I. Change

DIONYSUS and Cupid are both agents of change. First *The Bacchae*, destruction of the city, then *The Metamorphoses*, mischievous variations of nature. Some might say that change is violence, and violence is continuous whether it be Horror or High Camp. But sly Ovid simply declares:

My intention is to tell of bodies changed  
To different forms; the gods, who made the changes,  
Will help me—or I hope so—with a poem  
That runs from the world’s beginning to our own days.

To our own days, the bodies natural or politic wax and wane, *carpen perpetuam*. Something warms Galatea out of ivory; even rock turns into spiritual forms. Perhaps love is one way we experience change.

How then can we live without love of change?
Evolution has its enemies, that quiet genius, Owen Barfield, knows. In *Unancestral Voices*, he calls them by name: Lucifer and Ahriman. Most often, they coexist in us. Lucifer preserves the past utterly from dissolution. Ahriman destroys the past utterly for the sake of his own inventions.

a. Thus in one kind of history, chronicles of continuity, we deny real change. Even endings become part of a history of endings. From schism to paradigm; from apocalypse to archetype. Warring empires, catastrophe and famine, immense hopes, faraway names—Cheops, Hammurabi, David, Darius, Alcibiades, Hannibal, Caesar—all fall into place on numbered pages.

Yet continuities, “the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome,” must prevail in Story, on a certain level of narrative abstraction, obscuring change.

b. Thus, too, in another kind of history, we reinvent continually the past. Without vision, constant revision, the Party chronicles of 1984. Or individually, each man dreams his ancestors to remake himself. The Black Muslim takes on a new name, ignoring the deadly dawn raids, cries of Allah among slave traders, journeys across Africa in Arab chains.

Yet relevances must persist in Story, on a certain level of fictional selectivity, veiling change.

Behind all history, continuous or discrete, abstract or autistic, lurks the struggle of identity with death. Is history often the secret biography of historians? The recorded sense of our own mortality?
POSTmodernISM

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!

II. Periods

When will the Modern Period end?
When will Modernism cease and what comes thereafter?
What will the twenty-first century call us? and will its voice come from the same side of our graves?
Does Modernism stretch merely to stretch out our lives? Or, ductile, does it give a new sense of time? The end of periodization? The slow arrival of simultaneity?
If change changes ever more rapidly, and the future jolts us now, do men, paradoxically, resist both endings and beginnings?

Childhood is huge and youth golden. Few recover. Critics are no exception. Like everyone else, they recall the literature of their youth brilliantly; they do not think it can ever tarnish.
Let us consider where the great men are
Who will obsess the child when he can read.

So Delmore Schwartz wrote, naming Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Yeats, Kafka, Mann. He could have added: Proust, Valéry, Gide, Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, Faulkner, Hemingway, O’Neill.

A walker in the city of that literature will not forget. Nor will he forgive. How can contemporaries of Mailer, Pinter, or Grass dare breathe in this ancestral air? Yet it is possible that we will all remain Invisible Men until each becomes his own father.

III. Innovation

All of us devise cunning ceremonies of ancestor worship. Yet there is a fable for us in the lives of two men: Proteus and Picasso, mentors of shapes.

Masters of possibility, ponder this. They used to say: the kingdom of the dead is larger than any kingdom. But the earth has now exploded. Soon the day may come when there will be more people alive than ever lived.

When the quick are more populous than all the departed, will history reverse itself? End?
We resist the new under the guise of judgment. "We must have standards." But standards apply only where they are applicable. This has been the problem with the Tradition of the New (Harold Rosenberg).

Standards are inevitable, and the best of these will create themselves to meet, to create, new occasions. Let us, therefore, admit standards. But let us also ask how many critics of literature espouse, even selectively, the new, speak of it with joyous intelligence? Taking few risks, the best known among them wait for men of lesser reputations to clear the way.

