Modernism and Postmodernism in the Arts

The concept of progress is to be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things "just go on" is the catastrophe. It is not what which is approaching but that which is.

Walter Benjamin, Central Park

There is no boundary to the large number of theories that might be relevant to art. Almost any account of social life or of human concerns might be expanded to it. There are also many possibilities for theories bringing different aspects of art into sharp focus, such as artistic creativity, performance, criticism, reception, and the histories and sociologies. Another area is that of comparison of the arts of various cultures. One particular theoretical project, that of definition, attempts to sketch out what it is on account of which a thing is what it is. Definitions of art take diverse hypothetical approaches -
the functional, the procedural, and the historical. Moreover, individual philosophers have developed philosophical systems in which the analysis of aesthetics and art is accorded an important place. Theories of art also have been proposed by artists and by critics and historians.

In the twentieth century two important developments took place. These typically identify modernism and postmodernism as central to art's distinctive character or purpose. The suppositions of modernism have dominated the discussion of art over much of the past hundred years; postmodernism represents a recent reaction to modernism. In thinking about the difference between modernism and postmodernism, one often runs into the question of an antagonism between the two. Therefore the suppositions of modernism and their rejection by postmodernists are outlined below.

I

Modernism: an Overview

No single issue, perhaps, creates as much controversy in contemporary cultural and literary criticism as that of "modernism." It would be of great importance to examine the present status of modernism from the point of view of history.

Modernism cannot be described as an aesthetic position but must be seen as an expanded historical stage in which different aesthetic issues emerge in parallel with the rise of modern culture (distinguished by the emergence
of the nation-state, of the idea of the individual, and of industrial and consumer capitalism). These aesthetic issues are analyzed closely by modern visual and literary artists as a continuous tension between a quest for "legitimacy" in accordance with scientific, universal, ahistorical, or predominant terms and a self-conscious understanding of the historical particularity and cultural aftermath of artistic forms. Hidden in this tension is another opposition between the critical ideas of "autonomy" and "contingency." An autonomous work is one whose formal means are assumed to be sufficient in themselves: the work is assumed important without resorting to considerations (such as causal force, intention, historical events, political and cultural conditions, or other referents) beyond its formal characteristics. In contrast, the idea of contingency stands its ground on the root of artistic forms within cultural, ideological, or political conditions in which their importance is constructed. The notion of autonomy particularly functioned as a typical feature of the rhetoric on which modern art served as a cultural development (particularly in the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and enjoys assumptions for the formal growth of modern visual and literary art, the aesthetic claims on which it functioned, and finally for the terms (like claims to neutrality) in which it has been censured.

Modernism does not stand for one special period, it, then, might be more accurate to speak of various periods in which "modernity" developed. Modernity, as a broad literary-historical phenomenon, denotes:
Both a mode of seeing and a social organization: a mode of seeing insofar as the modern consciousness turns on a scientific outlook as against the mythical; and a social organization insofar as modern society rests on a market economy that progressively devolves into international corporatism.

Modernity, as the quality, experience, or period of the "modern," can perhaps best be described as the newness of the present as a break with the past, becoming broaden into a fast-ongoing and uncertain future. Basically, it seems committed to the notions of innovation, progress, and fashion, and counterpoised to the notions of antiquity, the classical, and tradition. The dichotomy of the most "up-to-date" features of the present from those which create a continuity with the past is precisely that aspect of competing definitions of the historical present. In its broadest sense, it is a structure of historical time consciousness.

As a sociological concept, one is tempted to recognize modernity as primarily connected with industrialization, secularization, bureaucracy, and the city. Such a definition is simply based upon a binary: modern / pre-modern.

Historical periodization of the "modern" can be specified according to five main stages:

I. To start with, the Latin term *modernus* (originated in
modo, meaning recently) was employed to substitute the cyclical opposition of "old and new" feature of pagan antiquity for an understanding of the present as an unalterable break with the past. It was this understanding of the present as "new" which was the core of the contests between ancients and moderns which separated the Middle Ages from the second half of the twelfth century to the beginnings of the Renaissance.

