

What is Post-Modernism?

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What is Post-Modernism?

BY CHARLES JENCKS



Carlo Maria Mariani, *La Mano Ubbidisce all'Intelletto*, 1983, oil on canvas, 70 1/2 x 69 in. For Modernists the subject of art was often the process of art; for Post-Modernists it is often the history of art. Mariani adapts eighteenth-century conventions, including even the 'erotic frigidité', to portray his allegory of autogenous creation: art painting itself. *The Hand Submits to the Intellect* recalls the Greek myth of the origins of painting and suggests that art today is still self-generated and as hermetically sealed as his ideal, claustrophobic space. (Courtesy of Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York)

FOREWORD

The growth of Post-Modernism has followed a sinuous, even tortuous, path. Twisting to the left and then to the right, branching down the middle, it resembles the natural form of a spreading root, or a meandering river that divides, changes course, doubles back on itself and takes off in a new direction. Its meaning is still in dispute not only because of this change but also because it signifies two quite different traditions to writers, philosophers and artists. Seen as progressive in some quarters, it is damned as reactionary and nostalgic in others; supported for its social and technological realism, it is also accused of escapism. Even, at times, when it is being condemned for its schizophrenia this 'failing' is turned, by its defenders, into a virtue. Like its parent, Modernism, it inevitably has the faults of any movement in contemporary society, the most obvious being an overproduction of artefacts and an inflation of theory. Indeed one critic of Post-Modern writing, Charles Newman, finds its defining quality to be the runaway growth typified by a multiplying economy.¹ But a critical reading of the evidence will show that the same problems of fast-track production and consumption beset other modern movements, and one can legitimately

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This paper was first given at a conference on Post-Modernism at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois in October 1985, and again later that month in Hannover, Germany, at a second conference on the same subject organised by Dr Peter Koslowski for *Civitas*.

NOTES

1. See Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*, with a preface by Gerald Graff, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 1985.

2. See Irving Howe, 'Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction' (1963) in *The Decline of the New*, Harcourt Brace and World, New York 1970. *The Decline of the New*, as the title suggests, also treats the subject. See also Gerald

speak of a mass-culture Modernism, a kitsch Futurism, a nostalgic Late-Modernism, and so forth. Overproduction and its attendant consequence of devaluation are, unfortunately, democratically shared by all Modernisms.