Reaction to the new has its own reasons that reason seldom acknowledges. It also has its rhetoric of dismissal.

a. The Fad
   —"It's a passing fashion, frivolous; if we ignore it now, it will quietly go away."
   —This implies permanence as absolute value. It also implies the ability to distinguish between fashion and history without benefit of time or creative intuition. How many judgments of this kind fill the Purgatorio of letters?

b. The Old Story
   —"It's been done before, there's nothing new in it; you can find it in Euripides, Sterne, or Whitman."
   —This implies prior acquaintance, rejection on the basis of unestablished similarity. It also implies that nothing really changes. Therefore, why unsettle things, require a new response?

c. The Safe Version
   —"Yes, it seems new, but in the same genre, I prefer Duchamp; he really did it better."
   —This implies a certain inwardness with the tradition of the avant-garde. The entrance fee has been paid, once and forever. Without seeming in the least Philistine, one can disdain the intrusions of the present.

d. The Newspeak of Art
   —"The avant-garde is just the new academicism."
   —This may imply that art which seems conventional can be more
genuinely innovative, which is sometimes true. It may also imply mere irritation: the oxymoron as means of discreditation.

About true innovation we can have no easy preconceptions. Prediction is mere extrapolation, the cool whisper of RAND. But prophecy is akin to madness or the creative imagination; its path, seldom linear, breaks, turns, disappears in mutations or quantum jumps.

Therefore, we can not expect the avant-garde of past, present, and future to obey the same logic, assume the same forms. For instance, the new avant-garde need not have a historical consciousness, express recognizable values, or endorse radical politics. It need not shock, surprise, protest.

Footnote

What the avant-garde probably still needs to do for a time is serve as the agent of change, which is recognizable when still newer change is in progress.

*And yet everything I have said here could lend, has lent, itself to serious abuses. The rage for change can be a form of self-hatred or spite.*
IV. Distinctions

The change in Modernism may be called Postmodernism. Looking at the former with later eyes, we begin to discern in it fringe figures closer to us now than the great Moderns who “will obsess the child” someday.

Thus the classic text of Modernism is Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1931). Contents: Symbolism, Yeats, Valéry, Eliot, Proust, Joyce, Stein.


*Erratum:* Gertrude Stein should have appeared in the latter work, for she contributed to both Modernism and Postmodernism.

But without a doubt, the crucial text is

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If we can arbitrarily state that literary Modernism includes certain works between Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), where will we arbitrarily say that Postmodernism begins? A year earlier than the *Wake*? With Sartre's *La nausée* (1938) or Beckett's *Murphy* (1938)? In any case, it includes works by writers as different as Barth, arthelme, eckett, orges, recht, roch, urroughs, utor.

V. Critics

The assumptions of Modernism, elaborated by formalist and mythopoetic critics especially, by the intellectual culture of the first half of the century as a whole, still define the dominant perspective on the study of literature.

*Exception:*

Karl Shapiro's *Beyond Criticism* (1953), *In Defence of Ignorance* (1960), works we acknowledge in a whisper. Why?

In England as in America, the known critics, different as they may
seem in age or persuasion, share the broad Modernist view: Blackmur, Brooks, Connolly, Empson, Frye, Howe, Kazin, Kermode, Leavis, Levin, Pritchett, Ransom, Rahv, Richards, Schorer, Tate, Trilling, Warren, Wellek, Wilson, Winters, etc. In saying this, surely I take nothing away from their various distinctions.

No doubt, there are many passages in the writings of these critics—of Leavis, say, or Wilson—which will enlighten minds in every age. Yet is was Herbert Read who possessed the most active sympathy for the avant-garde. His generosity of intuition enabled him to sponsor the new, rarely embracing the trivial. He engaged the Postmodern spirit in his anarchic affinities, in his concern for the prevalence of suffering, in his sensuous apprehension of renewed being. He cried: behold the Child! To him, education through art meant a salutation to Eros. Believing that the imagination serves the purpose of moral good, Read hoped to implicate art into existence so fully that their common substance became as simple, as necessary, as bread and water. This is a sacramental hope, still alive though mute in our midst, which recalls Tolstoy's What Is Art? I can hardly think of another critic, younger even by several decades, who might have composed that extraordinary romance, The Green Child.

