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Some Remarks on the Logic of Period Terms: Modernism, Late Modernism, Postmodernism

I

A dizzying variety of scholarly and not-so-scholarly books on postmodern subjects have come out in recent years in English and increashingly in French, German, and other European languages. They deal not only, as we would expect, with postmodern literature and criticism, or postmodern architecture and art, but also with postmodern theology, postmodern philosophy, postmodern law and jurisprudence, postmodern politics and political science, postmodern sociology, and even postmodern science — including physics, biology, and so on. (I would not be surprised if I learned that there exist books on postmodern cuisine or gardening!)

All of these books share two visible common features: they all make claims, in their very title, to have something to say about that mysterious and omnipresent phenomenon, postmodernism, and nearly all are published by university presses. The latter characteristic is interesting: it means that the word postmodern, coined several decades ago by scholars, has had a growing appeal to scholars, particularly to those who want to be «really modern» in terms of outlook, methodology, problematics — and how can one be «really modern» today unless one is «postmodern»? (We should not, however, forget Oscar Wilde's wise and witty maxim: the fastest way to become old-fashioned is to be modern or, we might add, postmodern!) At any rate, in order not to be conspicuously left behind (unless one does want to be left behind), today one *must* be postmodern, or at least deal with postmodern issues, in spite of the perhaps embarrassing fact that the label has also become a popular catchword one may encounter in large circulation newspapers or magazines, for instance in the vocabulary of film reviewers when they describe such blockbusters as *Back to the Future, Indiana Jones,* or *Batman.* But such embarrassment would be out of place: postmodernism, we are told by scholarly experts, is characterized, among other things, by its blurring of the sharp modernist distinction between «mass culture» and «high culture» (Huyssen 1986). If postmodernist authors are no longer ashamed of best-sellerdom (which was anathema to their modernist or the avant-gardist counterparts who, as we know, strove to be unpopular), why should scholars worry?

But what does it mean to be postmodern? Postmodernism is essentially a period term: very broadly it indicates the fact of belonging (more or less self-consciously) to

the cultural present as distinct from a recent cultural past, which was characteristically modernist. Like all period terms, it (as well as its cognates, postmodern, postmodernity) carries three different kinds of meaning which entertain sometimes paradoxical relationships. In order to understand these paradoxes, if not to resolve them, one must try to grasp the larger logic of period terms, the way they normally function, their inner semantic possibilities and constraints.

(1) First, period terms have an historical meaning: more precisely, they are historical constructs, enabling us to divide the continuum of history, to single out certain segments of the irreversible flow of time for purposes of classification, focused attention, and analysis. Such constructs are created by the historian, or rather by the historical attitude: when we talk, even informally, about periods, eras, epochs, the end of an era and the beginning of another, or an epoch-making event, we situate ourselves, willy-nilly, in an historical perspective, which presupposes the model of a *linear sequence* of time and of unique events. Period concepts help us to articulate this sequence. In this sense, like romanticism, symbolism, modernism, or the various historical avant-gardes, postmodernism is a unique phenomenon in a larger historical succession. What we look for when we use a period term in this primarily historical sense is a set of distinguishing features, a distinctive physiognomy, a constellation of differences which will set the designated period apart from all those that preceded it as well as from those that follow. When the period term refers to a contemporary situation — as was the case with modernism, and is today the case with postmodernism — we assume either that it will be followed by a new period, which will confirm its historical uniqueness, or, more apocalyptically, that it is the last, that with it history comes to an end, in which case its uniqueness is enhanced, rendered more dramatic and spectacular. (Some postmodernists relish this apocalyptical end-of-the-world uniqueness.)

