the aestheticists’ thought, and Welsch attributes it to prominent modern thinkers: Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Vattimo, Kamper, Sloterdijk, Goodman, Rorth, Fayerabend. In the arc from Kant to the present-day questions about imagination and art, those questions often play the central role within the intraphilosophical horizon.

The aesthetic dream upon which the modernity was founded, Welsch tells us, is most closely linked with the status that the notion of imagination has in the modernity. What will be of interest to us, here, is pointing out a different tradition, beside the classic German idealism and the understanding of imagination in G. Vico’s philosophy, and thus the possibility of modernity’s foundation in upon a different tradition.

The spiritual landscape in the 1920s Italy was determined by Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile in the tradition of Bertrando Spavente’s thought from the end of the 19th century. In the work della filosofia italiana nelle sui relazioni con filozofia europea (Bari, 1908), Spaventa argues that the Italian philosophical thought did not perish under the Inquisition, but developed in free lands and free spirits – in its new homeland, Germany. Thus, the true pupils of Bruno, Vanani, Campanella nor Vico are not the Italian philosophers, but Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel. The development of the German thought is free, independent and critical. The development of the Italian thought, on the other hand, is restrained, precipitate and dogmatic.

Vico was introduced into the 20th century (later also neglected) discussion by Benedetto Croce (outside and later is I. Berlin to mention) who also encouraged Windelband to finally include Vico in his History of Philosophy, after omitting him from earlier editions. Vico was brought to international attention after the 300th anniversary of his birth in 1968. Along the
lines of Heidegger and Husserl from the work “Crisis”, Ernesto Grassi dealt with the subject of Vico, emphasizing the significance of the priority of imagination as the basis for Vico’s philosophical relevance today. In the 90s, Marc Lilla distinguished himself as an original and relevant author on the subject of joke interpretation through his work “G.B. Vico. The Making of an Anti-Modern”, and this question arising from the “Vico-misunderstanding” will be of particular interest: What is modernity?

In contrast to Descartes and his predicate dualism, Ernesto Grassi seeks in Vico's philosophy the seeds of modern thought, the figurative thought, which refers to and reveals the space where being is manifested. In the wake of Heidegger's ontological differentiation, “Grassi expands Vico's conception of INGENIUM, which he sees as having roots in the ancients and in the Renaissance, as the ability of the mind to originate connections that are most fundamentally expressed in the metaphor”. (D. Verene) Vico said that man originally thought in GENERI FANTASTICI, UNIVERSALI FANTASTICI rather than in rational concepts.

“The modern metaphysics of scientific rationality provided, according to Grassi, only a temporarily stabilizing centre. Because it implicitly neglected the question of human interaction, and the imaginative language needed by human beings in communication, and the imaginative language needed by human beings in communications, modern scientific rationality was bound to degenerate as a guiding centre. Contemporary life is the dissolution of modern metaphysics, [...]” (M. Heim, Grassis Experiment).

In the 20th century, Ernst Bloch interprets art as an allegorical image of hope's desires that by its nature receives the “Utopian function.” Following Schiller, who unambiguously relates the concept of Utopia with art, Bloch is the one attempting to (to put Marcuse as a side note) establish the Utopian aesthetics of pre-appearance.

“The landscape of hope, even in a terrifying vision, is rather the aesthetic omega: Hegel called, in utopian-realistic fashion, human identity in the other, in the driving alteritas. This is the same as the goal-definition by virtue of the symbol, in contrast to the allegory which as identity relation in the other, expressed by what is other, is a path-definition. Art in its path (with regard to unity and universality, which is ultimately only one in so far as it is humane), it remains indebted to the symbolic. And, as art, in both immanently reflects if necessary the distance from what is right and, with other Objects immanently driven to the end, in a pre-appearance that has become positively possible, risks a Paradiso.”(The Principle of Hope II).

Since in modernity Utopia of the aesthetic is discernible from Utopian contents which art itself carries by its form, the status of Utopia today becomes an issue; or better yet, the status of its most distinguished representative from the previous century, Ernst Bloch.

In Germany, interpretations of Bloch have often gone from dogmatism within his circle to as far as the praise he received as a figure of integration during Two Germanies and the situation today, when his work Spuren is (deservedly) given prominence and read at Grammar Schools, but the rest of his works are neither discussed nor re-published. What's more, the official history of the University of Tübingen, where Bloch held a honorary chair, portrays him as a philosopher of moderate significance, almost in the sense that there was some "Merchenonkel", some "old chap telling fairytales." The history of reception of Bloch in Germany – including East Germany – is intriguing, and I personally have qualms about Habermas's interpretation of Bloch as a "Marxist Schelling", or the thesis that the "philosophy of nature" forms the "nature of Bloch's philosophy."
Gianni Vattimo provided a more substantial interpretation of Bloch, which rightfully emphasizes *The Spirit of Utopia* over the *Principle of Hope*. He recently presented it at the Third Mediterranean Congress of Aesthetics in Portorož, and it has been already present in his work *The End of Modernity*, in the chapter on the crisis of humanism.