II. The first main semantic change occurred with the growth of the awareness of a new era in Europe during the fifteenth century. This was originally demonstrated by the rise of the terms "Renaissance" and "Reformation" suggesting the beginning of a new (unnamed) period, by the defining of the previous era, now seen to be undoubtedly over, as the "Middle Ages;" and by the setting of the term Antiquity to indicate the pagan culture of ancient Greece and Rome. In the process, a new relationship between the ancient and the modern was set up at the expense of the Middle Ages, inasmuch as the Renaissance gave priority to the ancient over all other cultures. At this stage the modern was stood against the medieval, rather than against the ancient, and it had a right to choose only to the degree that it imitated the ancient.
III. In a third stage, extending throughout the sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, the terms Renaissance and Reformation turned to be a description of now completed historical periods. This demanded a term suggesting the new epoch as a whole which came after the Middle Ages. It was at this moment that the connotation of novelty in the term *moderus*, signifying “of today” as opposed to “of yesterday”- what is over, finished, or historically outshone- was restored. The Renaissance had tried to substitute the authority of the Church for the authority of the ancients. It was the ancients themselves who now came under the attack from the viewpoint of the present in the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, or the “Battle of the books” as it came to light.

IV. It was through a forth step, the “Enlightenment” and its effect, that this feeling of a qualitative newness about the times, of their being thoroughly other and better than what had passed before, was stabilized. Two things made this feasible: a re-thinking of the future outweighed Christian eschatology’s casting of its expectation of the impending arrival of doomsday, and the creation of new ideas of expectation by the growth of the sciences, and the
proliferating awareness of the "New World" and its peoples. The abstract temporality of "the new" came to have an epochal importance, inasmuch as it could now be inferred from a differently void future, without end, and hence without boundary. The typical framework of modernity as a form of historical time consciousness may therefore be seen to originate from a blend of the Christian notion of time as unalterable with criticism of its related notion of eternity.

These developments came to a climax in the end of the eighteenth century, in the conditions of the advancement of historical experience speeded up by the Industrial and French Revolutions, in the change of a series of historical terms. "Revolution," "progress," "development," "crisis," "epoch," and "history" itself all obtained new temporal firmness of purposes at this time. As proposed by many critics, time was no longer the medium in which all histories occur; it receives historical quality and history no longer takes place in, but through, time. Time turns to be an effective and historical force in its own right. It is because of the qualitative change in the temporal mold of historical terms which takes place at this time that "modernity" in the full historical comprehension of the term is
generally chosen to commence here. The modern simply no longer stands against either the ancient or the medi­eval periods, but more generally to “tradition.” It is this full understanding of modernity which creates a new era as a result of the quality of its temporality. The logic of the new, fashion, and aesthetic modernism may thus be seen as the after math of an aestheticization of “moder­nity” as a form of historical awareness and its shift into a general paradigm of social experience.

V. Lastly, in order to take us up to the present, we must put in a fifth phase in which the particular and paradoxi­cal abstractness of the temporality of modernity is im­mediately problematized and stated. This is the phase after the 1939-45 war during which “modern” changes its reference from “now” to “just now” or even “then,” and for some time has been a label always analyzing the past with which “contemporary” may be compared for its presentness.

“Modernity…” set now as a distinct historical period within its own temporal project, fixed as a name and is left helpless in the past. The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns is substituted for a Quarrel of the Moderns and Contemporaries. The Contemporaries turns to be
The postmodern, then, has not been instituted at the price of a complete denial of the modern. Now, keeping in mind the promise of the postmodern of the modern, one is perhaps better prepared to become postmodern, however, in this sense at least, by persisting in being modern, to move towards the times. As Lyotard puts it:

What, then, is the postmodern?... It is undoubtedly a part of the modern... A work can [now] become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.²

Indeed, it is in dwelling on “modernity” as a category of historical periodization that moves quite apparently in the direction of a dual role: it labels the contemporaneity of an era to the time of its categorization, but it demonstrates this contemporaneity regarding a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the concurrent result of separating the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus pinpointed. It figures either this paradoxical duality or basically dialectical quality which opens to question “modernity” as a category. This stance poses the separation of the logical structure of the process of change from its firm historical
The heart of this temporal matrix thus produced lies in a number of features characterized by:

I. Complete establishment of the historical present over the past as its repudiation and superiority, and the perspective from which to periodize and comprehend history as a whole.

II. Openness toward an undetermined future distinguished only by its intended superiority of the historical present and its relegation of this present to a future past.

III. A tendentious eradication of the historical present itself as the obsolete point of a perennial move between a ceaselessly changing past and an as yet undermined future.

It is certainly possible here to interpret "modernity" as an unfixed subject without an objective referent. What this project endorses is that "modernity" is "the product, in the instance of each utterance, of an act of historical self-definition through identification and projection which transcends the order of chronology in the construction of a meaningful present." In this account "modernity" situates itself as a perpetually renewed act of historical self-definition and estimation which emphasizes Habermas's reformulation of
the notion of modernity as an “incomplete project.” To propose the historical location of modernity is not to propose anything that is foreign to the “Enlightenment.” However, whereas the theme of such acts of self-definition is always relevant to the historical location and projects of the actors involved, both Habermas and his “postmodern” opponents intend to position the meaning of “modernity” through its historical connection with the Enlightenment. For them, “modernity” is identical to the incomplete project of Enlightenment.

We can best bring to a focus our discussion of modernity by taking a glance at debate of a particular social project, but it blurs the framework of the notion of modernity, restraining its fluidity, formality, and paradoxical dynamics. It is at this point that modernity raises, though perhaps never satisfactorily resolves, the key issue of the relationship between social progress and colonialism. In this regard, it demonstrates the wider historical process of colonialism during which a particular (European) present was established as the standard of social progress on a global scale. It is within the framework of this account of the “modern” that the term “modernization” came to be employed in the United States after the 1939-45 war to mention a form of social and economic “development” in Third World countries, modeled on a specific version of the history of capitalism in the West. Similarly limited definitions of “modernity” can be observed at work in economic discussions of the future of Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism, and in cultural discussions of religious “fundamentalism.”

What these issues uncover is, first, that the idea of modernity re-
mains the socially advantaged scene for the expression of competing point of views about the relationship of past, present, and future; and second that it is closely connected, inescapably, with the contradictory cultural heritage of European colonialism. The overall strategies governing modernity here can fairly be considered as the notions of “unity” and “hierarchy.” For if modernity is basically a temporal idea, it nevertheless turned to be feasible in its fully developed form only on the basis of certain spatial requirements: namely the unification of the globe through colonial navigation (giving the notion of “history” as a whole) and the hierarchial differentiation of European from non-European cultures (in which a historical differential could be presented within the present).

It is then precisely this problem which one may find pressing. As the cultural structure of Western societies is changed (especially by immigration) and their economic “Hegemony” is called into question, casting the very notion of “the West” into crisis, the idea is created new and more “hybrid” account of modernity within the terms of its “Paradigmatic” temporal form: “postcolonial contramodernities” and “countercultures of modernity,” carrying the promise of a new historicity.

“The aesthetic developments” that established the strong starting point for modernism can well be viewed in late Renaissance discussions concerning “the ancients and the moderns.” These resumed discussions of the parallel merits of painting and poetry as mimetic forms that had their roots in the work of Plato and Aristotle. After the seventeenth century, the mimetic
theory was slowly discarded as a philosophical core for beauty and also as the conceptual basis for visual artistic practice in the quest for a solution to the problematic notion of painting as an ineffective way of imitation (as an only sign of a sign, or image of an image).

The eighteenth century aspired to offer basic ideas behind the mimetic theory of art. With the emergence of aesthetics proper in the eighteenth century, the center of attention changed into an exploration of the peculiarity of each individual medium or mode of art. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* framed an institutional principle of modern art: that each medium can best bring itself to completion through maximizing its own formal characteristics. Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, defined an idea of aesthetic judgement as disinterested (without motivation in desire or need) and intersubjectively universal (free-standing of individual choice or peculiar taste), while his view of beauty rested in purposeful form. In Kant’s work there was no formula for connecting beauty or aesthetic judgement to art through engagement with the integrity of a work, but the principles of self-sufficient perfection and self-reflexive focus on a medium were adopted as characteristics of twentieth-century modernism, often with reference to Kant as their source. G. W. F. Hegel’s *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1975) formulated a philosophical grounds for fine art as a disclosure of truth, a standpoint of the process of self-knowledge of the Absolute in the approach of Mind and Spirit, Hegel’s stress on the self-reflexive view of the definition of beauty
made an easy, if doubtful, move into an artistic practice of self-referentiality (self-conscious focus on the process of art making as a subject for art and also a superior situation of formal means as an end in themselves). Although German Idealism presented a significant basis for modern aesthetics, it would be a mistake to regard modernism as identical with its aesthetics, since the visual and literary arts were constantly recast through their relation to broader cultural and historical concerns.