(2) Second, a period term always has a potential structural-synchronic meaning — a meaning which, once it is fully elaborated, seems to challenge the sense of sequential irreversible history. The unique historical physiognomy of a period remains, however, the basis or at least the phenomenological point of departure for the construction of the systematic, typological, or structural-stylistic category I now have in mind. The real difference between the diachronic use and the typological use of period terms is that in the second case the implied model of time is ultimately cyclical, a model of Viconian *corsi e ricorsi*, or one that allows for the possibility of repetition, be it repetition with variations. For historical structures or systems are repeatable, they can occur in more or less recognizable forms at different times, perhaps in alternation with opposite structures or systems. History, in this case, is a patterned process in which recurrences, similarities, analogies, correspondences, or homologies play a major role. Pure sequence reveals the hidden existence of rhythm and the logic of difference is complemented by a logic of resemblance. which explains why period terms (classic/ gothic; classic/ romantic; classic/baroque; romantic/modern; modern/ postmodern) can be articulated into evolutionary dual

schemes. The history of art, some theorists have argued, could be seen as the alternation through history of two opposite types, a sort of stylistic pendulum swinging between the classical and the baroque, for instance. Other theorists have adopted ternary schemes (classic/ romantic/ modern). Essential here is the recognition of a principle of recurrence (a recurrence with variations) within the larger irreversible time of history. If in the first, diachronical, acceptation of period terms history is supposed to never repeat itself, in this second case of systematic-typological conceptualizations, history does seem to repeat itself to a certain extent, in the sense that certain configurations (characteristic, say, of the classical type, or the romantic one, or the modernist one, or the postmodernist one, or whatever we may wish to call it) do return. This leads to remarkable chronological paradoxes. To stick with the case of postmodernism, some of its proponents, such as the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, have discerned postmodern features in Montaigne's «essays» (sixteenth century), and modern features in the German romantic literary form of the «fragment» as it was crystallized in the magazine *Atheneum* (end of the eighteenth century): «It seems to me that the essay (Montaigne) is postmodern, while the fragment (*The Atheneum*) is modern (Lyotard 1984: 81). Lyotard, one might note, rejects the notion that postmodernism designates a period and uses the term, when he applies it to Montaigne or the essay genre, in an aesthetic-typological sense. What he seems to be forgetting, in his cavalier wholesale dismissal of periodization («Postmodern is probably a very bad term, because it suggests the idea of 'periodization' and to 'periodize' is still a 'classical' or 'modern' idea» — 1983: 69), is that the word postmodernism itself has a history, and one that does not go back more than a half century or so (which means that fifty years ago no one could have seen aything postmodern in Montaigne). Moreover, the history of the word postmodernism shows that it has been most frequently used historically, i.e., in the first acceptation discussed above, to name a new period, following modernity, with its corresponding sensibilities, conceptions, views, tastes, discursive modes and ways of constructing meaning. Typologically, we might add, period terms circulate in the stream of history in all directions: postmodernist traits can be identified in artists of a more or less remote past, at the same time as older aesthetic modes can be seen as internal to the contemporary postmodernist project: postmodernism has thus been seen as a «new classicism» in art and architecture (Charles Jencks 1987).

(3) To make the logic of period terms more complicated, ambiguous, and slippery a third factor intervenes: the implicit value judgments that go with period concepts, the tacit assumptions and biases we unavoidably have toward them. Period terms, in other words, carry an evaluative meaning that could be located, depending on context, occasion, and the personality of the user, on a continuum extending from a positive-honorific pole to an utterly negative-derogatory one. Recent terms, such as postmodernism, are easily the most controversial: we are for or against them, because we celebrate or detest what they stand for. Postmodernism, thus, is dangerously bad for those who, for whatever reason, admire modernism (by no means a unified group

since it contains people of varied persuasions, people who would be dismayed at being grouped together, a formalist-purist art critic like Clement Greenberg, a neoconservative like Hilton Kramer, a neo-Marxist like Fredric Jameson). Postmodernism is, on the other hand, good news for those who oppose modernism (anarchistically-inclined critics like Leslie Fiedler, who resent the elitist features of modernism), or for critics with an apocalyptic vision of the terminal crisis of modernism, like the Ihab Hassan of the 1960s and 1970s (who saw postmodernism as the search for an exit from the modernist predicament), or even for critics who are less interested in rejecting modernism than in promoting certain new trends in literature and can do so most conveniently by counterposing them to a more broadly or narrowly defined modernism (as Alan Wilde does in his *Horizons of Assent*, in which the modernist prose of an E. M. Forster or Virginia Woolf is taken as a term of comparison or contrast for assessing the creation of such contemporaries as Ronald Sukenick, Raymond Federman, or Donald Barthelme). The evaluative implications of period terms, particularly when they refer to aspects of the very recent cultural past or the present, as modernism or postmodernism obviously do, must be carefully taken into account and weighed in the precise contexts in which they are used (and often abused for purposes of showing off, pretending, bowing to one or another current intellectual fashion, and so on).