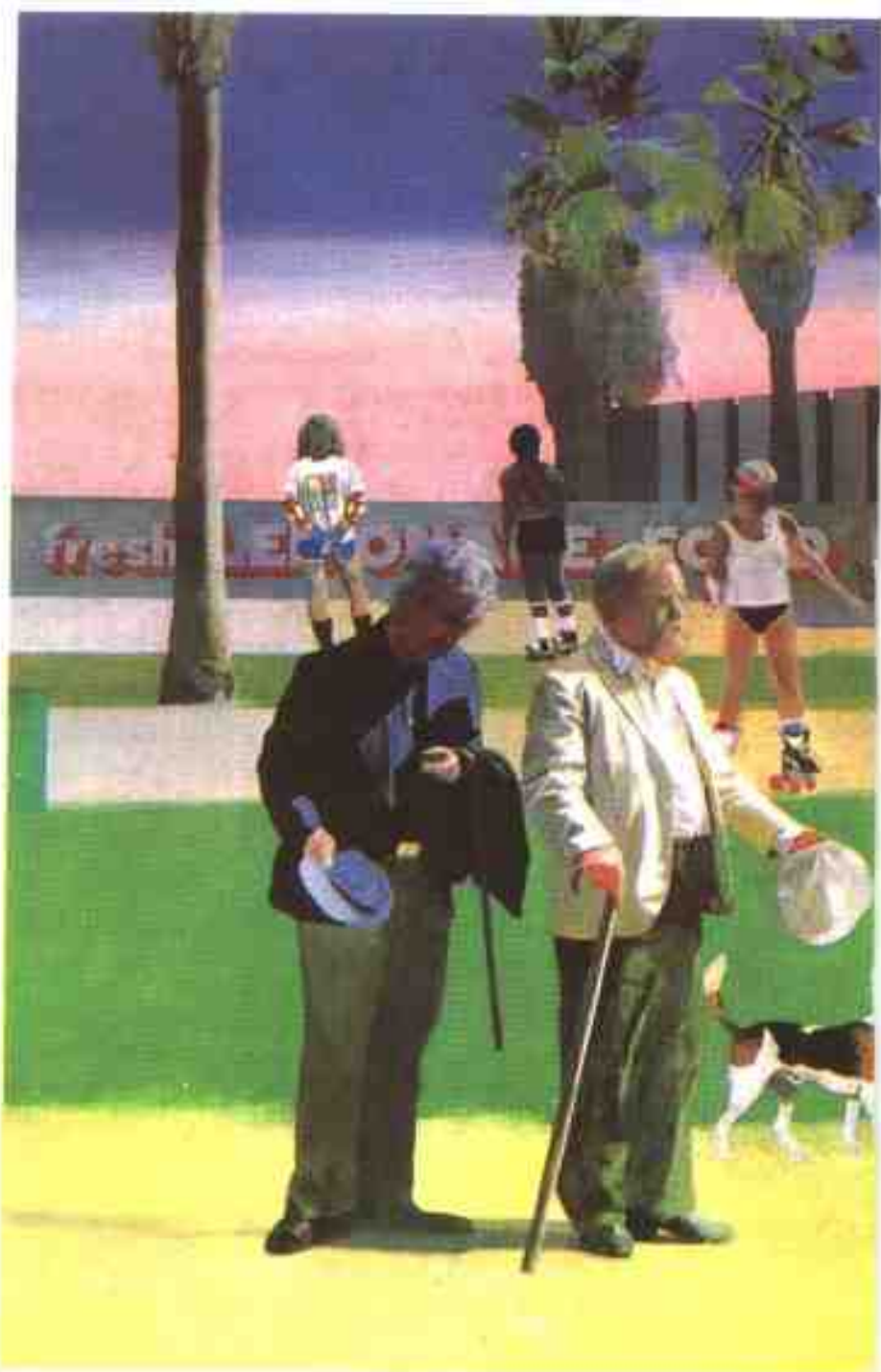
The concept was apparently first used by the Spanish writer Federico De Onis in his *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana*, 1934, to describe a reaction from within Modernism, and then by Arnold Toynbee in his *A Study of History* written in 1938, but published after the war in 1947. For Toynbee the term was an encompassing category describing the new historical cycle which started in 1875 with the end of western dominance, the decline of individualism, capitalism and Christianity, and the rise to power of non-western cultures. In addition it referred to a pluralism and world culture, meanings which are still essential to its definition today, and positively so. But Toynbee was, on the whole, sceptical of the 'world village' – as McLuhan was later to term it – and it is interesting that this scepticism was shared by those writers who first used the term polemically, the literary critics Irving Howe and Harold Levine, for this essentially negative description has stayed with the movement becoming in the event both a scourge and a challenge, an insult and a slogan to be carried into battle.² Their usage, in 1963 and 1966, was – as E.H. Gombrich has shown of the first use of the terms Gothic, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo and Romanesque – malevolent enough to sting, catch on and then become positive.³ Labels, like the movements they describe, often have this paradoxical power: to issue fruitfully from the mouths of detractors. No wonder their growth can resemble a twisting, organic shape, not only a tree or a river but, in the case of Post-Modernism, a snake.