The culture of literary criticism is still ruled by Modernist assumptions. This is particularly true within the academic profession, excepting certain linguistic, structuralist, and hermeneutics schools. But it is also true within the more noisy culture of our media. The New York Review of Books, Time (the literary sections), and The New York Times Book Review share a certain aspiration to wit or liveliness, to intelligence really, concealing distaste for the new. All the more skeptical in periods of excess, the culture of the logos insists on old orders in clever or current guises, and, with the means of communication at hand, inhibits and restrains.

Self-Admonition:

Beware of glib condemnations of the media. They are playing a national role as bold, as crucial, as the Supreme Court played in the Fifties. Willful and arbitrary as they may be in their creation of public images—which preempt ourselves—they are still custodians of some collective sanity. Note, too, the rising quality of the very publications you cited.
VI. Bibliography

Here is a curious chronology of some Postmodern criticism:


And here are some leitmotifs of that criticism: the literary act in quest and question of itself; self-subversion or self-transcendence of forms; popular mutations; languages of silence.

VII. ReVisions

A revision of Modernism is slowly taking place, and this is another evidence of Postmodernism. In *The Performing Self*, Richard Poirier tries to mediate between these two movements. We need to recall the doctrines of formalist criticism, the canons of classroom and quarterly in the last three decades, to savor such statements:

Three of the great and much used texts of twentieth century criticism, *Moby Dick*, *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, are written in mockery of system, written against any effort to harmonize discordant elements, against any mythic or metaphoric scheme . . . . But while this form of the literary imagination is radical in its essentially parodistic treatment of systems, its radicalism is in the interest of essentially conservative feelings. . . .

* * *

The most complicated examples of twentieth-century literature, like *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, the end of which seems parodied by the end of *Giles* [*Goat-Boy* by Barth], are more than contemptuous of their own formal and stylistic elaborateness.

Certainly some profound philosophic minds of our century have concerned themselves with the disease of verbal systems: Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein. And later writers as different as John Cage,
Norman O. Brown, and Elie Wiesel have listened intently to the sounds of silence in art or politics, sex, morality, or religion. In this context, the perceptions of Poirier do not merely display a revisionist will; they strain toward an aesthetic of Postmodernism.

We are still some way from attaining such an aesthetic; nor is it clear that Postmodern art gives high priority to that end. Perhaps we can start by revisioning Modernism as well as revising the pieties we have inherited about it. In Continuities, Frank Kermode cautiously attempts that task. A critic of great civility, he discriminates well between types of modernism—what he calls “palaeo- and neo-modern” corresponds perhaps to Modern and Postmodern—and takes note of the new “anti-art” which he rightly traces back to Duchamp. But his preference for continuities tempts him to assimilate current to past things. Kermode, for instance, writes: “Aleatory art is accordingly, for all its novelty, an extension of past art, indeed the hypertrophy of one aspect of that art.” Does not this statement close more possibilities than it opens? There is another perspective of things which Goethe described: “The most important thing is always the contemporary element, because it is most purely reflected in ourselves, as we are in it.” I think that we will not grasp the cultural experience of our moment if we insist that the new arts are “marginal developments of older modernism;” or that distinctions between “art” and “joke” are crucial to any future aesthetic.

Whether we tend to revalue Modernism in terms of Postmodernism (Poirier) or to reverse that procedure (Kermode), we will end by doing something of both since relations, analogies, enable our thought. New lines emerge from the past because our eyes every morning open anew. In a certain frame of mind, Michelangelo or Rembrandt, Goethe or Hegel, Nietzsche or Rilke, can reveal to us something about Postmodernism, as Erich Heller incidentally shows. Consider this marvelous passage from The Artist’s Journey to the Interior:

... Michelangelo spent the whole of his last working day, six days before his death, trying to finish the Pietà which is known as the “Pietà Rondanini.” He did not succeed. Perhaps it lies in the nature of stone that he had to leave unfinished what Rembrandt completed in paint: the employment of the material in the service of its own negation. For this sculpture seems to intimate that its maker was in the end determined to use only as much marble as was necessary to show that matter did not matter; what alone mattered was the pure inward spirit.
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Here Michelangelo envisions, past any struggle with the obdurate material of existence, a state of consciousness to which we may be tending. Yet can we justifiably call him Postmodern?