II

Bearing in mind the foregoing distinctions, I would like to discuss now the questions raised by the attempt of some theorists of postmodernism to introduce an intermediary category between modernism and postmodernism, namely, late modernism. Is there such a thing as a late modernist style? Is such a style used by contemporary artists? And if so, how can this style be convincingly distinguished from an earlier paradigmatic anti-traditional modernism (or High Modernism), as well as from a contemporaneous postmodernism that is more radically eclectic, metaphoric, and self-consciously ironic? Whatever the answer, the questions are interesting, for they imply, rather tantalizingly, that the introduction of a new element in the discourse about our cultural present — the notion of a third style — might possibly give us a better grasp of the frequent, increasingly abstract and nebulous opposition between modernism and postmodernism that dominates the cultural discussion in this fin de siècle. Even if we take it only as a provisional hypothesis, the notion of a late modernist style may offer a useful opportunity to reexamine and perhaps rethink the main theoretical positions in regard to modernism and postmodernism and, more broadly, to the ways in which we use and misuse period terms and stylistic categories.

In literature, for instance, the recognition of a late modernist style — coexisting not only with a powerfully surviving modernism or a full-fledged newer postmodernism but also with such other parallel styles as, say, contemporary versions of an older realism or naturalism — would have significant consequences in the ways we are

grouping together works belonging to the last half century or so. And such groupings — need we emphasize? — are not just neutral classifications but, in fact, invitations to look at certain works within a common frame of reference or context, to read and to reread them within a common horizon of intertextual possibilities, to try to capture (or create) similarities and contrasts among them that could help us to discover (or invent) interesting, unsuspected, enlightening ways of understanding them, both individually and collectively. Consider the following broad view of the modernism/postmodernism dichotomy and the acceptance of an intermediary late-modern style. A modernist work, according to this view, is one that seeks to explore the inner logic of the art form it uses in its farthest-reaching and subtlest implications, and such a work presupposes a highly trained, specialized, sophisticated audience (modernist art, it has been said, is an artist's art). A postmodernist work, in this same view, is one that attempts to do two apparently incompatible things, a work that speaks, as it were, in two voices and tries to attract simultaneously two distinct audiences: a sophisticated, knowledgeable, and necessarily elitist group, on the one hand, and a larger, more naive, less specialized public, on the other. Typical of modernism would be works such as Proust's *A la recherche to temps perdu*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Joyce's *Ulysses*; typical of postmodernism would be works that qualify for the paradoxical status of highly sophisticated best sellers — many of whom, interestingly, come from Europe: from Italy (Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* or *Foucault's Pendulum*), from Germany (Patrick Süsskind's *Perfume*), from England (John Fowles's *French Lieutenant's Woman*, D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*, or A.S. Byatt's recent *Possession: A Romance*), from Portugal (José Saramago's *Baltasar and Blimunda*, to be discussed in thes conference in a sepaparate paper by Douwe Fokkema), to cite a few recent examples. Important characteristics of postmodernism, in this latter sense, are found in some Latin American works illustrating the mode of «magic realism» (Garcia-Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would be the classic example), or in the otherwise unclassifiable works of a Vladimir Nabokov (*Despair, Lolita*, and *Pale Fire*). The ultimate test would be one of readability: in Nabokov's corpus, a novel like *Lolita* would be closer to the postmodern type, *Pale Fire* closer to the modernist/late modernist one. Late modernism, in this impromptu scheme (which I might try to refine on another occasion), would be illustrated by a persistence or even exaggeration of the purist-experimentalist-formalist elements of modernism. If we consider Joyce a modernist in *Ulysses*, we might wish to characterize *Finnegans Wake* as late modernist (in opposition, for instnce, to Ihab Hassan's view that *Finnegans Wake* is the first example of a fully postmodernist work). The experimentalism of the French *nouveau roman* would mark it as late modernist (almost unreadable but highly rereadable), rather than postmodernist (highly readable and rereadable as well). Samuel Beckett, occasionally dealt with as a postmodern, would appear rather as a late modern, to be read (or better reread) alongside Proust and, more profitably, alongside Joyce — as attempting to offer a negative version of the Joycean aesthetics of fullness. Such impromptu periodizing schemes can be of