Virtually the first positive use of the prefix 'post' was by the writer Leslie Fiedler in 1965 when he repeated it like an incantation and tied it to current radical trends which made up the counter-culture: 'post-humanist, post-male, post-white, post-heroic . . . post-Jewish'.⁴ These anarchic and creative departures from orthodoxy, these attacks on Modernist elitism, academicism and puritanical repression, do indeed represent the first stirrings of Post-Modern culture as Andreas Huyssen later pointed out in 1984, although Fiedler and others in the 1960s were never to put this argument as such and conceptualise the

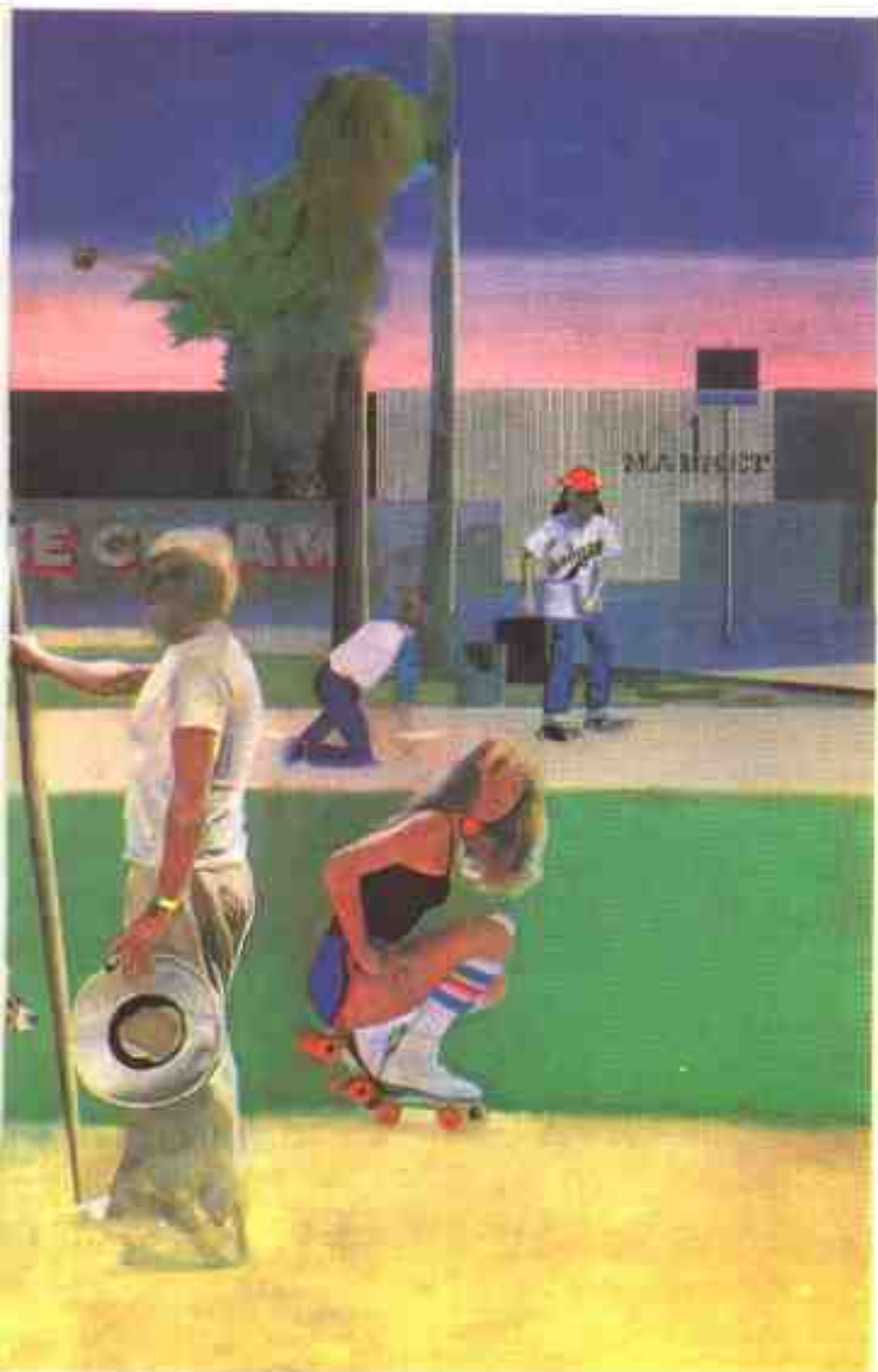
Graff, 'The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough' reprinted in *Literature Against Itself*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1979. Graff's critique of the Post-Modern seems to be more aptly directed at Late-Modern literature, as I mentioned to him when we met at a conference in Evanston, 1985, but he is using the term as defined by Howe, Levine, Charles Olsen, Hassan and others. For Harold Levine see 'What was Modernism?', *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*, Oxford University Press, New York 1966.