Where Modern and Postmodern May Meet: Or, Make Your Own List:

1. Blake, Sade, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Whitman, etc.
2. daDaDA
3. SURrealism
4. K A F K A
5. *Finnegans Wake*
6. *The Cantos*
7. ? ? ?

VIII. Modernism

This is no place to offer a comprehensive definition of Modernism. From Apollinaire and Arp to Valéry, Woolf, and Yeats—I seem to miss the letters X and Z—runs the alphabet of authors who have delivered themselves memorably on the subject; and the weighty work of Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr., *The Tradition of the Modern*, still stands as the best compendium of that "large spiritual enterprise including philosophic, social, and scientific thought, and
aesthetic and literary theories and manifestoes, as well as poems, novels, dramas."

Expectations of agreement, let alone of definition, seem superlatively naive. This is true among stately and distinguished minds, not only rowdy critical tempers. Here, for instance, is Lionel Trilling, "On the Modern Element in Modern Literature":

I can identify it by calling it the disenchantment of our culture with culture itself... the bitter line of hostility to civilization that runs through it [modern literature]... I venture to say that the idea of losing oneself up to the point of self-destruction, of surrendering oneself to experience without regard to self-interest or conventional morality, of escaping wholly from the societal bonds, is an "element" somewhere in the mind of every modern person...

To this, Harry Levin counters in "What Was Modernism?": *

Insofar as we are still moderns, I would argue, we are the children of Humanism and the Enlightenment. To identify and isolate the forces of unreason, in a certain sense, has been a triumph for the intellect. In another sense it has reinforced that anti-intellectual undercurrent which, as it comes to the surface, I would prefer to call post-modern.

Yet the controversy of Modernism has still wider scope as Monroe K. Spears, in Dionysus and the City, with bias beneath his Apollonian lucidity, shows. Released as energy from the contradictions of history, Modernism makes contradiction its own.

* More accurately, the quotation appears in a note preceding the essay. See Harry Levin, Refractions (New York, 1966), pp. 271-73.
For my purpose, let Modernism stand for X: a window on human madness, the shield of Perseus against which Medusa glances, the dream of some frowning, scholarly muse. I offer, instead, some rubrics and spaces. Let readers fill them with their own queries or grimaces. We value what we choose.

a. Urbanism: Nature put in doubt, from Baudelaire’s “cité” to Proust’s Paris, Eliot’s London, Joyce’s Dublin. It is not a question of locale but of presence. The sanatorium of The Magic Mountain and the village of The Castle are “cities” still. Exceptions, Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha or Lawrence’s Midlands, recognize the City as pervasive threat.

b. Technologism: City and Machine make and remake one another. Centralization, diffusion of the human will. Yet technology does not feature simply as a theme of Modernism; it is also as a form of its artistic struggle. Witness Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism. More subtle reactions to technology: Bergsonian time, mythical space, the occult image, the dissociation of sensibility, etc.

c. “Dehumanization”: Ortega y Gasset really means Elitism, Irony, and Abstraction (The Dehumanization of Art). Style takes over: let life and the masses fend for themselves. “Poetry has become the higher algebra of metaphor.” Instead of Vitruvian man, Leonardo’s famous image of the human measure, we have Picasso’s beings splintered on many planes. Not less human, just another idea of man.
Elitism: Aristocratic or crypto-fascist: Rilke, Proust, Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Pound, D'Annunzio, Wyndham Lewis, etc.

Irony: Play, complexity, formalism. The aloofness of art but also sly hints of its radical incompleteness. Dr. Faustus and Confessions of Felix Krull. The irony of Nonbeing.

