

# Modernism and Postmodernism

## AN OVERVIEW

by

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**Modernism**) refer to western experimental cultural tendencies, Modernism beginning in the late 19th century, and giving way to Postmodernism in the mid 20th. Whether Postmodernism has ended, and if so when, is at present unclear. The underlying and predating notion of *Modernity* relates to the second of two great leaps in human history: the first, about 10,000 BC in the Middle East, when the ‘hunting and gathering’ way of life began to be substituted for one based on agriculture and settled communities; the second, c. 1450–1800 in north west Europe, when industrialisation was introduced. We tend to think of our present age as a post-industrial, knowledge-based, one. However, it was Gutenberg’s ‘industrialisation’ of knowledge around 1450, with the invention of the printing press, that more than anything else helped launch the Modern era. Religious, scientific, economic, political and other upheavals followed but it was only in the late 19th century, with its sceptical questioning and experimental attitude, that we see a distinctively ‘modern’ outworking in the arts. Modernity involves progress through specialisation – separating and developing activities each according to its own inner logic. Within Modernism the more progressive specialists became known as the *avant-garde*. Where earlier art served mostly religious or state interests, now it increasingly served its own – “art for art’s sake” as the Aesthetic Movement put it. And each of the arts sought ‘purity’ and ‘autonomy’ – self-governance. Because narratives more properly belong to literature, for instance, a painting was not expected to tell a story. Nor, in many Modernists’ view, was it painting’s role to record appearances. There were the various lens-based media for that but, more importantly, trying to make paint appear to be what it was not – skin, sky, sea, or whatever – offended the Modernist principle of ‘truth to materials’. Art thus developed in the direction of formalism and abstraction, away from its traditional role of serving religion, state, or powerful individuals, and away also from a general public or audience. However, by the mid 20th century, Modernists were becoming exhausted by the self-imposed demand for the ever new, and increasingly uneasy at the gulf separating them and their work from society at large. Postmodernists addressed both these issues. Whether choosing to go forward with or without lessons learnt from Modernism itself, they sought to reconnect with art of the past and with society at large. Their problem was how to do this while retaining professional self-respect. On the whole, the reconnecting is fragmentary and ironical in fashion,

typically through pastiche, parody, or popular reference.

## Modernity

Modernity, the cultural movement or tendency, is part of a broader historical pattern or project, that of Modernity. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

It is not fully understood what produced the leap into modernity and why, just as some groups of hunters and gatherers gave rise to agrarian society [agriculture emerging in the Middle East c. 10,000 BC], some agrarian societies gave rise to industrial society. What is clear is that it took place between the 16th and 18th centuries and that it began in the countries of northwestern Europe – especially England, the Netherlands, northern France, and northern Germany.

This could not have been expected. Compared to the Mediterranean, not to mention Arabic and Chinese civilizations, northwestern Europe early in the 16th century was backward, technically and culturally. In the 16th and 17th centuries it was still absorbing the commercial and artistic innovations of the Italian city-states of the Renaissance and making piratical raids, where it could, on the wealthy Spanish empire. It seemed an unlikely candidate for future economic leadership of Europe. Yet it was there that the changes took place that propelled those particular societies into the forefront of world development.<sup>1</sup>

Bracketing Modernity “between the 16th and 18th centuries” may be queried. It excludes much of the Renaissance period and also Johannes Gutenberg’s invention, about 1450, of the printing press. The ‘industrialisation’ of knowledge facilitated by Gutenberg played a vital role within the development of modernity (>10040). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* again:

Modern society owes its origin to two great upheavals in the 18th century, one political, the other economic. Both were part of a broader pattern of change that, since the Renaissance and Reformation, had set the West on a different path of development from that of the rest of the world. This pattern included the individualism and, in the end, the secularism, that was the Protestant legacy. It also included the rise of science, as a method and as a practice. Both of these culminated in explosive events toward the end of the 18th century. The first helped provoke political revolutions in America and France. The second, in creating an atmosphere conducive to technological innovation, was one of the chief elements in the emergence of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

## Characteristics

Modernity may be basically characterised by:

- o specialization
- o autonomy
- o progress

In premodern societies, treatments of knowledge and belief tend to be bound together in mythical or religious narratives: in Modern ones, separated out into autonomous (self-gover-

<sup>1</sup> “Modernization – Becoming Modern”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 Ultimate Reference Suite DVD*.

<sup>2</sup> “Modernization – The Dual Revolution”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 Ultimate Reference Suite DVD*.

ning) specialisms and developed each according to its own 'inner logic'. In a premodern society, for instance, serious treatment of what is true, good, and beautiful may be by way of a creation myth: in a Modern one, respectively, by way of science, morality, and art. With regards to progress, W. L. Reese, in his *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion, Eastern and Western Thought*, 1980, writes:

From the Latin *pro* ("forward") and *gradi* ("to step or go"). In philosophy the conception of progress is to be contrasted with the view that the Golden Age was in the past, and with the view that time is eternal recurrence. Of course, in both West and East, views can be cited... where the cycle of time includes periods of progress and of regress or decline. But the idea of progress can perhaps best be viewed as a secularised version of the Christian movement toward the apocalypse, and the Kingdom of God.

The secular idea of progress gained prominence among the French *Philosophes* or Encyclopedists of the 18th century. Cabanis preached the idea of progress ending in a secular utopia. Condorcet believed in man's indefinite perfectibility...<sup>3</sup>

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678 and 1684) is a vision of progress "toward the apocalypse, and the Kingdom of God" at the individual Christian's level, the journey through life, toward damnation or salvation.

The scientific attitude, central to Modernity, brings with it belief in progress – over time, knowledge accumulates, understanding deepens, explanations and predictions become more precise. Confidence in humanity's progressive improvement, and perfectibility over time, was high during the 18th century Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. It was reinforced in the 19th century when Charles Darwin's theory of evolution placed humanity at the forefront of a progression leading from the lowest form of life through to the highest. If our ancestors were of the animal kingdom, our descendants, following this trajectory or line of progression, will further 'improve' upon us.

## Modernism

The cultural movement or tendency known as 'Modernism' shares the basic characteristics of Modernity itself – an *avant-garde* ('vanguard') of progressive artist-specialists, united under the banner of 'originality,' defends the purity and autonomy of its own artform and opens the way to ever new areas of aesthetic experience.

David L. Edwards, in 1988, gives the following account of Modernism:

Although the adjective 'modern' has been applied to many different phenomena at different times, 'modernism' (or 'the modern movement') has by now acquired stability as the comprehensive term for an international tendency, arising in the poetry, fiction, drama, music, painting, architecture, and other arts of the West in the last years of the 19th century and subsequently affecting the character of most 20th-century art. The tendency is usually held to

have reached its peak just before or soon after World War I, and there has for some time been uncertainty about whether it has ended. Orwell and Cyril Connolly were pronouncing its demise during World War II, but the *avant-garde* events of the post-war period require explanation. Frank Kermode has argued for continuity... Others, especially in America... have proposed a sharp distinction, a new *post-modernist* style amounting to a reaction against Modernist formalism, a choric, global village art, the product of a 'post-cultural' age...

As a stylistic term, Modernism contains and conceals a wide variety of different, smaller movements, usually reckoned to be those post-dating naturalism and characterized by the anti-positivistic and anti-representational leanings of many late-19th-century artists and thinkers. It would thus include the tendencies of symbolism, impressionism, and decadence around the turn of the century; fauvism, cubism, postimpressionist [sic.], futurism, constructivism, imagism, and vorticism in the period up to and over World War I; and surrealism during and after that war. A number of these movements contain large theoretical differences among themselves, but certain stylistic similarities. Thus atonalism in music, anti-representationalism in painting, *vers libre* in poetry, fragmentation and stream of consciousness presentation in the novel, functionalism in architecture, and in general the use of spatial or collage as opposed to linear or representational forms, are recurrent features. Another common characteristic noted by critics is the presence of an element of, in Frank Kermode's word, 'decreation' – of technical introversion, or an often ironic self-awareness – in Modernist forms...<sup>4</sup>

## Modernism and progress

The notion of progress, whilst central to Modernity, and much stressed within Modernism, is nevertheless problematic when related to art and Modernism. By the mid 20th century there was also a more general loss of confidence. Robert C. Solomon, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*:

...It is important to distinguish between progress in the realm of science and technology, where improvements in medical cures, modes of transport, and various scientific theories are easily established, and moral or spiritual progress, which raises profound philosophical problems about the nature of happiness and morals. It is by no means obvious that we are happier, more moral or compassionate, less dogmatic or belligerent, than our more 'primitive' peers and ancestors. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, argued (during the Enlightenment) that advances in the arts and sciences had corrupted rather than improved humanity.

As we end the twentieth century, after two world wars and fifty years of potential nuclear conflict, the concept of progress has come into ill repute. The conservative philosopher Friedrich von Hayek bemoans the fact that confidence in progress has now become a mark of a 'shallow mind'. But even those who see history as 'just one damn thing after another' (in the eloquent phrase of poet John Masefield) tend to insist that we can nevertheless learn

<sup>3</sup> W. L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion, Eastern and Western Thought*; Harvester Press, Brighton, and Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1980, ISBN 0-85527-7955, p. 460.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Edwards, in Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley (editors), *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 1977; 2nd ed., Fontana Press, London, 1988, ISBN 0-00-686129-6, p. 539.

from history, improve ourselves and progress beyond it.<sup>5</sup> Discussion of the “profound philosophical problems” raised by relating progress to the arts is beyond the present text, except to ask possibly the central question: ‘progress’ toward what? Is there some kind of artistic, secular, equivalent to apocalypse and/or salvation, or should we be thinking more in terms of an evolutionary process? We saw earlier how some abstractionists sought through their art a kind of universal visual language, akin to music in ability to communicate across cultural and other boundaries (>20521). This kind of (more or less) defined and declared goal was far from the norm though. For the most part, Modernist progressiveness was louder and more specific on what it rejected than what it was for.

### Criticisms of Modernism

By the mid 20th century, opinion was growing that many of the sacrifices made in pursuit of ‘progress’ within Modernism had to be reassessed. Previous ‘strengths’ now began to appear as weaknesses. The need, many felt, was no longer for ‘pure research,’ elitist and to many eyes purposeless and irrelevant: quite the opposite.

Fig. 1 Saul Steinberg, ‘Avant-garde Marching,’ from *The Inspector*, New York, 1973. Reproduced from E. H. Gombrich, *Topics of our Time, Twentieth-century Issues in Learning and in Art*, Phaidon, London, 1991, ISBN 0-7148-2707-X, p. 194.

American art critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–78) and others contended that the new cannot become a tradition without giving rise to unique contradictions, myths and absurdities, albeit, often creative absurdities. Italian architect and writer Paolo Portoghesi (b. 1931) objected to Modernism’s ‘hidden weapon,’ its ability to render perpetual change on the superficial level yet without changing its own fundamental character. How can one change something that by nature is in continuous flux? Objections to Modernism perhaps centred on the undesirability or absurdity of cultural activities being kept separate from one another.

#### ARCHITECTURE MOST REVEALING

What distinguishes Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism from one another is perhaps best revealed in the applied arts, particularly architecture, where connection with a broad public is conspicuous and involving. William J. R. Curtis writes:

Modern architecture presupposed a division of labour between architects, manufacturers, engineers and construction workers, but in many ‘undeveloped’ countries there were fewer steps in the process between conception and construction. Thus a building conceived on a Parisian drawing-board might require imported and expensive mass-produced components which entirely ignored local patterns of construction and labour when built in the Persian Gulf. The resultant forms were immediately at odds with centuries-old traditions of craftsmanship in which specific methods had been evolved to handle local materials. The practical logic behind regional style was undermined, and the delicate details and intuitions of handicraft were replaced by tatty, industrial building com-

ponents.

Fig. 2 Hassan Fathy, New Gournia Village, Luxor, Egypt, 1946–53. Reproduced from William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, 1982; 3rd edition, Phaidon, London, 1996, ISBN 0-7148-3356-8, p. 569.

The problems attached to importing foreign technologies were compounded by others related to the imposition of alien social theories, especially in the field of housing. What were conceived in Europe as low-cost models might be inappropriate when built elsewhere. In Egypt, for example, the philosopher/architect Hassan Fathy discovered that concrete-frame housing schemes built by the government in the 1950s were liable to be far more expensive in terms of money, transport costs and salaries than local, traditional, self-build models, and they were at odds with non-Western ways of life. In his *Architecture for the Poor, an Experiment in Rural Egypt* (1973), he summed up his critical position of the previous three decades...

Modernity does not necessarily mean liveliness, and change is not always for the better... Tradition is not necessarily old-fashioned and is not synonymous with stagnation... Tradition is the social analogy of personal habit, and in art has the same effect of releasing the artist from distracting and inessential decisions so that he can give his whole attention to the vital ones.<sup>6</sup>

While broadly accepting Fathy’s argument, Curtis also makes two valid counter-points:

This sounded convincing enough until one encountered the problems of very large numbers of poor people living in cities...<sup>7</sup>

And:

There can be little doubt that Fathy’s romanticization of the peasant was part of a larger ideological quest for national roots...<sup>8</sup>

From a very different perspective to Fathy’s, the leading Modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, as renowned for his economy with words as with architectural forms, famously used to remark: “You cannot invent a new architecture every Monday morning”. Clearly Mies van der Rohe is here questioning the Modernist stress on unbridled innovation. Similarly, Le Corbusier during his Purist years spoke of refining existing architectural types rather than inventing new ones – an observation in some respects striking at the heart of Modernism.

Finally, a Postmodernist perspective would suggest that a very different kind of criticism of Modernism be heard, the popular or democratic one – particularly as in the family house is generally represented the major aesthetic and financial commitment of a lifetime. Of houses built in these islands over the last few decades, the impression is that only a minority tend toward Modernism. Many more tend toward some kind of ‘historical’ styling – ‘Tudor-Georgian,’ for instance, with leaded double-glazing, fibreglass oak beams, and plaster classical columns. As offensive as this kind of

<sup>5</sup> Robert C Solomon in Ted Honderich (editor), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1995, ISBN 0-19-866132-0, p. 722.

<sup>6</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 1982; Phaidon, London, New York, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1996, ISBN 0-7148-3356-8, p. 569.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis, p. 569.

<sup>8</sup> Curtis, p. 569.

pick-and-mix styling, unrelated to any functional or structural requirement, is to the Modernist, it is celebrated by the Postmodernist.

## Postmodernism

Pop Art, emerging in the early 1950s as a reaction against Modernist Abstract Expressionism, in many respects marks the beginning of Postmodernism. The broad scope and variety of viewpoints embraced by Postmodernism is represented below by a selection of commentators.

Fig. 3 Carlo Scarpa, Museo Castelvecchio, Verona, 1956–64; exhibition room with view towards the basement. Reproduced from Peter Gössel and Gabriele Leuthäuser, *Architecture in the Twentieth Century*, Taschen, Cologne, 1991, ISBN 3-8228-0550-5, p. 374.

## Malcolm Bradbury

Novelist and critic Malcolm Bradbury (1932–2000), in 1988, offers this overview of Postmodernism:

Fig. 4 Robert Venturi, Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, London, 1987–91. Reproduced from David Watkin, *A History of Western Architecture*, 1986; 3rd edition, Laurence King, London, 2000; ISBN 1-85669-227-2, p. 665.

An increasingly familiar if still controversial term for defining or suggesting the overall character or direction of experimental tendencies in Western arts, architecture, etc., since the 1940s or 1950s, and particularly more recent developments associated with post-industrial society. The term contains its own paradox, suggesting that Modernism is decisively over, and a new artistic era has succeeded; at the same time it implies that successor movements are dependent on it, as well as in some degree in revolt against it. In fact most attempts at definition suggest that what has been called, by J-F Lyotard, 'the post-modern condition' arises from the broad if belated acceptance of Modernism and its avant-garde aspirations as the dominant 20th-century tradition – hence centralizing the avant-garde but requiring advance beyond its conventions. This has given the contemporary, post-1945 artist an inordinate, pluri-cultural range of styles, techniques and technologies, but has also created an uncertainty and indeterminacy about their use and their authority. Hence post-modernism is often associated with a revolt against authority and signification, and a tendency towards pastiche, parody, quotation, self-referentiality, and eclecticism.<sup>9</sup>

## Robert Venturi

One of the earliest serious advocates of Postmodernist 'pick-and-mix' styling was Robert Venturi (b. Philadelphia, 1925). Venturi has been influential both as an architect – his Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery in London, 1987–91, is an example – and as a writer. His *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1966, and *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972,<sup>10</sup> are among Postmodernism's leading theoretical

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, in Bullock, Stallybrass and Trombley, p. 671.

<sup>10</sup> Venturi co-wrote *Learning from Las Vegas* with his wife, Denise

texts. Where Mies van der Rohe's Modernist motto was "less is more," Venturi's Postmodernist one was "less is a bore."

## Umberto Eco

Umberto Eco, the Italian academic and novelist, writes:

I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her 'I love you madly', because he knows that she knows (and that she knows 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 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... But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.<sup>11</sup>

Eco here identifies and illustrates some recurring Postmodernist themes and issues, namely:

- o art's need to address a non-elitist audience or public
- o quotation, allusion and pastiche
- o parody, when these kinds of mimicry or imitation are done with ironic or other humorous intent<sup>12</sup>
- o kitsch, when done pretentiously, or simply badly.

Eco is highly regarded for his writings on semiology (or semeiology), the science of signs. He is perhaps more widely known, though, as author of the best-selling novel *The Name of the Rose*, 1983. A 1986 film of the book starred Sean Connery in the leading role of a medieval Sherlock Holmesian monk investigating a series of murders in a monastery. In the novel, the power of the monastery is seen as *knowledge*, housed or embodied in the mysterious library, and it is over access to, and control of, this knowledge that the murders occur. Eco here addresses quite complex intellectual issues in a form attractive and accessible to a wide audience.

## Charles Jencks

Charles Jencks, one of Postmodernism's earliest and leading commentators, argues that its practitioners *must* use irony when dealing with the past. More or less implicit to all such imitations are notions of the Classical or, at least, some recognition of our place within history. Postmodernists are sensitive to Modernism's 'disconnection from life' but unsure themselves how to make the connection, retaining professional self-respect. Their art may thus serve non-artistic causes (social, political, economic, gender, etc.) but tends to

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Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour.

<sup>11</sup> Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London, 1984, p. 67 (first published in Italian in 1983); quoted in Charles Jencks, *Post-Modernism: the New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1987, ISBN 0-85670-867-4, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Irony* – "really just hypocrisy plus style" (quoted in T. Shone, *The Sunday Times*, London, 2 Feb 1997, 11.6) – may be formally defined as the expression of one's meaning by language of opposite or different tendency. A teacher saying to a class "You all, I'm sure, find Postmodernist theory totally fascinating" is likely to be using irony.

do so in a fragmentary, distanced and ironical fashion. By the same logic, connections with art of the past – Modern and Premodern – tend to be through pastiche and parody. Jencks identifies seven general characteristics of Postmodernism:

- o Renaissance harmony and Modernist integration replaced by an emphasis on complexity and richness
- o pluralism, cultural and otherwise
- o historical continuum – the relation between past and present – reveals itself through parody, pastiche and nostalgia
- o a return in art to content, and particularly to content supporting a multiplicity of meanings
- o double-coding – the use of irony, ambiguity and contradictions
- o reinterpretation of tradition – present art building on past art
- o a sense of absence or emptiness at the centre – the 'grand narratives' of religion and humanist philosophy have lost their certainty even if they remain locally viable or desirable.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 5 Carlo Maria Mariani, *The Hand Submits to the Intellect*, 1983, oil on canvas, 199.4 x 175.3 cm/ 78.5 x 69 in; Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York City. Reproduced from Charles Jencks, *Post-Modernism, the New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1987, ISBN 0-85670-867-4, p. 50.

## David Quinn

The Irish journalist David Quinn offers the following observations on the Postmodernist age:

If the pre-modern age was the age of faith and modernity the age of reason, then post-modernity is the age of feelings. Quite how this transition came about is the subject of volume upon volume of dense academic prose. Suffice it to say that the post-modern age is determinedly relativistic in outlook.<sup>14</sup> It believes that there is no one-size-fits-all truth out there waiting to be found either by faith or by reason. In its basest possible form post-modernity says it's true if it feels true, or it's good if it makes us feel good...

<sup>13</sup> Paraphrasing from Jencks, *Post-Modernism, The New Classicism in Art and Architecture*, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *Relativism* is the philosophical doctrine that no absolutes or certainties exist; that all truth is relative. It underscores much Postmodern practice and theory. Albert Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity (1905 and 1916) helped found modern physics and astronomy but it was perhaps only when these theories led to the invention of the nuclear bomb that the concept of relativism became embedded in the public imagination. Each of us has a world-view that is as partial as it is unique. We perceive *through a personality* shaped and distorted by experience and circumstance. Also, the act of observation can itself affect the observed, for we are part of the world we observe. One consequence of the fracturing of a traditional 'God-centred' world-view is a hitherto unprecedented concern with 'deconstructing' – analysing – the linguistic and visual symbols and mechanisms by which we communicate with one another. The semiological writings of Roland Barthes (1915–80) inform much such discussion. Another perspective, among many, is offered by Feminism, in which the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) are often taken as a point of departure in attempting to distinguish that which is essential about being female – and human – from that which has been constructed or conditioned (part of the 'nature versus nurture' debate).

The novelist Fay Weldon in a talk last month described how British society has changed from a patriarchal to a matriarchal one. The former emphasised values such as courage, chivalry, sacrifice, nobility, prowess, endurance and patriotism. The present age, she said, has adopted "the traditional female language of caring and feeling, apology and sentiment, consensus and feel-good".<sup>15</sup>

Contrasting characteristics	
MODERN	POSTMODERN
International	Local
Ascetic	Contextual
Purist	Complex
Refined	Decorative
Elitist	Popularist
Single-minded	Eclectic
Paternalistic	Maternalistic
Intellectual	Emotional

## Strands of Postmodern art

There are many strands of Postmodern art and these are open to many kinds of analysis and interpretation. For instance, Edward Lucie-Smith, in *Art in the Eighties*, 1990,

Fig. 6 Stone Roberts, *Janet*, 1984, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 137.2 cm/ 60 x 54 in; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Reproduced from Jencks, p. 109.

finds geographical distinctions useful. Postmodern art, he contends, has been most successful in three regions – Italy, England, and the USA. In Italy, Classical, Neoclassical, and Conceptual art influences are stressed; in England, a 'learned style', for an audience sophisticated in art history; in Eastern USA, the art tends to be 'self-consciously allusive'; in Western USA, 'anachronistic' revived Classicism.

Fig. 7 Milet Andrejevic, *an Afternoon of Acteon*, 1983; gouache on paper, 32.0 x 50.0 cm/ 12.6 x 19.6 in; Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York City. Reproduced from Jencks, p. 159.

Jencks emphasizes the 'Classical', distinguishing five traditions of Postmodern Classical art:

- o metaphysical classical (e.g., late de Chirico, Carlo Maria Mariani)
- o narrative classical (e.g., R B Kitaj)
- o allegorical classical (e.g., Stone Roberts, Stephen McKenna)
- o realist classical (e.g., Philip Pearlstein, Robert Graham, Ben Johnson)
- o classical sensibility (e.g., Michael Andrews, Lennart Anderson, Milet Andrejevic).

## Criticisms of Postmodernism

Postmodernism, whilst clearly referring to what comes *after* Modernism, also, it has been seen, encompasses everything

<sup>15</sup> David Quinn, "Don't get tired, just emotional", *The Sunday Times*, London, Irish edition, 6 Sep 1998, 1.17.

from anti-Modernist to pro-Modernist schools of thought. This much criticised ambiguity and imprecision of terminology is reflected in much of the work itself. Modernism may have been for many too cold and austere but few would deny its basic rigour and seriousness of purpose. Postmodernism, in contrast, strikes many as merely ingratiating, shallow and directionless. Its fixation with humour and self-regarding irony draws parallels with a perpetually smiling portrait – in most cases initial appeal quickly palls. Similarly, Postmodernism's theoretical underpinnings, such as there are, have proven shaky – much so-called 'deconstruction' of our various 'sign-systems,' for instance, is increasingly seen as pretentious, self-indulgent, wilfully obscure and, ultimately, unproductive. In related areas, too, there has been some loss of confidence. Psychoanalysis and, to a lesser extent, feminism have been subjected to telling critiques in recent years. In the former, key case-studies of Freud's have been shown to be fraudulent; in the latter, internal schisms and disputes have undermined the necessary coherence of the feminist cause – the level of generalisation upon which the feminist message depended has proven unsustainable. Similarly, in social and political matters, strong advocates of relativism, believing that “there is no one-size-fits-all truth out there...” seem to have no trouble in making an exception when it comes to politics. There is at least some consistency in the 'politically correct' position in so far as others' political views are treated with much the same respect as facts.