course developed in more analytical detail and the resulting insights may well be worth the trouble. Such schemes should, however, remain conscious of their essentially impromptu character, so much so that any attempt to claim a larger, more objective, more compelling validity for them must be resisted. When such temptations arise we should be reminded that periodization and period terms — with their subtle historical, typological, and axiological possibilities — are premises and not conclusions, instruments of research (reading, rereading) and not findings, perspectives of understanding and not incontrovertible results of an understanding that would consider itself «final» or «definitive.»

The broadest idea of a separate late modern style was elaborated most persuasively by the architecture historian and critic Charles Jencks, an early and articulate proponent of the concept of postmodernism in architecture since the late 1970's. Jencks's first statement on the matter of architectural postmodernism, in his book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), focused on the shift from the rationalistic, austerely geometric, and utopian modernist style exemplified by the Bauhaus movement (Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe) or by Le Corbusier's «home as a machine for living in» to the more sensuously contextual, neo-vernacular, and playful revivalism of the postmoderns (Robert Venturi, Philip Johnson, Charles Moore, Aldo Rossi, Paolo Portoghesi and many others). Significantly, there was no mention of a late modern style in the 1977 book, which appeared to rule out the possibility of any survivals of modernism in new guises by opening as it did, with a blunt, unequivocal proclamation of «The Death of Modern Architecture.»

But soon after having published modernism's obituary, Jencks was forced to face the stubborn refusal of some of his postmodernist heroes to accept the honorific title he had bestowed upon them: James Stirling and Philip Johnson insisted that at times they were still modern and Charles Moore and Robert Venturi, sharp critics of modernism, «declared they didn't want to be 'Post' anything.» (Jencks 1980: 6) It became clear that the modernism/postmodernism dichotomy was too rigid. Consequently, Jencks started elaborating the notion of late modernism, conceived as a transitional but self-contained style, to which he devoted the title essay in his *Late-Modern Architecture* (1980). Two years later, the various developments identified as late-modern were given a major place in Jencks's survey of *Architecture Today*. More recently, in a paper on «Post-Modern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions» (published in the *Chicago Review* in 1987), Jencks returned to the question of distinguishing among modernism, late modernism, and postmodernism, and broadened the scope of his three twentieth-century stylistic categories to comprise, beyond architecture, the relevant directions in the arts (painting, sculpture, video) and in literature (poetry and fiction)[1].

It is interesting to note that Jencks quotes approvingly the witty definition of postmodernism (which he also reproduces in the 1988 book on *Post-Modernism*) put forward by the Italian semiotician, cultural critic and novelist Umberto Eco in his account of how he wrote his best-selling medieval detective mystery, *The Name of the*

Rose. Contrasting postmodernism with the avant-garde, Eco emphasizes their different attitudes toward the past. While the modern rejects the past in the name of the New, the postmodern recognizes that

> that the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, 'I love you madly', because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, 'As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly'. At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony.... (Eco 1983: 67-68).