From this point onward, in the early nineteenth century, Romanticism makes a significant move: the tension created between the subjective feeling of Romanticism and the empirical principles of Realism. Romanticism led to the eradication of belief in idealist perfection and enhanced focus on the site of artistic practice within social and psychological frames. August Wilhem von Schlegel constructed the assumptions of a Romantic aesthetics in which a work of art was marked with emotional imagination and created as an imaginative form with no paradigm or previous referent. Romantic expression supported the notion that art and beauty were precious because they unveiled truth, although they did this through feeling, rather than logic or judgment, and gave superiority to form and effect over structure and order.

Modernism put a spell on literary and artistic movements in the mid-to late nineteenth century. Basically this era seems committed to two positions that sit uneasily together and whose tension will provoke a reexploration and reinterpretation of both. In art-historical terms, the central stage in which stylistic and foundational breaks with the academic (and classical) tradition
takes place is in the 1860s, specially in France. Artistic autonomy emphasized the proliferating independence of visual art from literary sources, its noticeable ability to act as a location of critical social commentary, and its capacity to place a self-conscious exploration of the cultural and aesthetic terms of art making through thematic and formal investigations of the assumptions of art production. Edouard Manet's evident brushwork, debatable subject matter, and focus on the picture plane and Gustave Courbet's workmanlike surfaces and focus on nontraditional themes (such as labor) acted as paradigmatic examples of these developments.

Here we would add that the point of setting the focus of modernist theory on the opposition between "autonomy" and "contingency" would formulize the condition. The shift of autonomy from a philosophical framework (Hegel's notion of Idea recognizing itself) into a cultural one (art as an independent position with its own rules, agendas, and identity) was pivotal to modernism's practice of an aesthetic rhetoric that laid claim to the idea that formal means were instrumental for achieving cultural ends. The tension between autonomy and contingency was thus visible in a comparison between the artwork as a product or object among others (autonomous, freely circulating, and yet different in its identity) and the work of art as an integral element in and perfect expression of modern life.

This tension receives further clarification in Charles Baudelaire's 1845 essay, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, where he sees a critical demand for an aesthetic apt to modernity, explained as modern life,
but distinguished from modernism as the cultural expression of the modern period. It means that the role of art was to develop an exact picture of modernity but also to be independent of it to an adequate degree to provide an evaluation of or escape from its conditions. Emphasizing on the temporality of modern life, the ephemeral, the fleeting features of lived experience, Baudelaire expressed the basical duality of modernism in which one prospect is the contingent whose other half is the eternal and unchanging. Baudelaire’s poetry, with its emphatic repudiation of the classical verse forms and its blend of vernacular imagery and mythic eroticism, represents dualism as the opposition of spleen and ideal.

Perhaps the most vivid claim to “autonomy” is to be seen in the late nineteenth century:

Late nineteenth-century artists continued to explore the potential of visual representation to exist and function independently of a reference: the Post-Impressionist attention to the surface arrangement of pigment into form and Symbolists investment in color as a replete medium helped secure features of twentieth century visual modernism’s claims to autonomy.

Although autonomy plays a decisive role here, the late nineteenth century’s hidden basis is a re-elaboration of the condition of contemporary
culture and modern life. Nevertheless, the spiritual anxiety indicated in the work of such symbolist artists as Edvard Munch or Odilon Redon demonstrates a deep spiritual and psychological uneasiness about the situation of contemporary culture and the problems of sexuality, gender and the unconscious stimulated by social upheavals developed by urbanization, secularization, and industrialization. In the same way, the work of Georges Seurat, with its accurate optical manipulation, its recurrent, rational ordering of the use of coloring agent, and its thematic engagement with the fragmentation of modern life, indicates the degree to which modern art revealed and censured the contemporary condition. In the same decades of the late nineteenth century, the fascinating belief that art could be an effective social force for changing modern life or standing against some of its more false effects provided the motivation behind the Arts and Crafts movements, particularly that of William Morris in England, which strived to make artistic practice a paradigm for individual labor that was not classified under industrial production.

The late nineteenth century search for modernism undertaken by such artists as Conrad Fiedler and Wassily Kandinsky. Fiedler tried to establish a philosophical foundation for works of visual art that indicated completely through formal relations, a position accepted and expanded in the early twentieth-century aesthetics of Clive Bell and Roger Fry. The Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky reorients the concern for a systematic language of visual form in his work, and single out the crucial characteristics of elements of
color, composition, shape, and relations within the canvas in a quest for universal, stable meaning according to a pseudo-scientific exploration of visual effects. The area of modernism in the late nineteenth century embraced two metaphors, that of music and that of language, developed to establish the foundation for two different formalist trends at the turn of the century. Both drew heavily on a notion of autonomy to support their ideas of visual meaning as independent of reference: in the musical analogy, form is presentational (its expressive means are its meaning), and in the linguistic paradigm, form is rambling (its rule-bound systemic feature makes it produce meaning differently). Such artists (esp. Wassily Kandinsky) continued the enduring search for finding "legitimacy" for visual representations as a natural, crucial mode of representation rather than as an only conventional one, expanding earlier discussions about visual representation and mimesis. Such explorations preserved the claim that visual art could act as a form of presentation and not merely as a mode of representation. For Cubists, Futurists, and a variety of modern abstract painters and writers, therefore, an autonomous work lays claim to being a thing in its own right, a creation, in the same significance as a work of nature. Few works of modern art explored the limits of this notion (as visual art engaged entirely with color, composition, material, texture, mass, line, or literary compositions giving prominence to sound, rhythm, or word patterns). Nevertheless, this assumption developed a foundation on which much modern art was supposed to stress on self-conscious focus on art making and process.
In the twentieth century the modernist art world increasingly turned towards antagonism as a way to reaccess the social and in turn as a means to reinvigorate art. Therefore, artistic practice came to be seen as a site of resistance to the negative aftermath of technological advances, social upheavals, and the growth of mass culture. Artistic modernism divided into a formalist exploration (of the purity of the medium, often presented as universal and transcendent, as in the work of Ezra Pound or Piet Mondrian) and an avant-garde (devoted to employing art to produce a resistant countercourse, as in the work of Dadaists and Surrealists, or to help establishing a revolutionary new society in which the role of artist and aesthetics can be functional, integral, and productive, as in the work of Bertolt Brecht and Aleksandr Rodchenko.

It soon became clear that in the avant-garde autonomy served to explain two distinct features of artistic practice: the ability of visual art to delineate a realm of advantaged activity within the culture (and thus function as a location for symbolic interference and strategic political intervention) and, second, the striking emphasis on the completely individual identity of this work of art as against, opposed to, and separate from other culture production. From the received viewpoint this definition is chiefly concerned with establishing adequate political grounds or procedures for the rearrangement of particular cases with reference to existing status. In this definition, visual, literary, musical, or any other art as an autonomous form came to have a political aspect - its very identity as autonomous differentiated it from
industrial production (at first at the level of creation through maintenance of the handmade touch, mark, or other sign for uniqueness and later at the level of cultural production through the self-reflexive focus on conceptual assumptions as well as a proliferating demands for unconsumability within artistic work). The weight on the “laying bare of devices” demonstrated by Russian formalists Viktor Shklovsky, of the usefulness of negation or aesthetic difficulty maintained by Frankfurt School critic Theodor W. Adorno, found its artistic counterpart in the work of early twentieth-century artists such as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Marcel Duchamp, or in later decades, the work of John Cage and Samuel Beckett. But as a force in changing the terms of artistic identity from the “formal plane” of production to the “conceptual plane,” Duchamp was undoubtedly the strongest impact on the visual arts, especially after about 1950.

Modernism in the middle of the twentieth century generated a new interest in form, and in the ideas of an absolute autonomy of creative process and the independence of an artist and his/her work from the social historical surroundings. But it made no pretence to be value-free. By the middle of the twentieth-century modernism had turned to be highly codified in philosophical, artistic, critical, and cultural terms. In the visual arts, the idea of autonomy was connected with the notion of the “purity” of the medium, that is, a self-conscious focus on the formal features of production, and with the supporting notion that work generated through this belief had a directly comprehensive presence and meaning. New Criticism in literature (especially
the work of Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt) and high modernism [textual / formal self-consciousness] in the visual arts had a share in the critical theory that intention, biography, and history were secondary issues—much less significant in evaluating a work of art than the formal features of the poem, painting, or sculpture itself.

For a while this critical formulation seemed to carry great force, even among art theorists like Clement Greenberg. In the visual arts this critical formulation is connected with the work of Clement Greenberg, who claimed a teleological foundation for the material purity of a medium, especially painting. While ascribing the notion of an aesthetics of self-critical consciousness to Kant, Greenberg reshaped the ideas of disinterest and purposive form that were Kant's aesthetic premises into a vital feature of artistic process. Greenberg's focus on the purity of the medium was in fact more aptly an expansion of the earlier eighteenth-century aesthetic stance of Lessing and later formalists such as Fry and Bell. By its very autonomous and individual identity, Greenberg believed that art could function as a location for the support of cultural values. But the only assertion that cultural values are at stake and available to support within the formal means of fin art illustrates the degree to which the idea of autonomy is came to terms with a network of contingencies—all of which constantly re-establish the work of art within its historical and cultural moment.

A new direction in modernism was inaugurated in the 1960s by both Pop and Minimalist artists, when they looked for "new solutions to the
problem of the identity of the fine-art image in relation to that of mass culture." With the advent of Conceptual Criticism during the late 1960s, modernist analysis (based upon the predominance of formal aspects) has been edged from a place of prominence in literary and art scholarship. To preserve the differentiation between the forms, images, and production of visual art and those of the cultural industry, consumer capitalism, and mass market media, many artists put weight on a change from formal qualities to conceptual ones as the foundation of an artwork's identity, thus abandoning Greenberg's attention to the medium as the distinctive feature of a work of art. Conceptual artists of the 1960s stressed the idea that art based upon the conventions according to which a work could be perceived as art in nonessentialist terms. Thus, the pivotal issue for art in the second half of the twentieth century led to the notion of art as an idea: concept took the place of form as the core of a work's identity in the later modern aesthetic.

The concept of autonomy has been subjected to rigorous critical commentary since its first exposition. Critiques of modernism argued that "modernism effectively concealed or participated in practices of oppression with regard to class, gender, ethnicity, and colonial politics." This conception returns us to a negative definition of modernism. It emphasizes the ideological framework of artistic autonomy, it driven out, in its very claim to go beyond historical conditions in favor of universal explorations of form, associated easily with hegemonic cultural agendas aim at erasing their self-interested programs in the name of values of humanity, civilization, or an
advanced social order. Finally, it is apparent that:

... the idea of aesthetics as a disinterested arena engaged with such values turned out to legitimate, conceal, and otherwise serve the interests of a first-world culture. By focusing on the historicization of concepts of abstraction, self-sufficiency of formal means, and nonreferentiality, critics of modernism demonstrated that these very claims were symptomic of and linked to specific agendas.⁷

The basis for many of questions arising in autonomy drew from philosophical and interdisciplinary resources, such as, Marxism, feminism, and postcolonial theory. Writers engaged with an evaluation of art through the touchstones of historical materialism made particular study of the relations between visual form and the issues of social life in terms of class structure (e.g., Fredric Jameson, Timothy Clark, and Griselda Pollock). Proliferating consciousness of the heterogeneity of modern art put weight on the necessity of comprehending the ways in which the notion of autonomy had given help to dominate practices that departed from the formalist or avant-garde lines-such as figurative work or work in a more traditional or conventional mood, often generated in communities of women or by people of color. Recent evaluations of the tendencies pivotal to modernism's claims to autonomy have come from the realm of feminism, cultural studies, and
postcolonial theory (e.g., Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha) for which the term “representation” always has recourse to the cultural fabrics within which the artistic strategies act and the agendas of power in which they take part. The notion of autonomy as an aesthetic hypothesis is thus assaulsted and subverted through a claim of the cultural context as a condition for regarding autonomy as an aesthetic strategy in the first place.

One of the more disturbing features of arguments about the status of modernism in the late twentieth century is to be found in postmodernism. The idea of a society of the spectacle (in the work of Guy Debord) or of the simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard) that formulated in the late twentieth century indicated the end of modernism as a cultural, critical, and aesthetic paradigm, and the institutional myths of formal visual modernism and the avant-garde have now been sharply limited. Modern autonomy has been substituted for postmodern contingency (historical and cultural particularity, the social embeddedness of form and interpretation, a highly modified idea of artistic identity and originality, and a self-consciousness about the hegemonic agenda of rambling practices) as the main framework of the foundation of artistic activity.