Indeed, when writing *The Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch was also influenced by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, but primarily by expressionism. Scholars take Marx into serious consideration, but it is questionable whether Bloch really had a thorough understanding of Marx at the time of the writing. *The Principle of Hope* mentions dialectical and historical materialism more extensively, Marx is more frequently quoted, but Gajo Petrović, the most prominent Zagreber representative of the Praxis group, calls our attention to the fact that, if we leave out the cliches, we are left with a clear and noteworthy conception; in other words, to arrive at what is original in this work, we must look past its terminology.

Vattimo claims that *The Spirit of Utopia* is one of the philosophical works of the 20th century that have gone the farthest in the exploration of "the positive" behind the apparently dehumanizing aspects of the new existential conditions in a technological world. It proceeds that its author is a thinker of the "radical" crisis of humanism, although this view becomes questionable in the light of the more directly adopted elements of the Hegelian-Marxist tradition.

According to Vattimo, the consciousness of the new possibilities of existence available in the technological world has been progressively resolved through a new universal raise of the contents of humanism, which must be actualized by a revolution. Since *The Spirit of Utopia* is above all a philosophy of expressionism, it naturally follows that the conception of understanding art is extremely significant.

Gajo Petrović, who, as a philosopher of praxis, comes from a position of deep understanding and attempting to unite Marx and Heidegger, asserts that "The area of politics isn't the most suitable one to elaborate the basic tenets of my philosophy. I believe that man is "essentially" a free, creative being of praxis, and this possibility is best actualized through art. Danko Grlić wrote splendidly about this, and it is my fault to have neglected such elaboration. But it's not a matter of principle, rather respect."

Regarding "politics", it has assumed an exceptionally significant role in the modern self-alienated society, making the criticism of political alienation one of the primary concerns of the criticism of man's self-alienation and the establishment of the genuinely free community of genuinely free human personalities.

What I wish to emphasize is that the interpretation of man as a being of praxis must again and again be revisited in the context of addressing the concept of modernity and, very importantly, the role of art interpretation in its construction. This naturally concerns Bloch's philosophy to the extent that the problem cannot be addressed today adequately without referring to papers by former professors of aesthetics: Gianni Vattimo (especially for his excellent insight into Nietzsche and Heidegger) and Wolfgang Welsch (to distinguish the assumptions of modernity and postmodernity). The elucidation of the concept of modernity, its assumptions, limitations and uncompleteness in the broadest sense represents the true horizon of thought by which one should address Bloch, as well as the relations between modernity and utopia.
In his book *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in the Age of Apathy* (NY, 1999) Russel Jacoby writes that "utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished." The question is concerned with our future life, the texture is understood as the structure of the entire life, the fabric of life awaiting us, the work, even love; will this structure resemble the present at all? In other words, we are dealing with the idea that history contains possibilities of freedom and happiness that we have not yet begun to address, in which, according to him, lies the source of wisdom of our times in the age of political exhaustion and apathy.

Utopia, which has been related to the concept of art since Schiller, seems to be putting certain questions to aesthetics in the age of apathy. This questions (and we are far from answers) is also to be asked with Jean Baudrillard. In the interview (1996) «Art between Utopia and Anticipation»» (The Conspiracy of Art, NY, 2005) Baudrillard said:

«I think that is impossible to conceive of what the new generation will be like. As long as there was a certain history of art, even critical and contradictory, with avant-gardes, it was possible to foretell and anticipate, to invent, to create «revolutionary» microevents, but now I think that is no longer possible. There can still be, a sin other words, singularities on a backdrop of a virtually flat «aesthetic encephalogram».

These singularities are unpredictable and could very well be ephemeral. Not entering History, in short events that arise against, just in the politics that real events today are singularities that come from beyond and take place against politics and history. There can no doubt be trans-aesthetics singularities, thinks that emerge from any alterity and are therefore unpredictable”.

And:

“The aim of…modernity has reached its end, which is usually rather monstrous or aberrant, but where all possibilities have been exhausted or are being exhausted, everything ending in this sort of range of virtual reality that no one really knows anything about, despite the abundance of writing on the subject. At present, we are wearing the helmet the digital gear of virtual reality. We hope that even this virtuality is virtual, in other words that we will no longer have to deal with it, but it is now in the process of annexing all possibilities for the moment, including the possibilities of art, since with the multiplicity of artist working today, even if they are not working with computers or digital images, etc. if they redo what has been done, if they remix past forms, it amounts to the same. They don’t need computers: this indefinite combination, which is no longer art per se, happens in the mind”.

Baudrillard also said: “There has certainly been a movement of retraction. A halting of perspectives, in as much as the avant-garde utopias have been replaced by regressive utopias and that this rear guard is perhaps now in the pole position. That sentence develops the idea that art is going through a sort of travelling shot of its own history, a more or less authentic or artificial resurrection of all its past forms. It can surf through its history and rework it, not exactly by exploring new fields - after all, maybe the aesthetic world is finite like a physical universe – but by veering along the final and necessary curve of thinks. There is no exponential linearity of human progress, even less so for art, where the linear function has always been a problem. No one ever thought that art was going from one point to another, with a final destination”.