From Jencks's point of view, Eco has givens us, through his amusing allegory, a suggestive description of the central characteristic of postmodernist artistic discourse, namely, *double coding* as opposed to modernist art's single coding or commitment to a unique stylistic principle. The modernist logic of the new, based on a relentless hostility to the «already said» (a logic in which the past can be re-visited only via kitsch), would have prompted Eco's lover to try to find absolutely new ways of declaring his love and, in case of failure, to choose silence over expression. This is another way of saying that the modernist artist thinks within a single, highly demanding (and even heroic) frame of reference, and that his purist attitude forces him to use only one code of communication, an elitist and, perhaps, an ascetic one. The postmodern artist avoids the sterility to which a self-consistent modernist position is bound to lead in the long run by way of double coding: the past need not be passively imitated or falsely invoked, since it can be quoted — transcontextualized and duly put between quotation marks-and thus be made fit for reuse in a situation whose real novelty consists precisely of its renunciation to any claims of «innocence» (originality, uniqueness, absolute novelty or freshness). I would summarize this by saying that postmodernism's aesthetic salvation appears to lie in the.... quotation marks! Actually, beyond Eco or Jencks, most theorists of postmodernism seem to agree that an «aesthetics of quotation» or a principle of «quotationism» is essential to the postmodern identity (see Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, who suggests a mode of intertextuality that is essentially parodic or Guy Scarpetta, *L'impureté*, who suggests a mode of intertextuality that illustrates a new eclecticism, a postmodern «neo-baroque», and an «aesthetics of recycling»).

«Quotationism» is just one instance of Jencks's broader notion of double coding, the main semiotic characteristic of postmodernism. He writes (in 1987):

> To this day I would define Postmodernism as I did in 1978 as *doubly coded, one-half Modern and one-half something else (usually traditional building) in its attempt to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects*. The point of this double coding was itself double.... Double coding to simplify means both elite/popular and new/old and there are compelling reasons for these opposite pairings. (Jencks 1987b: 33).

Beyond double coding, other theoreticians of postmodernism, in the European and, more precisely, the French cultural space, have spoken of multiple coding or neo-baroque «overcoding» (Scarpetta). To discuss the question of late modernism — does it exist and, if so, what kind of existence does it have and how can we usefully or intelligently talk about it? — the most convenient way to start is by considering a late modernist structure, one whose most salient features distinguish it very clearly from a typical postmodern construction. From Jencks's sample of late modern architecture I have chosen the Pompidou Center in Paris, designed by Richard Rodgers and Renzo Piano. Essentially, everything in the building is subordinated to the explicitly modernist theme of the machine: the functionalist treatment of the insect-like «exoskeleton» («bones», that is, pipes, ducts, and tubes on the outside), the extreme logic, the extreme circulatory emphasis, the tendency toward a totally «isotropic», repetitive interior space (a space with the same physical properties along all axes). Late modernism, though, pushes the modernist logic to manneristic extremes: the tendency to use technology rhetorically and decoratively bypasses in a sly, and I would say even perverse fashion, the modernist interdiction of the ornament; moreover, the introduction of popular fantasy elements (the futuristic appearance of the building as a «bugeyed mechanical monster of Science Fiction») contradicts the canonic modernist requirement of purity.

Quite different is the postmodern style as illustrated by James Stirling's *Neue Staatsgalerie* in Stuttgart, which Jencks considers «the most 'real' beauty of Post-Modern architecture to date». (Jencks 1987: 37) The comparison with the Pompidou Center is all the more justified as both buildings are museums, although the Pompidou Center is a museum of *modern* art (hence its architectural thematization of modernity[2], including modernity's deliberate, defiant ignorance of context and the past, might be somehow justified). The important point, though, is not that the Stuttgart museum uses «traditional rustication and classical forms including an Egyptian cornice, and open air pantheon, and segmental arches», but that obviously modern materials (such as reinforced concrete) are used and that quintessentially modern forms are «collaged onto the traditional background». A typical postmodern instance of what Jencks calls double coding is the «ruins-in-the-garden» aspect of the parking garage seen from the outside:

> Classical blocks which have fallen about in an eighteenth-century manner, reveal the reality of Post-Modern construction: a steel frame holds up the slabs of masonry, and there is no cement between the blocks, but rather air. These holes in the walls, which are ironic vents to the parking garage, dramatize the difference between truth and illusion, and allow Stirling to assert continuity with the existing classical fabric while also showing the difference. Paradox and double coding exist throughout this scheme, which is more an articulation of urban tissue than a conventional building. (Jencks 1987b: 36)

I would say that the contrasts established by Jencks between canonical modernism, late modernism, and postmodernism are intuitively appealing in his attempt to survey, in the style of an informal but informed *causerie*, a complex cultural landscape still in the making.

III

Theoretically, however, the classification proposed by Jencks is flawed and it might be interesting to take a closer look at some of its flaws, which may alert us to the difficulties and intellectual perils involved in any stylistic classification of the same type. A theoretical analysis of Jencks's three main constructs for twentieth century architecture (but also for twentieth century literature and art, since he subsequently extended them to these domains as well) is furthermore justified by the fact that he himself has expressed pride at the specially discriminating character of his classification which, instead of the five or six variables taken into account by most architecture or art historians, uses no less than thirty.

At first sight, the list of thirty variables that Jencks has compiled — a list that is supposed to answer all the questions raised by a differential analysis of twentieth century trends in architecture — is quite impressive (Jencks 1982: 16; also reproduced in Hoesterey 1991: 19). One is slightly disappointed, however, at the lack of any explanation of how the distinguishing criteria were arrived at. As soon as we turn our attention to the individual variables that make up the list we soon notice their heterogeneity and, as we go on examinisg and weighing them, we find it increasingly hard to imagine how one could use in any more rigorous way such heterogeneous categories to make meaningful stylistic comparisons or distinctions. To take just one example: variable number four gives us *Zeitgeist* as a characteristic of modernism, «late capitalism» corresponding to late modernism, and «tradition and choice» to postmodernism. But one does not see why the romantic notion of *Zeitgeist* (or «spirit of the times») would be an exclusive feature of modernism and why «late capitalism», or postmodernism, for that matter, would be denied a *Zeitgeist* of its own; and even so, one is hard put to make out in what way «traditions and choice» would be relatable or contrastable to «late capitalism» or *Zeitgeist*. Jencks's variables, taken one by one, give me a strange sense of *déja vu*. More precisely, his classification reminds me of

Jorge Luis Borges who, in examining Bishop John Wilkins' procedure for establishing a universal analytical language, came upon

> ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies [which] recall those attributed by Dr. Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopedia entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor, (b) embalmed one, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance. (Borges 1981:142).

But this kind of humorous confusion is the fate of most, if not all classifications. Be that as it may, the difficulties raised by Jencks's thirty variables remain even if, for the sake of argument, we suppose that they are all established in a perfectly convincing, valid manner. The fact is that he fails to tell us how these thirty variables are to be effectively taken into account, and how many of them are to be fulfilled as a minimum for determining that a structure is modern, late modern, or postmodern. Jencks himself, when faced with individual cases, appears to use no more than five or six criteria, and these five or six criteria, unlike those of mainstream architecture historians, he seems to feel free to select as he pleases from the total of thirty. The procedure is of course statistically indefensible. It is one thing if, out of five or six «diagnostic criteria», all or most are actually satisfied before making a particular diagnosis. It is a completely different thing if, out of thirty such criteria, only five or six are effectively satisfied — the diagnosis in this case would be extremely unreliable. Thus, while intuitively we may agree with some of Jencks's judgments and insights as they apply to specific cases, we find that his introduction of thirty variables — be these variables adduced as correctly as one would wish — is theoretically not very helpful as long as we do not know how many of these are necessary for making a reasonable determination.

IV

This brings me back to the earlier question: Is there such a thing as a late modernism? Or, to put it differently and perhaps more adequately: Is it useful to *invent* a category of late modernism, and if so, why? Let me insist that «to invent» is the right word in this case, given that such labels (modernism, late modernism, postmodernism, and such like) are in fact only intellectual constructs or tools that may be needed for doing certain jobs, constructs or tools that will become useless, cumbersome, and even worse when the jobs to be performed are different. In reply to the foregoing questions, let me say again that the distinction between late modernism and postmodernism serves Jencks well when he tries to present the complicated current architectural scene. Under the circumstances, the distinction fulfills a specific

need, namely, the need for a verbal framework within which to focus, analytically and, why not?, metaphorically, on the stylistic differences between, say, a Richard Rodgers (aside from the Pompidou Center one may recall such a typical Rodgers work as the *Lloyds Redevelopment* in London) and a Charles Moore (for exemple, his typically postmodern *Piazza d'Italia* in New Orleans, 1975-80). But the usefulness of the distinction between late modern and postmodern vanishes when the perspective changes — when, for instance, we are called upon to judge the theoretical soundness of an ambitious chart which, as we saw, lacks a principle of inner coherence and finally appears to «resort to chaos», as Borges would put it.

By the same token, the distinction between modernism and postmodernism, as reelaborated by Jencks more recently, is also of limited usefulness. The remarks on postmodern art in the first part of the 1987 essay, and particularly those on the Italian postmodernist painters (Sandro Chia, Carlo Maria Mariani, and Mimmo Paladino), are interesting. But the considerations on late modernism that follow are increasingly abstract and hard to follow intuitively, since they invite us to look at the late modern style as an extension of an earlier strain of «agonistic» or «schismatic» modernism, about whose specific qualities Jencks remains silent. All we learn subsequently is that this «schismatic» modernism would be (rather vaguely) a deviation from the common Protestant «religion» established by true modernism! Jencks seems to be carried away with an euphoria of vast cultural metaphors which end up being taken literally or quasi-literally, although a certain quality of intellectual playfulness is never completely absent. In his cultural-metaphorical mood, Jencks accounts for canonical (architectural) modernism in terms of the historical model of the sixteenth century Reformation, postmodernism being thus a Counter-Reformation. Along these lines, we learn that in the thirties and forties major universities started disseminating

> the purist doctrines of John Calvin Corbusier, Martin Luther Gropius, and John Knox van der Rohe. Their white cathedrals were soon built in every land... (Jencks 1987: 45)

In the same vein, he characterizes the postmoderns of the 1970s and 1980s as a

> Counter-Reformation [with] its new saints and zealous bishops... Also Rossi, the new Italian Pope of architecture, issued decrees on Neo-Rationalism.... The most militant apostle, a veritable Ignatius Loyola, Leon Krier, established his following, called Rational Architects, equivalent to the Society of Jesus. All these New Jesuits from Spain, Italy, Belgim, and France even insisted on building with ancient techniques of craftsmanship and stone. (Jencks 1987b: 54-55).

And late modernism? It is, in Jencks's good-humored but chaotic game of cultural-historical transpositions, an extension of Protestantism at its most radical and antinomian. Curiously, on the strength of no more than this amusing metaphor, Jencks would have us accept his proposal for «a complete reshuffling of categories»

and to recognize that «what Goldberger, Foster, Jameson, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Krauss, Hassan and so many others *often* define as 'Post-' is mostly 'Late', because it is still cammitted to the tradition of the New». (Jencks 1987b: 49) But it is hard for me to see what this shift in nomenclature is supposed to achieve. In Jencks's own essay, the proposed terminological reshuffle, based on the identification of late modernism with a renewed «Protestantism» in aesthetics, does not achieve too much. It does not give the notion of a late modern style a sharper, more distinct, more interesting aesthetic identity or edge. And the proposed terminological reshuffle raises yet another problem: how is one to reconcile Jencks's earlier view of late modernism (slick-tech, technocratic, contentedly post-utopian, quite comfortable within the framework of «corporate culture») with the agonistic, antagonistic, and subversive features which his more recent version of late modernism must accommodate if it is to replace the postmodernism of Hassan et al.? By now, the category of late modern has become at best a large and ungraspable abstraction; at worst a hodgepodge of far-fetched and often incompatible analogies.

In conclusion, I will stick to my own pragmatic analogy of stylistic/historical terms as tools or, better, heuristic constructs. Their function is not to «reflect» with more or less accuracy objective, externally existing «realities» — there is nothing «out there» that could be reflected. Their function is much more modest: to shape and reshape patterns of significant relations (historical, structural, evaluative), to separate and recombine them for purposes of understanding and intellectual manipulation, and ultimately, I would argue, to invent or reinvent such patterns in order to throw new light on certain artistic works. Essential to my view of stylistic/aesthetic categories as heuristic constructs is the concept of purpose. What can be the purpose of distinguishing between modernism, late modernism, and postmodernism? It depends of course on the situation. In a classroom environment or in a textbook designed for classroom use, such a distinction would introduce a mere convention used for the sake of a convenient, didactically simplified mode of presentation of complex contemporary cultural issues. In journalistic usage (as in art or architecture reviews), late modernism is simply a less radical departure from modernism, but has really no distinctive features of its own (its status is comparable to that of the modifiers «semi-» or «quasi»). Being not specified in any detail, the job the term has to do in such a case is one of rough approximation, which may be justified in informational terms, but cannot claim to be intellectually too exciting. An example of such usage is found in Paul Goldberger's *On the Rise*, which collects the author's *New York Times* architecture reviews over a decade or so: «What has been termed late modernism — the tendency to merge the sleek and cool materials of modernism with the picturesque impulses of postmodernism — is a vital part of American, not to say international, architecture as the 1980's unfold... In late modernism and postmodernism alike, we see a desire to make the building a sensuous object, to make it stimulate our emotions as well as our intellect» (Goldberger 1983: 6). In a more professional survey like Jencks's (I think of his *Architecture Today*) the purpose of the distinction modernism/

late modernism/postmodernism remains presentational: it offers the reader «rules of thumb» for distinguishing among recent stylistic procedures and practices. The criteria of such a distinction — Jencks's thirty variables — are affirmed but left unexamined. My own purpose in this paper has been to briefly discuss the circumstances in which such distinctions could be fruitfully adopted, as well as those in which they are better be avoided. I also have tried to call attention to some of the implications of the logic of period terms. But, one might ask, is the notion of late modernism in art history or in literary studies justified? Should we use it or dismiss it? My answer would be that, in principle, late modernism is as justified as modernism, avantgarde, postmodernism, and similar terms in the lexicon of modernity: namely, when it is «reinvented» and used to do an intelligent, convincing, fruitful, exciting, or at the very least useful job. Otherwise it can be no more than yet another pseudo-scholarly, pretentious, and uninteresting bore. And of course, like modernism and postmodernism, it does not correspond to any given literary or artistic «reality»: the most it can do is to create perspectives from which one can understand certain aspects of the processes of artistic production and reception — historically, typologically, axiologically — in their essential fluidity.

Notes

[1] Jencks most recent contribution to the question of postmodernism, the elegant and richly illustrated volume *Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), does not add anything new to the terminological discussion as such. The theoretical arguments, contained mostly in the first chapter, «The Values of Post-Modernism», are essentially unchanged from earlier publications, and particularly the *Chicago Review* essay, discussed below. The interest of the volume comes from the fact that, aside from the survey of «postmodern classicism» in architecture (note the use of the hyphen, which is fully self-conscious and meant to convey the difference between Jencks's position and that of supporters of «postmodernism» like Ihab Hassan and others), it includes an extensive treatment of international postmodernist painting «concerned with the recent classical synthesis» (from late Chirico and late Balthus to Carlo Maria Mariani, from Ron Kitaj to Ben Johnson, from Francesco Clemente to Lennart Anderson, etc.). The distinction between late-modern and post-modern is on occasion invoked to justify certain absences (Frank Stella and Richard Diebenkorn are «late-modern» and consequently their works are not discussed). But here the author is more concerned to distinguish among various strains within postmodernism (metaphysical classical, narrative classical, allegorical classical, etc.) and the late-modern style is not the object of analytical attention.

[2] For the more apocalyptic sensibility of Jean Baudrillard what the Pompidou Center thematizes is rather the end of modernity or what he calls the «end of the social». This, in his view, coincides with the ominous apotheosis of mass society and mass consumption under the sign of the «simulacrum» which announces the final «black hole», the bursting inward or implosion in which our civilization will perish. In his *L'effet Beaubourg*, Baudrillard sees the Pompidou Center — which he prefers to call by the name of the old Parisian district where it is located — as a sinister mechanomorphic supermarket of cultural simulacra, indeed a locus of «the death of culture» and of the «operational prostitution of a culture which has been at last done away with» (p. 24), a «monument of cultural determent» (p. 23) which attracts the

masses as irresistibly as the site of a disaster. Of course for Baudrillard Beaubourg is an icon/ symbol of a broader and deeply troubled, if unconscious postmodernity.

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