

**FROM CORE TO PERIPHERY AND BACK  
MODERNIST IDENTITIES REVISITED (I)**

**Conf. univ. dr. PETRU ȘTEFAN IONESCU**  
**Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918” din Alba Iulia**

***Abstract:** Amongst the many historical transformations brought along by the revolutions of modernity one particular social phenomenon turned out to be one of the major game changers of our times: the power of the crowds<sup>1</sup>. The role of the crowds in history has always been important and treated accordingly by the rulers, in Greek and Roman antiquity for instance<sup>2</sup>, but its predominant role as a social player was made possible only after the European and American Revolutions of the modernity. Especially with the French Revolution, the power of the masses seemed to become absolute, and in the following centuries, it gained complexity and autonomy, claiming not only political influence or dominance, but invading and dictating on all aspects of life, art included. The crowds become a living social mass with its own practical psychology where individuality and with it the courage to stand up for one's own views is given up to the detriment of secure and conformist anonymity behind the shield of the compact wall of the masses. Groups and individuals that have been at the heart of social and cultural life are soon replaced by others, coming from the margins, but re-emerge again and again when the historical feeling changes. As power corrupts<sup>3</sup>, the power of the crowds does the same, and power is then used to restrain other minority groups which do not follow the general trend. This situation leads to conflict, rebellion, and disobedience. In life and in art as well.*

**Key words:** modernism, core, elitism, periphery, culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Illustrative in this respect is Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, but also the pivotal works dedicated to this phenomenon by Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud, Everett Dean Martin and Jose Ortega y Gasset.

<sup>2</sup> One only has to remember in this respect the famous dictum "*panem et circenses*" and its signification given by Juvenal, of a people that has renounced all important and virtuous principles in life and now follow only their primary, low instincts like to unrestraint power over others and indulgence: "But how does the mob of Remus behave!" "Why, follow Fortune, as mobs always do, and hate him that is condemned?" [...]. Long ago they have thrown overboard all anxiety. For that sovereign people that once gave away military command, consulships, legions, and everything, now bridles its desires, and limits its anxious longings to two things only—bread, and the games of the circus!" Juvenal, *Satires*, Satire X, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> As expressed by Lord Acton, in his famous quote: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely".