

What Then Is Post-Modernism?

Charles Jencks

How ironic to ask this question after so many years, as if there were a clear answer. And the quandary has only deepened in the meantime, since a generation has grown up, untrained in the old doctrines. The young now double the question – ‘Well then old man, what was Modernism?’ How could you possibly explain these terms to someone who had no knowledge of recent global history, an infant or a digital surfer of the depthless present?

Responding to this challenge near the outset of debate in 1982, the exasperated French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, but far from settling the matter the children only increased the dispute. The classification of an age is always controversial. Imagine telling a young British architect just starting out that he is going to live in the Age of King Charles (which is probably the case, but trivial). In the anthology to hand you will find many attempts to crack the big conundrum of our time – how should our period be classified? Or who are we? Or where are we going? Before we address these portentous but pressing questions, in conclusion, and pull out the threads that tie Modernism and Post-Modernism together in a significant way, let us pause to survey the riotous scene with detachment, defining both monikers together as is usually done, and with irony. After all, anything as serious as identity must be taken lightly.

Contrasting the Modern and Post-Modern

Consider various walks of life. For contemporary historians, such as the diplomat Robert Cooper, the strong American state in its policeman role is very modern, whereas the conglomerate EU, which acts through the soft power of law, is post-modern.¹ Economists usually see the most successful modern corporation as General Motors, especially now that it is failing; while consumers are finding Amazon to be typically post-modern.² Or, the customary opposition that Robin Murray makes between Fordism and Post-Fordism: the sluggish leviathan and the fast-changing, computerised company of less than 50 people that interacts with it (see Part 3). Indeed, the huge sprawling factory was where most modern production took place, and because office work characterised the post-industrial nation by the 1960s, sociologists often put the post-modern shift at this point.

Today, with the information world and Google, this post-modernisation has gone into an extended network in everyone’s PC, an ill-defined area. That digital no-place of electronic heaven is rather a pm virtual space, one to be contrasted with its very material predecessors of the factory and the bank. Moreover, if materialism was *the* major philosophy of Modernism this leads to a curious observation. It means that the very pm Madonna famously mis-sung herself in 1985, as ‘I’m a Material Girl’. Yes, of course, she is materialistic but her constant change of persona, her use of multiple media and even her name brand her as quintessential Po-Mo.

Consider those new-old words defining the major economic system of the recent past. The neologisms 'capitalism and socialism' were modern when they were first used in 1810, but today the hybrid 'socialism' of the advanced economies could be called post-modern. Even with their regulation-lite, the G20 governments control about 40 per cent of their economies, and their deficit spending on armaments amounts to a kind of guaranteed social expenditure. Today's socialism is not quite the goal that the Modernist Karl Marx had in mind for his utopia, and its unsavoury mixture needs to be consumed with a strong dose of PM sarcasm.

Let us follow this last point into hybrid foods. If the pure Camembert cheese is modern, then the mixed Cambozola is post-modern and the recent crossbreed Camelbert (like Brie but from camel milk) is very pm. Or, switch to the horrors of the political landscape, return to the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and his fundamental definition.³ This turns on the archetypal killing factory of Modernism, Auschwitz. That death camp was so successful in its rationalisation and mass-production that, Lyotard argues, it ushered in its opposite, postmodernism (he writes it streamlined). But then, if there is a recent media counterpart of this catastrophe, it might be George Bush's bombing of Baghdad on night-time TV, 'Shock & Awe'. Branded terrorism could be considered a post-modern form of pre-announced murder.

Shift to everyday attitudes and behaviour. It is no doubt a cliché to say so, but straightforwardness, transparency and honest simplicity have been valued among the modern virtues, from the boy scouts to the Bauhaus; while irony and ambiguity characterise Post-Modern architecture and literature. Umberto Eco gave one of the most famous definitions of the latter in his *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, excerpted below. Because it is canonical, and brings up in a striking way a general truth about our age, I quote it at some length:

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.⁴

The Age of Lost Innocence is a pertinent classifier for our time especially because it speaks to the age of branding where politicians and media routinely spin the truth. More importantly, it stems from an insight into the most dominating of all discourses, that is, language. Since language – speech and writing – is the slowest changing and most imperial of all sign systems, even more conservative than architecture, it has to confront the problem of lost innocence every day, the perplexity of how to handle 'the already said'. How can one speak anew and with authenticity using old words and hackneyed

expressions? One solution is Eco's advice to his sophisticated lovers. Irony, with quotation marks that bring it to consciousness, thus surround pm love letters, or literature, or what Linda Hutcheon and others call 'metafiction', (see Part 2). Post-modern literature and architecture confront a truth which many of the more abstract arts joyfully disregard: the way understanding and meaning must depend on a negotiation between the past, present and future. Like DNA, which has an almost four billion year history, this post-modernism is about time-binding, a theme to which I will return.

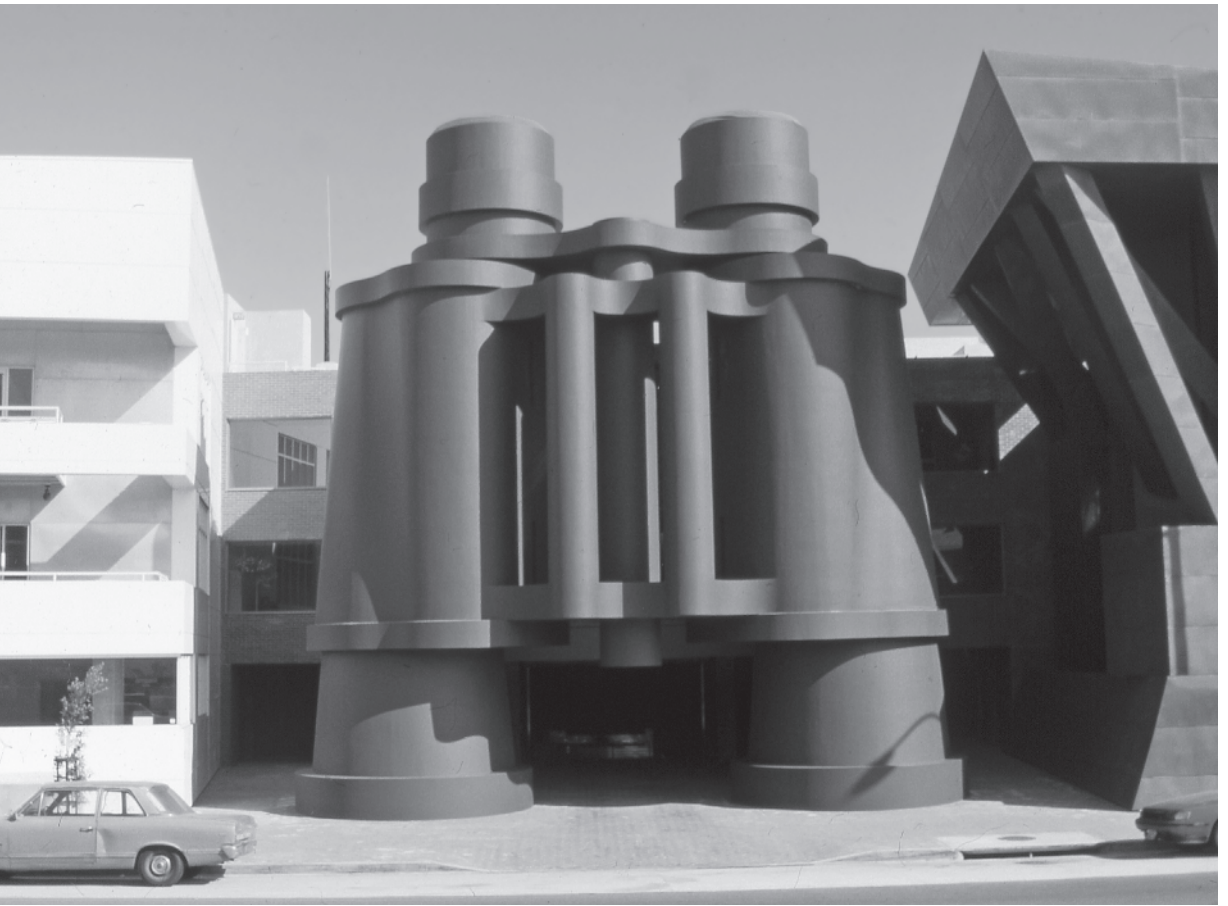
After this breathless survey let us take stock of the post-modern landscape, so far. The first ambiguity is the spelling of the label. It varies from the cultural *movement* (capitalised) to the social and economic *condition* (lower case), from the abbreviated PM to the sarcastic even dismissive Po-Mo (usually applied to pastiche works), from the hyphenated (meaning hybrid pluralism) to the streamlined (meaning integrated). Second, the list of contrasts suggests my argument. Post-Modernism is not a total break with Modernism, but rather its *combination with other things*, a slide away from its parent rather than an act of patricide, a sometime loyal opposition rather than an anti-modern movement. Above all, it is a deepening of Modernism. Thus, to typify the present age one could put an 'and' between the two terms of the following list because, I am claiming, they are interdependent and today mutually defining:

Modern	And	Post-Modern
American nation hard power		EU conglomerate soft power
General Motors Corp		Amazon and Post-Fordism
Factory production		Tertiary + production
Materialism		Information world
Holocaust		Shock & Awe
Capitalism/socialism		Socialism
Straightforwardness		Ironic self-referencing
Innocence		Lost innocence
Present tense		Time-binding

From this beginning list another thing is clear: to support or condemn either movement or condition *en bloc* is not helpful. When both are here to stay we need to hack out a critical path through their respective snags.

Let us continue the *tour d'horizon* into the arts, considering some epigones from each movement. No one disputes that Piet Mondrian, Mies van der Rohe and Minimalism were the epitome of the modern movement; but, less clearly, in a sort of muddy pm way, Mark Tansy, Frank Gehry and Radical Eclecticism are Post-Modern.

One trouble with such clear distinctions is that, for instance, early Mondrian and Mies were steeped in a kind of Expressionism. Before they reduced art and architecture to abstraction, to their virtuous 'almost nothing', their work was brooding with a dark spirituality, a harbinger of the post-modern cosmic. This brings us to another truth of changing paradigms. There are some figures in the arts, such as Picasso and Le Corbusier,



Frank Gehry, Chiat/Day Building, Main Street, Santa Monica, 1985–91. An eclectic collage of styles to facilitate and communicate different functions of this ad agency. The binoculars relate to the Pop tradition of Los Angeles roadside architecture. Their curves also signal elegantly how one negotiates a car into the parking garage and the overall function of the agency: market research. A white boat shape, left, and the copper trees, right, also support other office and administration functions, and relate to the seaside and hillside nature nearby. This is an *architecture parlante*. © Charles Jencks.

who were clearly part of both movements. That is, like the protean creator Michelangelo who strode triumphantly from early to high Renaissance and then from Mannerism to Baroque completely oblivious to the terms, they straddle epochs and classifiers. Such creators laugh at human categories, as they skate on by.

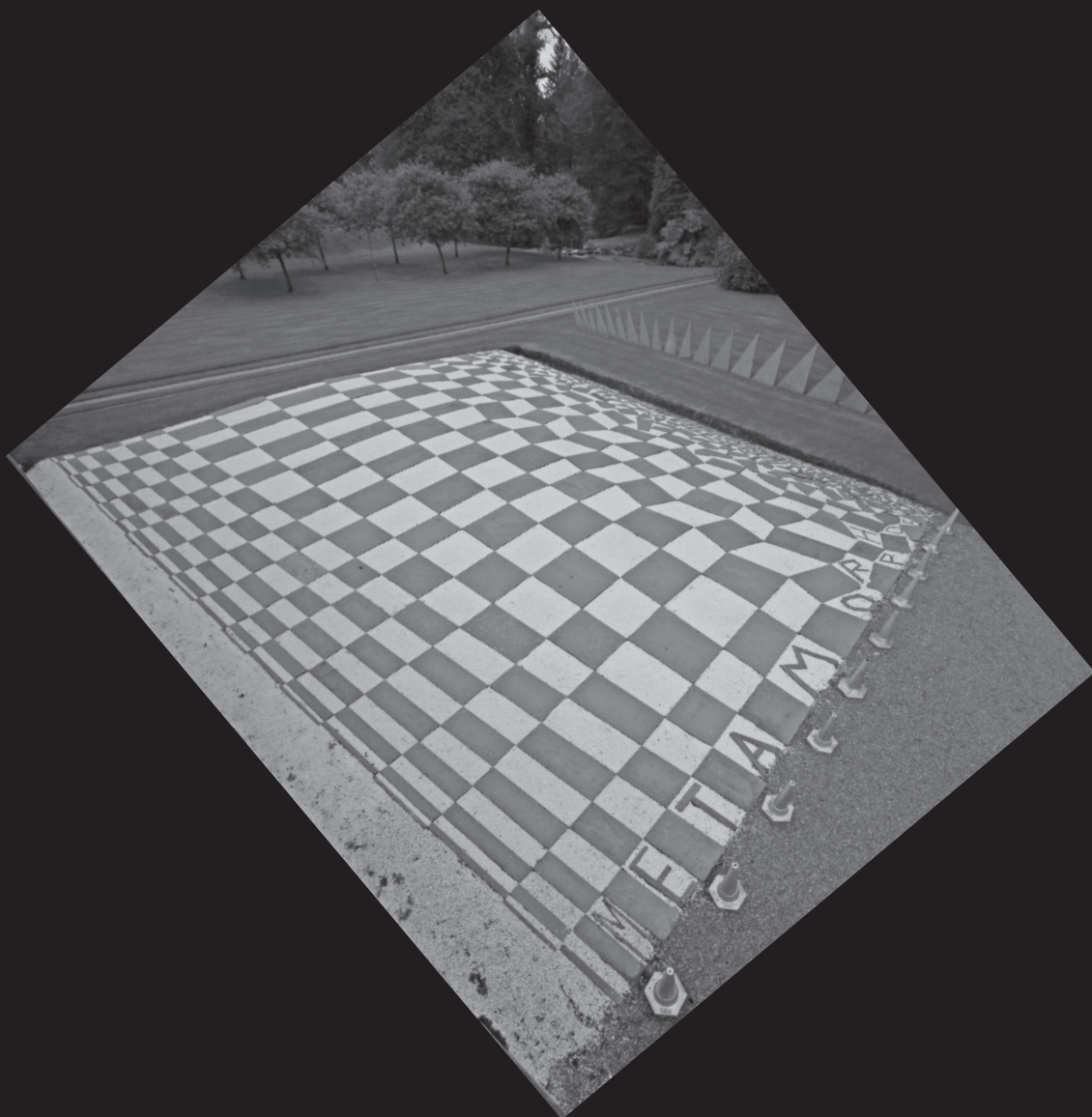
Labels and period classifiers should never be taken too seriously it would appear; yet, our ironic historian answers, they often are. Reputations and careers hang by the thread of a prefix such as post-, whether it is Impressionism or another 'postie', and the minute historians decide to banish all talk of Roman or Gothic or, in politics, Whig and Tory, these terms are smuggled back in a series of disguised synonyms. Language, with its 'already said', again plays its conservative trick. Unconscious Modernist and Post-Modernist theories are just as powerful and insidious after their labels have been forgotten. Generals, without reflecting on received ideas, usually fight the last war; governments, following Keynes, bail out banks too big to fail; and parents, unaware they are carrying on the theories of Dr Spock, fail to be good disciplinarians.

Thus theories and practices of our time can be divided fruitfully into Modern and Post-Modern as long as the labels are taken with a pinch of irony. This is particularly true of the sciences. The modern sciences of simplicity are based on reduction, on analysing reality into atoms, molecules and the units of social organisation like neighbourhoods, functions and classes. By contrast, the post-modern sciences of complexity are based on emergence and feedback, synthesising parts into their interacting wholes, like weather patterns, the stock market and the human personality. The former sciences gave us atomic theory and determinism, the latter are bringing us nonlinear dynamics and a creative universe. Newton versus Prigogine, Adam Smith versus George Soros, mechanism versus organicism and materialism versus self-organising systems. So far so clear and helpful.

The amusing problem arises when we examine such things as the space between these theories, as in classical versus nuclear physics. The former are deterministic and the latter indeterministic. Since both theories work to a great degree of accuracy, in their realms of large and small size, physicists used to explain their schizophrenia with a joke. They use the classical theory on Monday, Wednesday and Friday reserving the other three workdays to quantum mechanics, and fuzziness.

Indeed, Fuzzy Logic is, with its 'sort-ofs' and kind-ofs', typically post-modern. Is a half-eaten apple still an apple? When does a sweater with holes become holes with fabric attached? Or, the notorious pm query of the philosopher Bruno Latour: what defines the pulsating, wobbling hole in the ozone layer; how big does the old hole have to get to become a real hole? Reality comes with *many more* states of 'more or less' than 'either/or' and so, the argument goes, reality is mostly post-modern. The same goes for Mother Nature (which many people take for reality).

Consider this contrast of views. Modern geometry is clearly defined, based on the classical solids and self-same in its repetitions; while the geometry of nature, or *most* of it, is fractal, crinkly, irregular, grainy and self-similar in pattern. The pm scientist and mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot wrote *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* in 1977 applying it successfully to clouds, coastlines, rocks, lightning and the stock market. Ever



Charles Jencks, *Fractal Terrace*. Two views of ultimate nature. To the left the Platonic notion, that the ultimate forms are regular solids; to the right, the recent fractal view of nature by Benoît Mandelbrot. The terrace metamorphoses from primary forms – the Cézanne and Le Corbusier view – to the more prevalent idea that nature is *mostly* made from self-similar elements. But since the underlying geometry seems to be both types the rectangles turn to squares and then morph to rhomboids, irregular forms and then scale down to fractals. Garden of Cosmic Speculation, Scotland 2001. © Charles Jencks.

since these convincing demonstrations and his dramatic contrasts between the past and present views of nature – the Platonic and the fractal view – I have been pondering this very fuzzy pm word ‘most’. Could they be presented together as a continuum? I wondered, and then forced a marriage of the competing theories into a landscape called the Fractal Terrace. It morphs, from the clear rectangles and squares of Cézanne and Le Corbusier on one side, into the irregular rhomboids and fractals on the other. From self-sameness to self-similarity, from repetition to scaling, from Modern to Post-Modern, it shows a continuous meld. It also brings up some historical ambiguities.

The Battle of the Labels and the Demon of Time

Go way back in time since time is the great constructor. The word *modernus* was apparently coined sometime in the 3rd century by the Christians, to show their superiority over the pagans, and the term has carried a progressive impulse ever since, both technical and moral. ‘I am cleaner than thou and, while your soul may be immortalised in stone in Rome, mine will be eternal in heaven.’ Such one-upmanship we may doubt was ever put like this though, because of the meaning of *modernus*, it was possible. The modern, coming from the Latin *modo* signifying ‘just now’, had the major patent on the present tense.

It was logical that the Renaissance thereafter used it to contrast with the previous age of the Gothic. Hence the subsequent Battles of the Ancients and the Moderns, from the 1600s to the 1850s, when such terms were employed by philosophers, architects and Shakespeare, for insult or for praise.⁵ Then, upping the ante, from 1875 to 1975 the many ‘posties’ arrived, from post-Impressionism to post-industrial to post-modern, and they all had ‘posteriority’ built into their logic. If one stops to think about this paradox – being ‘post-present’, that is being ‘just now plus in the future’ – one can tease out the devastating strength of the phrase, the way it captured the *Zeitgeist*. It suddenly rendered the up-to-dateness of the Modern obsolete, just as Modernists had lampooned the Ancients for three centuries. Oscar Wilde conveyed the ironies of time in the succession of modern-isms: ‘Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern,’ he pronounced in a famous epigram, ‘one is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly.’ Or, another wit added later, after many art movements were killed off in the 1920s: ‘all the Isms have become Wasms.’ A melancholic truth of the *Zeitgeist*, ‘the spirit of the time’, the way fashion makes movements prematurely grey. Sometimes liberating, mostly fashion-time is a killer. The time-binding of Post-Modern culture tries to arrest this commercial obsolescing, the ideal is to slow it down by turning it into complex time.

The first use of ‘post-modern’ was as a throwaway challenge in 1875, and then a minor description of departures from within Modernism of Spanish poetry in 1934. Arnold Toynbee, in his 1947 *A Study of History*, used the term as an encompassing category to describe a new historical cycle starting in 1875.⁶ This formulated the end of Western dominance, the decline of individualism, capitalism and Christianity, and the rise to power of non-Western cultures. In addition it referred in a positive way to a pluralism and world culture, meanings which are still essential to its definition today – part of the cumulative argument which is so important. But Toynbee was, on the whole, sceptical of

the decline implicit in the prefix ‘post’ and it is interesting that this scepticism was shared by the literary critics Irving Howe and Harold Levine, who first used the term polemically. Their essentially *negative* description has stayed to haunt and, paradoxically, help the movement because of its paranoid overtones, its suggestion of decline, of having arrived on the scene too late.⁷ However, like many negative labels – Gothic, Baroque, Rococo, Impressionism and Fauve among many others – it soon became a badge of courage, a tactical insult to turn against the Modernists. And then their anger amplified PM into a media event and kept it in the public eye for 20 years. Just as ‘Roundhead and Cavalier’ flipped from derisory to praiseworthy, just as ‘Whig and Tory’ reversed their negative meaning and were taken into battle to create the two-party system, so the abusive slur became the empowering tribute.

Virtually the first *positive use* of the prefix ‘post’ was by the writer Leslie Fiedler in 1965, when he repeated it like an incantation and tied it to current radical trends which made up the counterculture: ‘post-humanist, post-male, post-white, post-heroic ... post-Jewish.’ These anarchic and creative departures from orthodox liberalism represent the first stirrings of the cumulative tradition, although Fiedler and others in the 1960s were never to put the argument as the overarching concept of Post-Modernism.⁸ One of their goals was to challenge the monoculture of Western dominance and reach a large and diverse audience, without becoming populist.

Yet, an explicit defence had to wait until the 1970s and the writings of Ihab Hassan, by which time the radical movements which Fiedler celebrated were somewhat out of fashion, the post-isms turned to Wasms. Also, a problem of definition arose as Hassan tied the postmodern (he again streamlines the term) to the ideas of ultra-experimentalism in the arts and ultra-technology in architecture. His list of exemplars included William Burroughs and Buckminster Fuller and such key terms as ‘Anarchy, Exhaustion/Silence ... Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis ... Inter-text ...’⁹ In effect, his canon defined the origins of *Deconstructive* Postmodernism, and that created a double movement with two heads. His departures were Modernist trends taken to an extreme by the agonistic wing of the avant-garde, and that is why I, with others such as the writer John Barth, would characterise them as *Late-Modern*, or *Ultra-Modern*, or *Most-Modern* – Mo-Mo not Po-Mo. John Cage was Hassan’s exemplary postmodernist, a musician who took the ‘almost nothing’ of the minimalists to the next step of ‘absolutely nothing’ – total silence.

Post-Modernism as Double-Coding

Given such extremes it was predictable that a different Post-Modern culture emerged. As I’ve mentioned, it is written hyphenated to show its pluralism not streamlined like a rocket, and capitalised to signify a *cultural* movement and not a *condition* of the economy and society. The culture could be positive and reconstructive, the condition was a global economy not open to control. Architecture was the field that led the way in defining this reconstruction for several compelling reasons. Architects have to deal with pluralism, directly and widely differing taste-cultures, in the words of the sociologist Herbert Gans and his important analysis. Architects also have to deal with fast- and slow-changing technologies,

with the virtues and vices of modernisation. Think of the Modernist injunction against ornament, and in favour of mass-production. Or, put the positive contrast the other way and contemplate how, by the 1970s, Post-Modernists criticised the boring repetition of mass-production and prophesied the coming variable computer production.

Such oppositions are *not* at work in art, music or poetry in any compelling way, and that is why I defined post-modern architecture, in 1975 and subsequently in many books, as essentially involved with pluralism and double-coding.¹⁰

Socially and semantically architecture has to mediate between the ephemeral tastes of fashion and, like language and genetics, the slow-moving codes of the past. In the 1970s the typical double-codes of hyphenated Post-Modernism were new/old, high art/low art, professional/common, elite/populist, abstract/iconic and Non-Modern/Modern. In a nutshell, PM was the contrast of Modernism *and* its Other.

This double-coding naturally produced the characteristic style which caught on, the juxtaposition of codes that underscored these oppositions, as they did with Umberto Eco's lovers. Since the rich, middle class and poor (to use Modernist class terms) have varying speeds of change, a single style or code will not be effective for complex, urban situations. These have to mediate different speeds, they have to bind various times together and, as sociologists began to show, urban villagers have a different time-frame from itinerant cosmopolites. Double-coding, or really multiple coding, is the necessity of much architecture. Modern projects that failed to perform within the various codes of the users were often blown up by dynamite, as they were in St Louis in 1972. This famous detonation led to my framing the Death of Modern Architecture (see Part 2), a surprise to many who did not realise that the Modern was not as the early Christians hoped, the Eternal. For many, including the historian John Summerson, this death was liberating. They could see, in the phrase of the Vatican cardinals longing for a new pope, 'where there's death there's hope'; or, the physicists' similar remark in 1900 against the stranglehold of tenure, 'physics proceeds death by death'. The 1970s was the decade of civic-minded explosions around the world, and they refuted Modern urbanism and architecture in a way that Modern music was never blown up, nor Modern poetry.

My own work, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), was the first book to thematise a post-modern movement and use the phrase in the title. Putting the disputatious moniker on the cover of a tome, coupled with the fact that the architectural movement had direction and a visible coherence, led people to say that I invented the term and concept, a claim that is true only in the sense that I theorised, popularised and made it the name of a book. But it was the architectural style, the clear double-coding, and the moral arguments of Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi and a host of others fighting for a more just and complex urbanism who carried the day. The imperative for the hybrid language existed in architecture as it did not in most of the other arts. Inevitably it continues to today, with the iconic building and the various mixed languages that characterise some architecture, particularly the urban fragment. Time-binding, eclecticism and the impurity of signs are more natural to the public arts that must communicate to a wide audience, while abstraction can dominate large movements of painting, music and tone poetry.



above: James Stirling and Michael Wilford, Neue Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, 1977–84. Multiple language games, mixture of new and old codes, pluralism – many post-modern values are realised here including much signalled irony. Stirling liked the comparison with Umberto Eco's definition of post-modernism saying it well represented his intentions. *left:* James Stirling surrounded by young admirers at Stuttgart State Gallery, 1984. I witnessed various groups interpreting the building throughout one day – travellers, amateur painters, lovers, scholars, businessmen, the young and old – and, in spite of their quite opposite readings, they were all positive. An interesting vindication of multiple-coding. © Charles Jencks.

9/15 – Default Modernism Explodes Again

In this sense, Post-Modernism is a social style of the arts and Modernism an elite style, although the latter can be very popular. Ponder the ironies of populist abstraction. Everybody in New York City comes to wonder at the abstract, steel monoliths of Richard Serra, celebrated at the Museum of Modern Art in 2007, but nobody knows what they mean. Or rather, they do know very well. Like much Modern abstraction, it comes down to one strong meaning, the aesthetic charge of ‘wow’, how did they squeeze these 1,000-ton torqued ellipses into the low-ceilinged second floor? MoMA, on its website, animates these installations for populist consumption, showing the pure rusted abstractions descending on the museum garden as if from a heavenly crane, off camera. God, as Plato averred, loves abstract primary forms, He’s a mathematician, using Corten steel that’s pre-rusted. These magical associations then flow directly into the body of the perceiver as he makes a tiny pilgrimage of 60 feet through the leaning tilt of the industrial age, the 1850s. Is this really *Pre-Modernism*?

No. It is really *Late-Modernism* because it is so exclusively aesthetic and because abstraction is also well suited to an age that is fragmented into many taste-cultures, and confused about issues of content. This compounds the ironies. The Marxist theorist, Fredric Jameson, argues angrily and thoroughly against PM, in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. That is what he called the logic in 1984 for *The New Left Review*, and an influential book of that title in 1991. The problem with his connection of global capitalism and consumer culture is not in their loving relationship, but in his prefix of *Post*. If he had examined the number of abstract, middle-class buildings filling up the town centres of middle America; if he had taken a statistical view of corporate monoliths all over the world and set them against other styles; if he had weighed the reigning styles of Minimalism in the arts, he would have found the dominance of the aesthetic sign over other signification, and pragmatic cost-saving over meaning. The cultural logic of Late Capitalism is the hegemony of impersonal abstraction, of corporate good taste, of Late-Modernism. Most architecture created by global corporations (80 per cent?) stays away from questions of meaning and is abstract for the very good reason that a global culture does not know what to signify much beyond the power of capital.

Thus we reach a paradox with which I have been playing. As the reader will have realised there is a telling contradiction in the argument about taste and popularity. Architecture, *the* public art, often leads in local situations towards Post-Modern double-coding; but the majority of *large* commissions result in the aesthetic coding of Late-Modernism. These two departures from Modernism have to be seen together and in relationship to the parent.

The only problem for this truth is one of overtones. No one wants to adopt the prefix ‘Late-’, except on one occasion the architect Peter Eisenman, because it implies they were born dead on arrival.¹¹ Call them Still Modernists, they still want to act, build and speak as if it were 1920. In architecture, and much painting and sculpture, a Neo-Minimalism came to dominate these arts since the 1990s. Generalising this style across the spectrum of the arts one could speak of a Default Modernism, the preferred mode that dare not speak its



Late-Modernism squeezed into a London piazza. Richard Serra's *Fulcrum*, Liverpool Street, London 1987, Corten steel tilts into the Barbican. © Charles Jencks.



Default Modernism. When they were finished in 2007, the Four Towers of Madrid became the ultimate expression of the top of the market. They vary in height from 223 to 250 metres (731 to 820 feet), an extraordinary concentration of offices on a parallel Madrid in an open plain. The smooth beauty of debt packaging finds its apotheosis as abstraction, abstract financial instruments that only the chosen few will understand; if them. © Charles Jencks.

name. Aesthetically safe, it became the default mode when a young designer wanted the job but had no idea of what to signify – and so clearly signified it: nullity. Conservative and easy on the brain, it has been the corporate assumption of the globe for 20 years.

When faced with social contradictions politicians such as Tony Blair, during these same years, adopted the mantra ‘modernise’, as if it had a clear meaning and unchallengeable mandate. Yes, modernise the economy by all means, create abstract banking rules, aesthetic financial derivatives, instruments that are high-sounding, so very high-tech. In the 1990s many such beautiful tools were created by the modernisers, called ‘collateralised debt obligations’ (CDOs) and ‘collateralised mortgage obligations’ (CMOs). Abstract? Hard to fathom? Meaning almost anything, like an enigmatic minimalist box? Some pointed out the ‘toxicity’, even then. Also created to sound more objective and impersonal were the CDSs, the ‘credit *default* swaps’, the most radioactive of all modern innovations. These also structured debt, so that computers could model what was supposed to lie inside the box. As they were sold on, from one speculator to the next, the credit bubble was amplified many times. Soon the financiers were passing each other IOUs with complex derivatives that, as a whole, no one could understand. This spreading of debts was called ‘securitisation’ and was supposed to lessen risk if everybody took it on. A misnomer. Because this actually multiplied risk, beyond that which caused the 1930s depression, it should have been called ‘insecuritisation’.

The world’s biggest stock investors, George Soros and Warren Buffet (for a while the richest men in the world) understood what was inside the dumb box perfectly well. In 2003, the latter called derivatives WMD, ‘weapons of mass destruction’.

The authorities paid little heed to these warnings, the US and UK governments kept dancing to the tune of their CDSs and CDOs and while they waltzed Gordon Brown, the Iron Chancellor, followed the American lead into ‘regulation-lite’, that is, no regulation. After all, in the abstract those using derivatives were doing rather well, and achieving Triple-A ratings, in the circular manner of Late-Modern Abstraction (being successful, like Enron, for being successful). The music built to a crescendo in the summer of 2007 and then started to sound discordant. One by one banks dropped from the dance and, following Northern Rock, had to be (virtually) nationalised. And then on 9/15 came the Big One, the crunch in credit that would be heard throughout the world. It was the moment when beautiful abstraction stopped, when too many credit default swaps could not be swapped, and blew up. On 15 September 2008, the giant bank, Lehman Brothers – ‘too big to fail’ – was *allowed* to fail.

This was a mistake in government policy, because Modernist theory said there was no choice but to support Lehman’s. In the connected global system you have to prop up the giants or the machine stops. So, the next giants in trouble, AIG and companies, were rescued in the biggest state finance of private banks in American and British history. In part, this flip-flop from no rescue to saving any Leviathan led to the final irony. Public government came to the rescue of private greed, the poor taxpayers supported the rich stockholders. An American joke summarised the inversion of Late-Capitalist logic: ‘too big to fail’ had become ‘socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor’.

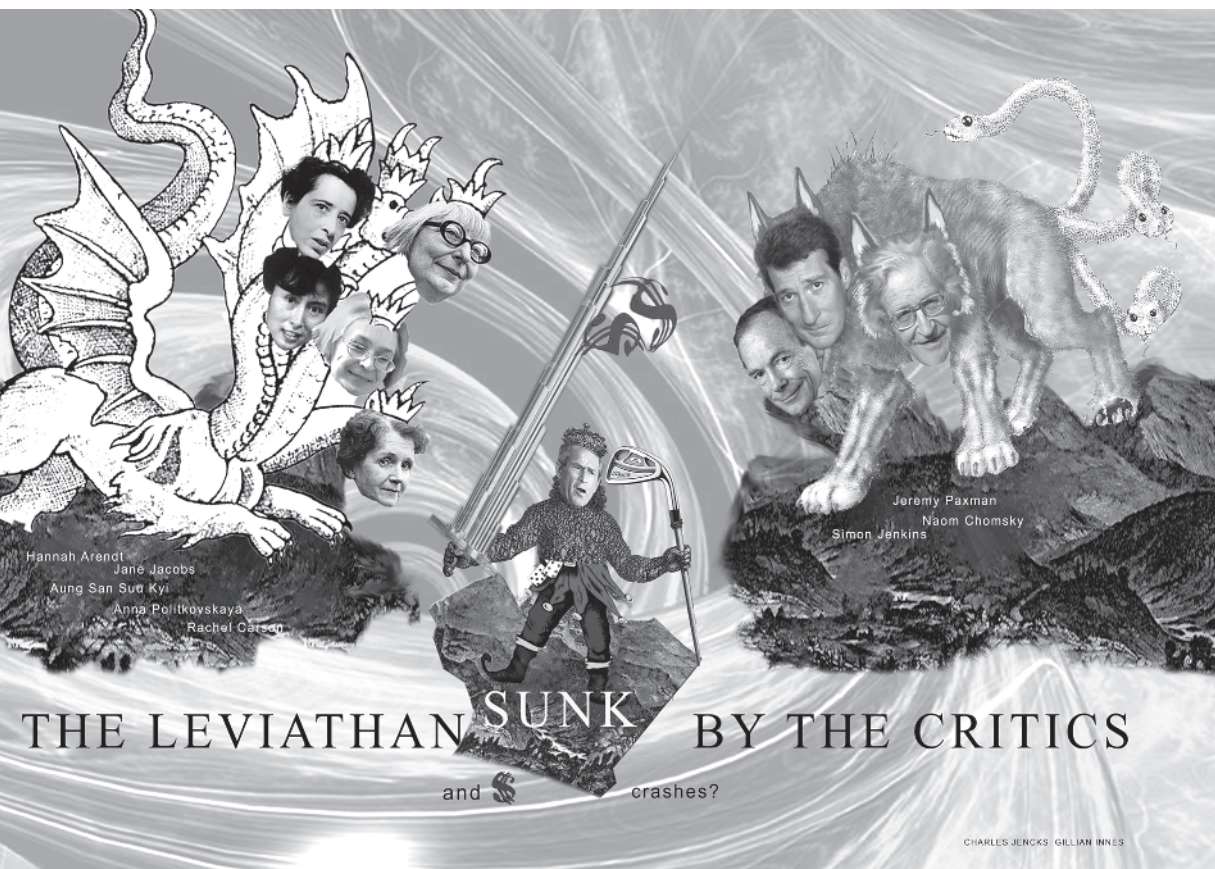
Was this a Late-Capitalist *and* Late-Modernist collapse? A financial version of the blowing up of Pruitt-Igoe; or the meltdown of Chernobyl; or the collapse of the Soviet Union? Or, just one more of the many Deaths of Modernism that ushered in the postmodern (in Lyotard's phrase about Auschwitz)? Even though it is contentious to assert, and aided by the post-modern information world, the greatest global financial crisis in history is a clear product of modernity in its late phase. Indeed, the response to the crunch is also textbook modernisation action, with its reliance on big government propping up only the biggest players, such as AIG and General Motors. In a word, political modernism is Bigness Inc, or the way the Leviathan of Hobbes still, after 300 years, dominates the grand game of politics and power. Post-Modern critics are lined up against this monster, which does not mean that they win very often.

My Ideal Post-Modernist

So, the Modernist reality is often grim and its economic practice rather dismal, to use the standard phrase about its non-science (see Anatole Kaletsky on economics, Part 3). However, Modern culture, stemming from this reality is sometimes very different from its background, and also critical of modernisation. This critical strand is precisely the one that leads into Post-Modernism, a golden thread of continuity. To be brief, it includes such works as Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, Picasso's *Guernica*, Stravinsky's *Sacre de Printemps*, Le Corbusier's buildings at Ronchamp and Chandigarh, TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. All these monuments of Modernism are fundamentally concerned with time-binding and responding to the myths embedded in contemporary life. Cathy Gere's recent *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* even shows how most of these great works are involved with a single past myth: that of ancient Crete and the Minoan myth of the Minotaur. These creations are complex mixtures of many discourses and, in the terms I have been stressing, typically double-coded between past and present, high art and low, etc. They eschew the reductive impulse of most Modernist work and while abstract at moments they resist the eliminative strain of the Modern. In a word, they are proto-Post-Modern, the strand that continues to run unbroken through the 20th century – albeit as the thin thread of a minority.

The writer John Barth, like Umberto Eco, calls attention to this strand in *The Literature of Replenishment* (republished in full, Part 2), as he emphasises the inclusive nature of PM:

My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century Modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naiveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-modernist marvels (by my definition and in my judgement) as Beckett's *Stories and Texts for Nothing* or Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. He may not hope to reach and move the devotees of James Michener and Irving Wallace – not to mention the lobotomized mass-media illiterates. But he



The Critic Laughs. Bush sinks, the Leviathan shakes the biggest skyscraper in the world, the Burj Dubai. Petrodollars fall from the sky, the Furies Smile, the Hydra of Truth shows the follies of Bigness, while Cerberus critiques the follies of Power. But hold on, is Bush sinking or rising? The crash in the \$\$\$\$\$\$ is the quickest way to pay off the trillions in debt. The US-of-Oil now has five large military bases in Iraq set around the pumps. It has control of the \$30 trillion in black gold reserves. Who has won, who has failed? (And who has lost a nation, and who are the 655,000 dead?) © Charles Jencks.

should hope to reach and delight, at least part of the time, beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the Early Christians: professional devotees of high art.¹²

Here again Post-Modernism gains by being contrasted with Late-Modernism and enhanced by relating to previous Modernisms, not being a rupture or an anti-modernism. Also, Barth's formulation of an ideal post-modernist is helpful. This is particularly true when there is such widespread confusion in the public's mind between the social condition and the high culture that relates to it; or because of Fredric Jameson's confusion between Late-Capitalism and the cultural movement that critiques it. Most bewilderment stems from the muddle between a global consumer system and a high culture. Indeed, many Still Modernists do not grant this distinction and, like the writer Arthur Kroker, see the whole movement *en bloc* as 'excremental culture'.¹³ Such oversimplification misses the point, especially the threads that lead out of Modernism, those of TS Eliot, Le Corbusier *et al.*

The exemplary post-modernist, as Barth avers, acknowledges the realities of Ford, Marx, Freud and Darwin, but has these ideas and realities 'under his belt, but not on his back'. As the reader will find, for every Fordism there is now a Post-Fordism, and for every Darwinian there is a follower who has understood how Darwin was half-right. This does not mean, as the recent cover issue of the *New Scientist* put it, that 'Darwin was Wrong'.¹⁴ Many Post-Darwinists have pointed out, over the last 30 years, that in describing evolution many other factors beside the environment have to be taken into account. They include internal factors within the organism, Hox genes, ecological interactions and recently horizontal gene transfer (HGT). Elsewhere I have written on this Post-Darwinism and it is especially important in design and architecture, for framing questions of the responsibility of the designer versus chance. If the Darwinian paradigm underlay Modernism through its reductivism, Haeckel, Nietzsche and social Darwinists like John D Rockefeller, then a Post-Darwinism is also essential to the growing PM paradigm. This is discussed in Part 3 by Charles Birch and Edward Goldsmith, a Darwinism that is 'under the belt, but not on our back'.

My ideal post-modernist, like Barth's, is fundamentally concerned with time-binding, with making clear the connection of past, present and future. One of the chronic problems of the dominant Modernism today, especially in its late phase, is its loss of memory and continuity, the way it is infantilised by the marketplace. Gore Vidal chides the USA as 'the United States of Amnesia', and his sometime enemy Norman Mailer at least agreed on this point, saying that US architects had created in their Late-Modern developments 'empty landscapes of psychosis'. The fast-changing economy and the imperatives of work and consumption create the depthless present where cultural continuity is lost, if it exists at all. So, if I have to point to an ideal post-modern artist I would mention Anselm Kiefer who binds various epochs together in his contemporary constructions. The recent past, and for him this would include the Nazi catastrophe, ancient myth, future hope, archetypal drama are realised in a new grammar. Many discourses cross on his large canvases and constructions. His work is the PM equivalent of *The Waste Land* and *Guernica*, and on occasion so was that of Ron Kitaj.



Anselm Kiefer, *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (Poppy and Memory), 1989. Kiefer often turns the elements of destruction into a poetics of melancholy that refers both to recent history and the promise of the future. *Mohn und Gedächtnis*, with its droopy lead airplane that cannot fly, relates to Second World War war machines, a burnt landscape, toxic pollution, the lead books that are stacked on its wings and the growth of wheat. A paradoxical but potent mixture, these constructions are often completed with handwritten messages. The mixed palette is a dramatic synthesis of past, present and future codes. Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin. Photo © Charles Jencks.

Yet there is another essential aspect of an ideal post-modernism that eludes contemporary artists and that concerns contemporary metaphysics. Any great period of culture well expresses the fundamental insights of the reigning scientific paradigm and, if that has morphed ahead from Modernism, it still awaits a Michelangelo to transform it into art. Let me reiterate the shifts: from Newton to Einstein, from linear to nonlinear dynamics, from determinism to self-organising systems, or from simple to complex systems. So the slides and developments go, each one *not* a refutation of its modernist counterpart but a deeper insight into the universe. The last section of this book, Part 3, is devoted to them, in particular Tito Arcchi's short article 'Chaos and Complexity'.

These collective post-modern sciences of complexity, that are named as such in the 1980s, actually grow out of those that were mooted in the 1960s, the latter a period I would therefore call Complexity I. As the reader will also find in Part 2, Jane Jacobs in 1961 and Robert Venturi in 1966 sounded the first bell of post-modernism with their respective theories of complex urbanism and architecture. Complexity in the city and complexity and contradiction in architecture were explicitly formulated as the shift in these two fields and they had a profound effect, deepening their professional orientations. But 20 years later, as the film puts it in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, by this time round we could actually say that the universe itself is a complex, self-organising system; we could understand a deeper complexity theory. The Santa Fe Institute was the place where these 'sciences of the 21st century' were explicitly formulated, and Complexity II became the metaphysics of our Post-man. At the time however, I found it was hard to persuade the earlier theorists, such as Venturi, that this was true. Perhaps architects are more conservative than urbanists, because Jane Jacobs certainly appreciated Mark 2 and the economists at Santa Fe.

By the late 1990s at least 30 different attempts were made by scientists and philosophers to capture what was at stake, and several best-selling books on the subject had appeared.¹⁵ In an issue of *Architectural Design* in 1997, 'New Science = New Architecture', I also tried to summarise this new paradigm, with several definitions of a nonlinear architecture, and above all of complexity itself. Defining complexity adequately was like trying to pin down sudden creation on the wing:

Complexity is the theory of how emergent organisation may be achieved by interacting components pushed far from equilibrium (by increasing energy, matter or information) to the threshold between order and chaos. This important border or threshold is where the system often jumps, bifurcates or creatively interacts in a new nonlinear, unpredictable way (the Eureka moment) and where the new organisation may be sustained through feedback and the continuous input of energy.

In this process quality emerges spontaneously as self-organisation, meaning, value, openness, fractal patterns, attractor formations and (often) increasing complexity (a greater degree of freedom).¹⁶

The new complexity paradigm in architecture was then emerging, an identifiable, second stage of Post-Modernism, led now not by Robert Venturi but by Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Cecil Balmond, Frank Gehry and ARM. It has continued to thrive ever since although, as with many movements that become global, it bloomed as both a commercial and academic fashion. And so once again fashion-time played its game of asset-strip, and reduced complexity to computer software and, in architecture, to funny shapes.

In any case, no architect, artist or creator has yet expressed the canonic version of contemporary metaphysics. In terms of searching for the ideal post-modernism, a masterpiece summarising the complexity view of the universe does not exist. But, there are many interesting attempts visible on the horizon, and it must be a matter of time, and willpower.

Long Wave, Medium Wave: Deepening Modernism

Where does this quick, and selective, survey lead in the answer to the big question posed at the outset, where and what is our time? If one took an informal poll among experts, and concerned participants in the debate, it would probably lead to some agnostic results, some of which are unexceptional. Obviously, there are at least two somewhat opposed Post-Modernisms, a deconstructive version that I and others would call Late-Modernism, and a reconstructive version offered here. What unites these two PMs is a shared concern for pluralism, and a critique of monolithic culture, what Lyotard called 'a war on totality'. This essential definition would mean that post-modernists of all shades would deny that a single label could be adequate to the multispeed times of global reality. They are all cultural relativists in this sense though not in others.

However, stepping back and looking at the larger picture of global development gives a more nuanced answer. With the growth of modernisms since at least the Renaissance, when *moderna* came in vogue, when the nation state became dominant and capitalism started in Italy and elsewhere, it does make sense to talk about the Modern World as historians do. At the same time one insists on the legitimacy of the 5,000 languages, and cultures, which cut it into many parts. The hegemony of modernism starts about 1500, and there are many holocausts to go with it, most of them brought to consciousness, named and debated only in the last 30 years (like the 'American Holocaust').¹⁷ Placing the various modernisms within this overarching long wave, one could say that there are at least two historical medium waves that develop roughly since the 1960s, the Late- and Post- ones that agitate the waters. Wave theory is, of course, just another branch of physics and a metaphor for historians, but it helps to illuminate the question.

If the big wave is made up from the three aspects – modernity, modernisation and Modernism – and I believe it is, then the globe is still very much in a modern period. It rules, not OK as far as minorities and ecologists are concerned, but it still dominates most cultures. Nevertheless, its critics and creators have moved elsewhere, to adopt a spatial metaphor, both forward and back and to the side, creating these medium waves as they do so. So, while it is true that Post-Modernism is really a part of the bigger wave and has not yet fundamentally changed its force or direction, the cultural movement has, I would

argue, deepened its quality and thought. That is to say, the PM ecological agenda has little to show against the juggernaut of the global economy except many high-sounding pronouncements and one or two ameliorations such as lessening that indeterminate hole in the ozone layer; while pm science has many accomplishments to its credit.

To get a picture of how the contemporary world views reality, it is more convincing to concentrate on these sciences of complexity and see the way they combine with the sciences of simplicity. It is a picture of both/and, not either/or. Thus the fractal geometry of nature, that appears to cover most of reality, still has to defer to Euclidean geometry in the case of spherical planets, hexagonal beehives, and so much architecture in the right-angled city. But fractal geometry is the more general science and they are both useful. In like manner, Einsteinian relativity theory is a better description of the cosmos than Newton's theory of gravity. In particular, we know it is much better at framing the universe at high speeds, over great distances and in supergravity. But since we live *mostly* in the slow-moving, Newtonian world, our everyday experience denies this deeper truth. The point is also that neither Einsteinian nor quantum physics disproved Newtonian mechanics – the keystone of modern science. They were just deeper and more general explanations of reality.

This analogy of a dual and hybrid view is largely true for the other sciences of complexity: thermodynamics, nonlinearity, the chaos sciences, biology and cosmology, to name but a few. They have merged with and deepened their modern progenitors. Again, like post-industrialisation these complexity sciences take off in a big way during the 1960s. Weather prediction, the chaos science accidentally discovered by Edward Lorenz, is the standard example. And these formulations are wider, deeper, more general than their forebears. In a sense, they include the sciences of simplicity, the linear ones, as limiting cases.

I think we can follow this parallel from the sciences into the relationship between the Modern and Post-Modern. The two different orientations complement each other and are often synthesised or else hybridised together. This is certainly true in art and architecture, where the styles and ideas are merged in such profusion that classification becomes difficult, even pedantic. Pluralism now reigns in the arts with maybe 100 or so global styles extant, and at any large art fair it is this PM variety that is most evident, not an integrated Modernism. True, it is a market pluralism, without deep conviction, but an important differentiation nonetheless.

What characterises the sciences and the arts is recognisable in other areas of culture and civilisation. Modern orientations have been synthesised by post-modern ones, or exist in tension with them, or they are melded and hybridised. Dual, paired, merged or one swallowing the other? Probably every discipline and discourse should be examined separately. But, following the contrasts I mentioned at the outset, I present a very modernist diagram, a list of the father and the daughter. The argument would be that in nearly every case, to get an idea of what kind of world we are in, we should put a big 'and' between the two sides of this bloodline. Maybe that explains the irony of today asking, what period are we in?

MODERN either hybridised or paired with POST-MODERN

In politics	
1 nation states	regional bodies (EU)
2 totalitarian	democratic
3 consensus	dissensus
4 class friction	new agenda issues, green
In economics	
5 Fordism	Post-Fordism (networking)
6 Capitalism/socialism	regulated socialism
7 centralised	decentralised
8 rational choice	reflexivity
9 hidden hand	behavioural
In society	
10 industrial	post-industrial
11 class-structured	many clustered
12 proletariat	cognitariat
In culture	
13 Purism	double-coding
14 elitist	multiple taste-cultures
15 objectivism	values in nature
In aesthetics	
16 simple harmonies	disharmonious harmony
17 formal flatness	content-driven
18 top-down integrated	conflicted semiosis
19 abstract/ahistorical	time-binding
In philosophy	
20 monism	pluralism
21 materialism	semiotic view
22 utopian	heterotopian
23 reductivist	holistic
In science	
24 mechanistic	self-organising
25 simple/linear	complex/nonlinear
26 deterministic	indeterministic
27 Newtonian	relativity
In spirituality	
28 atheism	panentheism
29 patriarchal	post-patriarchal
30 disenchantment	re-enchantment
In media	
31 world of print	electronic
32 fast-changing	instant changing
33 spatialised	globalised WWW
In worldview	
34 mechanical	ecological
35 hierarchical	heterarchical
36 accidental universe	anthropic principle
37 existentialist/alienated	embedded
38 innocent/straightforward	lost innocence/ironic

These 38 contrasts reveal a pattern and of course do not fully define either side of the equation. I have only discussed a few of them, while some others are treated by contributors to this anthology. Obvious lacunae in my sketch are feminism, multiculturalism, the decline of religion and rise of a pm spirituality. But the general argument I think can be sustained that, as usual, an individual and culture are both mixtures of different epochs, sedimentations of various orientations. The pattern of our time is the post-modern sublating the modern, but the economy and society of the globe is still based on modernisation. Now, at the time of writing (August 2009), that the global system seems to have been momentarily saved from meltdown by a huge effort of reflation, no one can doubt that Modernist theory and practice still dominate. Bigness and massification and the Leviathan still rule, but not OK. One can conceive of an ideal post-modernism as the loyal opposition to its father, or the continuation of modernism and its transcendence, and those who do not conceive of movements in terms of their ideals are doomed to misunderstanding.

Notes

- 1 See Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations*, Atlantic Books (London), 2003, pp 26–37 for these political distinctions.
- 2 See John Kay, 'Lessons from the rise and fall of a carmaker', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2009: 'The history of modern business is the history of GM and vice versa. Adam Smith saw that the division of labour was the key to prosperity ...' Here Kay discusses the decline of the ultimate modern corporation, General Motors, under globalisation as consumers became more discriminating and the market more focused on niches. In conversation, we discussed what would be the typical post-modern corporation and I believe he thought maybe it would not be a corporation at all, but something like the Web. Anyway, Amazon is the archetypal information-based corporation.
- 3 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children, Correspondence 1982–1985*, Turnaround (London), 1992, pp 30–1.
- 4 Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch (New York and London), pp 67–8.
- 5 For a brief overview of 10 versions of Modernism since the 3rd century see my *Critical Modernism: where is post-modernism going?* John Wiley (London and New York), 2007, pp 8–11.
- 6 Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, ed DC Somervell, Oxford University Press (New York), 1947–57, 1: 39.
- 7 Irving Howe, 'Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction' (1963), in *The Decline of the New*, Harcourt Brace and World (New York), 1970. For Harold Levine, see 'What was Modernism?', in *Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*, Oxford University Press (New York), 1966.
- 8 Like many writers formulating a negative or positive version of the post-modern Fiedler does not see the movement across all the arts and as a new episteme, nor does he attempt a whole book on the subject. See his 'The New Mutants' (1965), in *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. 2, Stein and Day (New York), 1970.
- 9 Ihab Hassan has somewhat shifted his definitions of postmodernism over the years to be more inclusive and pluralist, and less Late-Modern (in my terms). His oppositions between the Modern versus Post-Modern can be found in his entry on Wikipedia, where 33 are given. They include the following contrasts: Romanticism/Symbolism-Pataphysics-Dadaism; Form (conjunctive, closed)/ Antiform: (disjunctive, open); Purpose/Play; Design/Chance; Hierarchy/Anarchy, and so on. As I will argue it seems to me absurd to argue that Post-Modernism isn't fundamentally romantic, symbolic, formal, purposeful, designed, hierarchical in parts, and so on. Post-Modernism is as Robert Venturi wrote, involved with 'both/and' not 'either/or'. The full list of Hassan's terms defines his concept as mostly Late- or Deconstructive Modernism, and is more coherent and applicable as such, but the reader can judge his position more fully in the text in this Reader.
- 10 My first lectures on Post-Modern architecture occurred in early 1975, and I organised an RIBA

Conference on it that year; the nascent pluralist movement was described in 'The Rise of Post-Modern Architecture', *AAQ*, London, 1975. Thereafter I wrote many books on aspects of PM, and published seven editions of *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977, 1978, 1981, 1984, 1986, 1991, 2002); it was translated into at least 11 foreign languages. The contrasts made with its double were published in *Late-Modern Architecture*, Academy Editions (London), 1980, and since then I have understood that at least these two major movements have contested the departures from their common parent. Double-coding as a definer was introduced in the 1978 edition of *LPMA*.

- 11 Since approximately 2006, Peter Eisenman, reading Edward Saïd on the idea of the Late Work of artists, has talked about his own work as 'late' in these terms. I heard him talk about this version, contrasting it with Modernism and Post-Modernism, at the RIBA, November 2008. Strangely he denied that he understood the 'new paradigm' of science, and its implications; strangely, because we have discussed it on many occasions, and his work often shows such an understanding. But then, Peter is always clear and never simple in his categorisations, especially about himself. He is certainly not what I am characterising as a Still Modernist.
- 12 John Barth, 'The Literature of Replenishment, Postmodernist fiction,' *The Atlantic*, January 1980, pp 65–71.
- 13 Arthur Kroker, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyperaesthetics*, St Martin's Press (New York), 1986. Perhaps there are a few Post-Modernists who would embrace this epithet, such as the artists Gilbert and George and Jeff Koons.
- 14 'Darwin was Wrong', *New Scientist*, 24 January 2009, pp 34–9. The issue is concerned mostly with horizontal gene transfer.
- 15 Among the popular books on complexity theory there was M Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos*, Simon and Schuster (New York), 1992; Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos*, JM Dent (London), 1992; more specialised books were Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*, Weidenfield and Nicolson (London) 1994, and my own, *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe*, Academy-Wiley (London), 1995. The writings of Stuart Kauffman, Ian Stewart, Frijof Capra and Paul Davies also were important in this developing paradigm not to mention Ilya Prigogine and his co-workers. His epochal *Order out of Chaos*, though not so explicitly concerned with complexity, had appeared in the 1980s.
- 16 Charles Jencks, Guest Editor, 'New Science = New Architecture', *Architectural Design*, July 1997, p 8.
- 17 See David E Stannard, *American Holocaust, Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, Oxford University Press (New York), 1992. Stannard put the number of those killed within 50 years of Columbus's 'discovery' at between 60 million and 80 million. The figure is contentious for two reasons: the difficulty of measurement and the question of how many were killed intentionally, or by disease and germ warfare. For a more general discussion of the way modernisation could itself be lethal and violent, see Theodore H Von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization*, Oxford University Press (New York), 1987. Whether the genocides of recent years in various countries deserve the epithet holocaust is equally debated. Without wishing to address the subject here, I would only claim that there is a big question for modernists of all persuasions to answer and a good book with which to start reflecting is Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press (Cambridge, UK), 1989.

Charles Jencks, October 2009. © 2010 John Wiley & Sons Ltd.