Abstraction: Impersonality, sophistical simplicity, reduction and construction, time decomposed or spatialized.

Mondrian on Reductionism. "To create pure reality plastically, it is necessary to reduce natural forms to the constant elements of form and natural colour to primary colour." Gabo on Constructivism: "It has revealed a universal law that the elements of a visual art such as lines, colours, shapes, possess their own forces of expression, independent of any association with the external aspects of the world..." The literary equivalent of these ideas may be "spatial time." (See Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," The Widening Gyre.)

"Dehumanization" and the Nonhuman: There is more to it than "another idea of man"; there is also a revulsion against the human, or a renewal of the sense of the superhuman. Rilke's "Angels." Lawrence's "Fish":

And my heart accused itself
Thinking: I am not the measure of creation
This is beyond me, this fish.
His God stands outside my God.

d. Primitivism: The archetypes behind abstraction, behind civilization. An African mask, a beast slouching toward Bethlehem. Structure as ritual or myth, metaphors from the collective dream of mankind. Cunning palimpsests of time, ironic palingenesis of literary forms. Also Dionysus and the violent return of the repressed.
e. Eroticism: All literature is erotic but Modernist sex scratches
the skin from within. It is not merely the liberation of the libido, a new
language of anger or desire; love now becomes an intimate of disease:
sado-masochism, solipsism, nihilism, anomie. Consciousness seeks
desperately to discharge itself in the world. A new and darker stage
in the struggle between Eros and Thanatos. (See Lionel Trilling, "The
Fate of Pleasure.")

f. Antinomianism: Beyond law, dwelling in paradox. Also dis-
continuity, alienation, non serviam! The pride of art, of the self,
defining the conditions of its own grace. Iconoclasm, schism, excess.
Beyond antinomianism, even, toward apocalypse. Therefore, deca-
dence and renovation. (See Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Broken Center.)

g. Experimentalism: Innovation, dissociation, the brilliance of
change in all its aesthetic shapes. New languages, new concepts of
order. Also, the Word beginning to put its miracle to question in the
midst of a miracle. Poem, novel, or play henceforth can never really
bear the same name.

In those seven rubrics, I seek not so much to define Modernism as
to carry certain elements which I consider crucial, carry them forward
toward Postmodernism.
IX. The Unimaginable

The unimaginable lies somewhere between the Kingdom of Complacence and the Sea of Hysteria. It balks all geographies; bilks the spirit of the traveler who passes unwittingly through its spaceless realm; it boggles time. Yet anyone who can return from it to tell his tale may also know how to spell the destiny of man.

I know the near-infinite resources of man, and that his imagination may still serve as the teleological organ of his evolution. Yet I am possessed by the feeling that in the next few decades, certainly within half a century, the earth and all that inhabits it may be wholly other, perhaps ravaged, perhaps on the way to some strange utopia indistinguishable from nightmare. I have no language to articulate this feeling with conviction, nor imagination to conceive this special destiny. To live from hour to hour seems as maudlin as to invoke Last Things. In this feeling I find everyday that I am not alone.

The litany of our disasters is all too familiar, and we recite it in the name of that unholy trinity, Population, Pollution, Power (read genocide), hoping to appease our furies, turn our fate inside out. But soon our minds lull themselves to sleep again on this song of abstractions, and a few freak out. The deathly dreariness of politics brings us ever closer to death. Neither is the alteration of human consciousness at hand. And the great promise of technology—which? Fuller's? Skinner's? Dr. No's? Engineers of liberation or of control?—the promise is conditional on everything that we are, in this our ambiguous state.

Truly, we dwell happily in the Unimaginable. We also dwell at our task: Literature. I could learn to do pushups in a prison cell, but I can not bring myself to "study literature" as if the earth were still in the orbit of our imagination. I hope this is Hope.

X. Postmodernism

Postmodernism may be a response, direct or oblique, to the Unimaginable which Modernism glimpsed only in its most prophetic
moments. Certainly it is not the Dehumanization of the Arts that concerns us now; it is rather the Denaturalization of the Planet and the End of Man. We are, I believe, inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what response is adequate to our reality. In a sense, we have all learned to become minimalists—of that time and space we can call our own—though the globe has become our village. This is why it seems bootless to compare Modern with Postmodern artists, range “masters” against “epigones.” The latter are closer to “zero in the bone,” to silence or exhaustion, and the best of them brilliantly display the resources of the void. Thus the verbal omnipotence of Joyce yields to the impotence of Beckett, heir and peer, no less genuine, only more austere. Yet moving into the void, these artists also pass to the other side of silence, and discover the sacrament of plenum. The consummation of their art is a work which, though art still, pretends to abolish itself (Beckett, Tinguely, Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt) or else to become indistinguishable from life (Cage, Rauschenberg, the Man Within Mailer’s Fiction). Duchamp coolly pointed the way.

Nihilism is a word we often use, when we use it unhistorically, to designate values we dislike. It is applied to the children of Marcel Duchamp.

When John Cage, in “HPSCHD” for instance, insists on Quantity rather than Quality, he does not surrender to nihilism—far, far from it—he requires:

—allure and permission of being, generosity
—discovery in multitude, confusion of prior judgment
—mutation of perception, of consciousness, through randomness and diversity

Cage knows how to praise Duchamp: “The rest of them were artists. Duchamp collects dust.”
I have not defined Modernism; I can define Postmodernism less; and the parallels and contrasts between these movements are least obvious to me. No doubt, the more we ponder, the more we will need to qualify all we say. * Perhaps elisions may serve to qualify these notes.

* New journals are now founded for the purpose of exploring Postmodernism. See, for instance, Boundary 2, Binghamton, New York.
POSTMORTEMISM

— Art following the trend of ephemeralization. Also, boundless dispersal by media. The sensuous object disappearing into a concept?

— The computer as substitute consciousness or as extension of consciousness? Will it prove tautological, increased reliance on prior orders? Or will it help to create novel forms?

— Human needs soon to be altered, perhaps on the most basic level, and the end of art? Hence sporadic artistic reactions against Technologism.


— Irony becomes radical, self-consuming play. Black canvas or blank page. Silence. Also comedy of the absurd, black humor, insane parody and slapstick, Camp. (See Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Negative Capability.)

— Abstraction taken to the limit and coming back as New Concreteness: the found object, the signed Brillo box or soup can, the non-fiction novel, the novel as history. The range from Concept Art (abstract) to Environmental Art (concrete).

— Warhol: "I want to be a machine;" Burroughs simulating insect life. From infrahumanism to posthumanism, be-
yond man and into the cosmos. Sci-fi.
To love life and to love man are no longer the same.

“Dehumanization,” both in Modernism and Postmodernism, essentially means the end of the old Realism. Increasingly, Illusionism takes its place, not only in art but also in life. The media contribute egregiously to this process in Postmodern society. In *Act and the Actor Making the Self*, Harold Rosenberg says: “History has been turned inside out; writing takes place in advance of its occurrence, and every statesman is an author in embryo.” Thus the Illusionism of politics matches that of Pop Art or Neo-Realism.

The end of the old Realism also affects the sense of the Self. Thus “Dehumanization,” both in Modernism and Postmodernism, implies revision of the Self evidenced:

In Modernism—by doctrines of impersonality, the masks of Yeats, the tradition of Eliot, the dramatic objectivity of Joyce; or by the opposite, the stream of consciousness of Joyce, the allotropic ego of Lawrence. (See Robert Langbaum, *The Modern Tradition*, pp. 164-184.)

In Postmodernism—by phenomenology (Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), Beckett’s fiction of consciousness, varieties of the *nouveau roman* (Sarraute, Butor, Robbe-Grillet), the linguistic novel of *Tel Quel* (Sollers, Thibaudeau). (See Vivian Mercier, *The New Novel*, pp. 3-42.)

— The post-existential ethos, psychedelics (Leary), the Dionysian ego (Brown), Pranksters (Kesey), Hell's Angels, madness (Laing).