3 For this idea and a discussion of several terms see E.H. Gombrich, 'The Origins of Stylistic Terminology', *Norm and Form*, Phaidon, London 1966, pp. 83-6, and 'Mannerism: The Historiographic Background', also printed in *Norm and Form*, pp. 99-106.

4 See Leslie Fiedler, 'The New Mutants' (1965) published in *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler Vol. II*, Stein and Day, New York 1970, and *A Fiedler Reader*, Stein and Day, New York 1977, pp. 189-210.



11) Peter Blake, *The Meeting* or *Have a Nice Day, Mr. Hockney*, 1981-3, oil on canvas, 39 x 49in. An ironic meeting of 1960s 'Pop' painters at the Post-Modern academy in the 1980s. This new version of Courbet's *The Meeting* or *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* is both a contemporary comment on Classicism and a classical composition in itself. The meeting is between three representational artists – Howard Hodgkin, Peter Blake and David Hockney – the last with a



brush rather than a staff in his hand. The squatting girl's pose is taken partly from a skating magazine and partly from classical sculpture. The heroic meeting in 'Venice', California, commemorates a historical act, if not a grand public one, as the nineteenth-century Classicist would no doubt have preferred. Monumentality and banality, a timeless present and the transient afternoon are not in severe contrast. (Courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London)

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tradition.⁵ This had to wait until the 1970s and the writings of Ihab Hassan, by which time the radical movements which Fiedler celebrated were, ironically, out of fashion, reactionary or dead.

Ihab Hassan became by the mid 1970s the self-proclaimed spokesman for the Postmodern (the term is conventionally elided in literary criticism) and he tied this label to the ideas of experimentalism in the arts and ultra-technology in architecture – William Burroughs and Buckminster Fuller, 'Anarchy, Exhaustion/Silence . . . Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis . . . Intertext . . .' – in short those trends which I, with others, would later characterise as Late-Modern. In literature and then in philosophy, because of the writings of Jean-François Lyotard (1979) and a tendency to elide Deconstruction with the Post-Modern, the term has often kept its associations with what Hassan calls 'discontinuity, indeterminacy, immanence'.⁶ Mark C. Taylor's curiously titled *EHRING, A Postmodern A/Theology* is characteristic of this genre which springs from Derrida and Deconstruction.⁷ There is also a tendency among philosophers to discuss all Post-Positivist thinkers together as Post-Modern whether or not they have anything more in common than a rejection of Modern Logical Positivism. Thus there are two quite different meanings to the term and a general confusion which is not confined to the public. This and the pretext of several recent conferences on the subject has led to this little tract: 'What is Post-Modernism?' It is a question, as well as the answer I will give, and one must see that its continual growth and movement mean that no definitive answer is possible – at least not until it stops moving.

- [1] In its infancy in the 1960s Post-Modern culture was radical and critical, a minority position established, for instance, by Pop artists and theorists against the reduced view of Modern art, the aestheticism reigning in such institutes as the Museum of Modern Art. In architecture, Team Ten, Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi and the Advocacy Planners attacked 'orthodox Modern architecture' for its elitism, urban destruction, bureaucracy and simplified language. By the 1970s, as these traditions grew in strength and changed and Post-Modernism was now coined as a term for a variety of trends, the movement became more conservative, rational and academic. Many protagonists of the 1960s, such as Andy Warhol, lost their critical function altogether as they were assimilated into the art market or commercial practice. In the 1980s the situation changed again. Post-Modernism was finally accepted by the professions, academies and society at large. It became as much part of the establishment as its

5 See Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *New German Critique*, No. 33, Fall 1984, devoted to *Modernity and Postmodernity*, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1984.

6 See Ihab Hassan, 'The Question of Postmodernism', *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, Harry R. Garvin (ed.), Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Toronto and London 1980, pp. 117-26.

7 See Mark C. Taylor, *EHRING, A Postmodern A/Theology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1984.

parent, Modernism, and rival brother, Late-Modernism, and in literary criticism it shifted closer in meaning to the architectural and art traditions.

John Barth (1980), and Umberto Eco (1983), among many other authors, now define it as a writing which may use traditional forms in ironic or displaced ways to treat perennial themes.⁸ It acknowledges the validity of Modernism – the change in the world view brought on by Nietzsche, Einstein, Freud *et. al.* – but, as John Barth says, it hopes to go beyond the limited means and audience which characterise Modernist fiction: ‘My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naïveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-modernist marvels (by my definition and in my judgement) as Beckett’s *Stories and Texts for Nothing* or Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*. He may not hope to reach and move the devotees of James Michener and Irving Wallace – not to mention the lobotomized mass-media illiterates. But he *should* hope to reach and delight, at least part of the time, beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the Early Christians: professional devotees of high art.’⁹ This search for a wider audience than the Early Christians also distinguishes Post-Modern architects and artists from their Late-Modern counterparts and from the more hermetic concerns that Ihab Hassan defined in the 1970s. There are of course many other specific goals on the agenda which give Post-Modernism a direction. [2]

But because its meaning and tradition change, one must not only define the concept but give its dates and specific context. As the reader will find, I term Post-Modernism that paradoxical dualism, or double coding, which its hybrid name entails: the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Hassan’s ‘postmodern’ is, according to this logic, mostly Late-Modern, the continuation of Modernism in its ultra or exaggerated form. Some writers and critics, such as Barth and Eco, would agree with this definition, while just as many, including Hassan and Lyotard, would disagree. In this agreement and disagreement, understanding and dispute, there is the same snake-like dialectic which the movement has always shown and one suspects that there will be several more surprising twists of the coil before it is finished. Of one thing we can be sure: the announcement of death is, until the other Modernisms disappear, premature. [3]

8 See John Barth, ‘The Literature of Replenishment, Postmodernist Fiction’, *The Atlantic*, January 1980, pp. 65-71. and Umberto Eco, ‘Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable’, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London 1984, first published in Italian, 1983. Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* became, of course, a best-selling version of the kind of Post-Modern fiction that Barth and Eco describe in their theoretical writing.

9 John Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 70.



[2] Robert Graham, *Olympic Arch*, Los Angeles, 1984, bronze, metal and granite, c.20 x 12 x 4ft. The search for a wider audience has led some sculptors towards urban commissions which comment on place and activity – a form of context-specific art. Here Olympic athletes, truncated to signify physical power, go through their exercises which are also those of the sculptor. The emphasis on 'perfect casting' and 'absolute realism' recalls classical norms while the disjunctions and combined materials make it unmistakably of the present. (Courtesy of the artist)



[3] Giorgio de Chirico, *Lu Letturnu*, 1926, oil on canvas, 36 x 28in. Early and Late De Chirico works have inspired a generation of Post-Modern architects such as Aldo Rossi and Leon Krier and artists such as Gerald Garguere and Stephen McKenna. The appeal of his enigmatic allegories lies perhaps in their portrayal of a lost, classical world: a dignified image of man, nature and architecture set in quietistic disruption. Many other Modern artists – Picasso, Moore, Ruhlman, Mirandi, Magritte – have had an equal influence on Post-Modernists and thus one can speak of an evolution from, as well as a contrast between, the two periods. (Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York)

I THE PROTESTANT INQUISITION

In October 1981 *Le Monde* announced to its morning readers, under the section of its newspaper ominously headed 'Décadence', that a spectre was haunting Europe, the spectre of Post-Modernism.¹⁰ What Frenchmen made of this warning as they bit into their croissants is anybody's guess, especially as it came with the familiar Marxist image of a ghost looming over their civilisation (and their coffee) – but they probably soon forgot the phantom and looked forward to next morning's 'Décadence' column, for in our culture one ghost grows boring and must be quickly replaced by the next. The problem, however, has been that critics – especially hostile, Modernist critics – won't let this one dissolve. They keep attacking the phantom with ever-increasing hysteria, making it grow into quite a substantial force that upsets not only *le petit déjeuner* but also international conferences and price quotations on the international art market. If they aren't careful, there will be a panic and crash at the Museum of Modern Art as certain reputations dissolve like dead stock.

Clement Greenberg, long acknowledged as the theorist of American Modernism, defined Post-Modernism in 1979 as the antithesis of all he loved: that is, as the lowering of aesthetic standards caused by 'the democratization of culture under industrialism.'¹¹ Like our 'Décadence' columnist he saw the danger as a lack of hierarchy in artistic judgement, although he didn't go so far as the Frenchman in calling it simply 'nihilism'. Another art critic, Walter Darby Bannard, writing in the same prestigious *Arts Magazine* five years later, continued Greenberg's crusade against the heathens and re-stated the same (non) definition, except with more brutal elaboration: 'Postmodernism is aimless, anarchic, amorphous, self-indulgent, inclusive, horizontally structured, and aims for the popular.'¹² Why did he leave out 'ruthless kitsch' or the standard comparison with Nazi populism that the architectural critic Ken Frampton always adds to the list of horrors? Ever since Clement Greenberg made his famous opposition between 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' in a 1939 article, certain puritanical intellectuals have been arguing that it has to be one thing or the other, and it's clear where they classify Post-Modernism, although of course if it's really 'horizontally structured' and 'democratic' it can't

10 Gérard-Georges Lemaire, 'Le Spectre du post-modernisme', 'Décadence', *Le Monde Dimanche*, 18 October 1981, p. XIV.

11 Clement Greenberg, 'Modern and Post-Modern' – presented at the fourth Sir William Dobell Memorial Lecture in Sydney, Australia, on 31 October 1979 and published the following year in *Arts Magazine*.

12 Walter Darby Bannard, 'On Postmodernism', an essay originally presented at a panel on Post-Modernism at the Modern Languages Association's annual meeting in New York, 28 December 1983, published later in *Arts Magazine*.

13 Aldo van Eyck, 'RPP – Rats, Posts and Other Pests', 1981 RIBA Annual Discourse published in *RIBA Journal*, *Lotus* and most fully in *AD News*, 7/81, London 1981, pp. 14-16.

be at the same time Neo-Nazi and authoritarian. But consistency has never been a virtue of those out to malign a movement.

Quite recently the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has been hosting a series of revivalist meetings which are noteworthy for their vicious attacks on Post-Modernism. In 1981 the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck delivered the Annual Discourse titled 'Rats, Posts and Other Pests', and one can guess from this appellation how hard he attempted to be fair-minded. He advised his cheering audience of Modernists in a capital-lettered harangue, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I beg you, HOUND THEM DOWN AND LET THE FOXES GO' – tactics not unlike the Nazi ones he was deploring, although the hounds and foxes give this pogrom an Oscar Wilde twist.¹³ If Van Eyck advised letting the dogs loose on Post-Modernists, the older Modern architect Berthold Lubetkin limited himself, on receiving his Gold Medal at the RIBA, to classing them with homosexuals, Hitler and Stalin: 'This is a transvestite architecture, Heppelwhite and Chippendale in drag.'¹⁴ And he continued to compare Post-Modernism with Nazi kitsch in subsequent revivalist *soirées* in Paris and at the RIBA, even equating Prince Charles with Stalin for his attack on Modernism.¹⁵ One could quote similar abuse from old-hat Modernists in America, Germany, Italy, France, indeed most of the world. For instance the noted Italian critic Bruno Zevi sees Post-Modernism as a 'pastiche . . . trying to copy Classicism' and 'repressive' like fascism.¹⁶

We can see in all these howls of protest something like a negative definition emerging, a paranoid definition made by Modernists in retreat trying to hold the High Church together, issuing daily edicts denouncing heresy, keeping the faith among ever-dwindling numbers. It is true they still control most of the academies, sit on most of the aesthetic review boards, and repress as many Post-Modern artists and architects as they can, but the mass of young professionals have fled from the old Protestant orthodoxy and are themselves bored and fed up with the taboos and suppressions. In any international competition now more than half the entries will be Post-Modern, and that generality applies as much to sculpture and painting as it does to architecture. The door is wide open, as it was in the 1920s when Modernism had knocked down the previous academic barriers; the irony is that today's old-time Modernists are determined to be just as

14 Berthold Lubetkin, 'Royal Gold Medal Address', RIBA, *Transactions* II, Vol. 1, No. 2, London 1982, p. 48.

15 Berthold Lubetkin, 'RIBA President's Invitation Lecture', 11 June 1985, unpublished manuscript, p. 13. Published in part in *Building Design Magazine*, London. The comparison is with Stalin's giving Corinthian columns to the people. The Prince of Wales provokes the following memory: 'I can't help recalling the diktat of Stalin fifty years ago when he said "The assumption that the specialists know better drags theory and practice into the bog of reactionary cosmopolitan opinion." The proletariat acquired the right to have their Corinthian colonnades. . . .'

16 'Is Post-Modern Architecture Serious?: Paolo Portoghesi and Bruno Zevi in Conversation', *Architectural Design*, 1/2 1982, pp. 20-1, originally published in Italian in *L'Espresso*.

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[4] Ralph Erskine, Byker Wall, Newcastle, 1974. Some of the first Post-modern housing was ad hoc and vernacular in style making use, as here, of traditional and modern materials, green stained wood, brick, corrugated metal and asbestos. Also, following the Team Ten critique of the *tabula rasa*, it tended to mix high and low buildings with existing ones. Classical fragments are also incorporated in this collage. The emphasis on participation, with design acknowledging the tastes of the inhabitants, has remained a constant social goal of Post-Modernists. Ralph Erskine, Vernon Gracie and the architects actually had their office accessible on the site. (Photo C. Jencks)



[5] Robert Krier, Hittorffstrasse Apartments, Berlin-Kreuzberg, 1977-81. The white social housing of the Modernists is here adapted in a palazzo U-shaped block to form part of a perimeter block and positive urban square. Modern technology and imagery is mixed with a traditional typology, a typical double coding. Subsequently Robert Krier and others have been instrumental in the development of Post-Modern housing in Berlin under the auspices of the IBA. The typologies are exemplary, as is the idea of having several architects work together with common guidelines: by 1987 the results of this new urbanism can be gauged. (Photo Gerald Blomeyer)



[6] Venturi and Rauch, Franklin Court, Philadelphia, 1972-8. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown took up the lessons of Pop art and applied them to a Las Vegas study generalising such rhetorical devices as the amplification of image and stereotype. The goal was a legible architecture understood in a mass-culture. Here Benjamin Franklin's house is 'ghosted' in stainless steel, a Pop icon – the past set above his preserved memorabilia and 'signs' on plaques. (Photo Venturi and Rauch.)



[7] Venturi Rauch and Scott Brown, Gordon Wu Dining Hall, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981-2. Along with James Stirling's Neue Staatsgalerie and Michael Graves' Harnett Building this work ranks as one of the first mature buildings of Post-Modernism. Built in a Free-Style-Classicism that is appropriate to the Princeton campus, it uses Modern elements, such as the strip window, and traditional signs, such as the Sashana, in a functional, symbolic and ironic manner. The 'complexity and contradiction' and other rhetorical devices which Venturi espoused in the 1960s are present, but not overly insistent. (Photo C. Jencks.)

paranoic, reactionary and repressive as their Beaux-Arts persecutors were before them. Indeed the slurs against Post-Modernists occasionally sound like the Nazi and academic vitriol poured on Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius in the 1920s. Is history repeating itself in reverse? I'm not sure, but I do believe that these characterisations have not done what they were supposed to do – stem the tide of Post-Modernism – but rather have helped blow it up into a media event. My nightmare is that suddenly the reactionaries will become nice and civil. Everyone, but particularly the press, loves an abusive argument carried on by professors and the otherwise intelligent: it's always entertaining even if it obscures as much as it explains. And what it has hidden are the root causes of the movement.

II POST-MODERNISM DEFINED

Post-Modernism, like Modernism, varies for each art both in its motives and time-frame, and here I shall define it just in the field with which I am most involved – architecture. The responsibility for introducing it into the architectural subconscious lies with Joseph Hudnut who, at Harvard with Walter Gropius, may have wished to give this pioneer of the Modern Movement a few sleepless nights. At any rate, he used the term in the title of an article published in 1945 called 'the post-modern house' (all lower case, as was Bauhaus practice), but didn't mention it in the body of the text or define it polemically. Except for an occasional slip here and there, by Philip Johnson or Nikolaus Pevsner, it wasn't used until my own writing on the subject which started in 1975.¹⁷ In that first year of lecturing and polemicising in Europe and America, I used it as a temporising label, as a definition to describe where we had left rather than where we were going. The observable fact was that architects as various as [4-7] Ralph Erskine, Robert Venturi, Lucien Kroll, the Krier brothers and Team Ten had all departed from Modernism and set off in different directions which *kept a trace of their common departure*. To this day I would define Post-Modernism as I did in 1978 as *double coding: the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects*. The point of this double coding was itself double. Modern architecture had failed to remain credible partly because it didn't communicate effectively with its ultimate users – the main argument of my book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* – and partly because it didn't make effective links with the city and history. Thus the solution I perceived and defined as Post-Modern: an architecture that was

¹⁷ My own writing and lecturing on Post-Modernism in architecture started in 1975 and 'The Rise of Post-Modern Architecture' was published in a Dutch book and a British magazine, *Architecture - Inner Town Government*, Eindhoven, July 1975, and *Architecture Association Quarterly*, No. 4, 1975. Subsequently Eisenman and Stern started using the term and by 1977 it had caught on. For a brief history see the 'Footnote on the Term' in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, fourth edition, Academy Editions, London/Rizzoli, New York 1984, p. 8.



[8] Berthold Lubetkin and Tecton, Hallfield Estate Housing, London, 1947-55. The typology of Le Corbusier's 'City in the Park' led to an urbanism which was first criticised by Jane Jacobs in 1961 and then later by a chorus of writers including Robert Goodman, Oscar Newman, Rob Krier, Colin Ward and, recently, Alice Coleman. Lack of personal 'defensible space' represents just one of the problems of this typology; scale, density, and symbolism are equally questionable. (Photo C. Jencks)

professionally based *and* popular as well as one that was based on new techniques *and* old patterns. Double coding to simplify means both elite/popular and new/old and there are compelling reasons for these opposite pairings. Today's Post-Modern architects were trained by Modernists, and are committed to using contemporary technology as well as facing current social reality. These commitments are enough to distinguish them from revivalists or traditionalists, a point worth stressing since it creates their hybrid language, the style of Post-Modern architecture. The same is not completely true of Post-Modern artists and writers who may use traditional techniques of narrative and representation in a more straightforward way. Yet all the creators who could be called Post-Modern keep something of a Modern sensibility – some intention which distinguishes their work from that of revivalists – whether this is irony, parody, displacement, complexity, eclecticism, realism or any number of contemporary tactics and goals. As I mentioned in the foreword, Post-Modernism has the essential double meaning: the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence.

The main motive for Post-Modern architecture is obviously the social failure of Modern architecture, its mythical 'death' announced repeatedly over ten years. In 1968, an English tower block of housing, Ronan Point, suffered what was called 'cumulative collapse' as its floors gave way after an explosion. In 1972, many slab blocks of housing were intentionally blown up at Pruitt-Igoe in St Louis. By the mid 1970s, these explosions were becoming a quite frequent method of dealing with the failures of Modernist building methods: cheap [8]