— The Hippie movement. Woodstock, rock music and poetry, communes. The culture of *The Whole Earth Catalogue*.

— The primitive Jesus.

e. Eroticism

— Beyond the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The repeal of censorship. Grove Press and the *Evergreen Review*.

— The new sexuality, from Reichian orgasm to Brownian polymorphous perversity and Esalen body consciousness.

— The homosexual novel (Burroughs, Vidal, Selby, Rechy, etc.). And the lesbian?

— Camp and comic pornography.

f. Antinomianism

— The Counter Cultures, political and otherwise. Free Speech Movement, S.D.S., Weathermen, Church Militants, Women's Lib, J.D.L., Black, Red, and Chicano Power, etc. Rebellion and Reaction! Not only aesthetic but also actual (guerilla) attacks on reason and history, science and society.

— Beyond alienation from the whole culture, acceptance of discreteness and discontinuity. Evolution of radical em-
piricism in art as in politics or morality.

— —Counter Western "ways" or metaphysics, Zen, Buddhism, Hinduism. But also Western mysticism, transcendentalism, witchcraft, the occult.

— —The widespread cult of apocalyptism, less as renovation than as destruction.

g. Experimentalism — —Open, discontinuous, improvisational, indeterminate, or aleatory structures. Absurdist and neo-surrealist modes. But also reductive, minimalist forms. In general, anti-formalism. (See Calvin Tompkins, The Bride and the Bachelor.)

— —Simultaneism. Now. The impermanence of art (sculpture made of dry ice or a hole in Central Park filled with earth), the transience of man. Absurd time.

— —Play, humor, happening, farce. (See "Irony" above.)

— —Intermedia, the fusion of forms, the confusion of realms. An end to traditional aesthetics focused on the "beauty" or "uniqueness" of the art work?

Morse Peckham argues, in Man's Rage for Chaos, "that art is a disjunctive category, established by convention, and that art is not
a category of perceptual fields, but of roleplaying.” And in *The Art of Time*, Kirby White says: “Traditional aesthetics asks a particular hermetic attitude or state of mind that concentrates on the sensory perception of the work . . . . [Postmodern] aesthetics makes use of no special attitude or set, and art is viewed just as anything else in life.”

Is this why Postmodern art, viewed in a Modernist perspective, creates more anxiety than it appeases?

XI. Alternatives

The reader, no doubt, will want to judge for himself how much Modernism permeates the present and how much the latter contains elements of a new reality. The judgment is not always made rationally; self-love and the fear of dissolution may enter into its as much as the conflict of literary generations. Yet it is already possible to note that whereas Modernism created its own forms of Authority, precisely because the center no longer held, Postmodernism has tended toward Anarchy, in deeper complicity with things falling apart. The ceremonies of Yeats’ own work, indeed of his life, are to the point.

Speculating further, we may say that the Authority of Modernism—artistic, cultural, personal—rests on intense, elitist, self-generated orders in times of crisis, of which the Hemingway Code is perhaps the starkest exemplar, and Eliot’s Tradition or Yeats’ Mythology is a more devious kind. Such elitist orders, perhaps the last of the world’s Eleusinean mysteries, may no longer have a place amongst us, threatened as we are, at the same instant, by extermination and totalitarianism.

Yet is the Anarchy of Postmodernism a deeper response, somehow more inward with our destiny? Though my sympathies are in the present, I can not believe this to be so. True, there is enhancement of life in certain anarchies of the spirit, in humor and play, in love released and freedom of the imagination to overreach itself, in a cosmic
consciousness of variousness as of unity. I recognize these as values intended by Postmodern art, and see the latter as closer, not only in time but even more in tenor, to the transformation of hope itself. Still, I wonder if any art can help to engender the motives we must now acquire; or if we can long continue to value an art that fails us in such endeavor. These are not assertions; they are open questions. It is time for everyone to open up alternatives to the Unimaginable.

Who knows but that the only alternative man does possess is one to his “human” consciousness?

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