II

Postmodernism: Historical and Conceptual Survey

There has been considerable interest in postmodernism from the perspective
of culture, of sociology, and of intellectual and epistemological history. Postmodernism has been making known as a term that reconciles often incongruous developments on the influence of global restructurizations in contemporary culture. With a touch of skepticism, it has been touched on as a way of representation and as a periodizing notion that characterizes a new epochal boundary. Consequently:

Underlying the term “postmodernism” and its links to the remapping of the cultural terrain said to accompany the globalization of the economy and communication networks is the assumption that technological changes and the restructuration of the world economy in the interest of multinational capital have led to the emergence of new social movements, agencies, and cultural practices. How one qualifies these changes is a matter of unresolved contention.

In very general terms, postmodernism is connected with a cognitive change that stressed the termination of philosophical foundationalism and consequently epistemological uncertainty (which in literature, as David Attwell suggested, occurs simultaneously with a textual turn); with the pluralization of “legitimate” knowledges from both within and outside the predominant cultures of advanced industrial societies originating from a crisis of legitimation; with hybridization, namely, the subversion or moderating of traditional bound-
aries between high culture, mass culture, and vernacular culture; and with the increase in cultural oppositions between the first and the third world. Most endeavors to delineate postmodernism, "which remains an elusive, contradictory term, highlight hybridity, textuality, and ambivalence as some of its most recognizable characteristics."

Postmodernism specifies many various types of cultural object and phenomenon in many diverse manners. Among these, perhaps three various uses of the term may widely be identified. First, postmodernism pinpoints a number of developments in the arts and culture in the latter half of the twentieth century. The reference point and point of departure for this type of postmodernism are the different forms of modernism that developed in the arts and culture in Europe in the first half of the century. Second, it designates the rise of new frameworks of social and economic organization, again approximately since the end of the 1939-45 war. As such, its reference point and point of departure is the tendency of modernization which specified the early years of the century, with the development of industry, the growth of the mass market, and the speed in automation, travel, and mass communication. Third, it indicates a peculiar type of theoretical writing and reflection, usually, though not completely, writing and reflection which chooses the first or second area as its goal. It may be helpful to classify these three fields of application with the terms postmodernism, postmodernity, and the postmodern. (It should bear in mind that this classification is a suitable opportunity selected for present objectives alone, and does not coincide
commonly with usages of these three variations in critical writing).

Critical analyses of postmodernism have expanded to nearly every artistic form and area of cultural practice, but the debate about the rise of a postmodernist reaction to an earlier modernist trend has showed a tendency to develop its clearest and strongest frame in those fields in which modernism had previously been most markedly and clearly described, for instance, architecture, the visual arts, and literature. Two of the principal commentators of postmodernism, the architectural commentator Charles Jencks and the literary critic Ihab Hassan, hold that the interrogation or revolutionary vigor of earlier forms of modernism had inured over the twentieth century to conventional artistic practices and considerable institutional forms. It should be mentioned that the points of the critiques undertaken by these two writers suggest clearly various definitions of the ways in which postmodernism arises out of and goes beyond this now institutionalized modernism.

According to Jencks, what is in issue is the subversion of the authoritarian style and sensibility of international modernism and the creation of architecture to a new variety of styles and functions. Thus the paragon of a building that would be rigorously and simply "itself," revealing and performing its function without ornament or excess, is to replace for a paragon of a building that would differently embody, mimic, and communicate with its architectural and nonarchitectural contexts. Such an architecture is commonly not pure or self-constant but hybrid, regarding its combination of various styles obtained from past and present.
But Hassan asserts that the postmodernist notion is to be found not in a simple break with modernist styles in literary writing so much as in a return to some of the more rebellious and unruly forms of avant-garde practice that had designated literary and artistic modernism at its beginning: the consuming potency of Alfred Jarry's "pataphysics," the humorous iconoclasm of dadaism, the acceptance of dynamism in vorticism and futurism. Hassan finds support for this notion of postmodernism as a revival rather than a transcending of modernism in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, for whom, paradoxically, postmodernism may be said to come before rather than after modernism.

It may be worth recalling that many broadside attacks of artistic postmodernism are on the value of aesthetic autonomy. For many modernist artists and authors, the value of art was to be explained purely on its own terms. In evaluation of the visual arts exclusively, the basis of modernist style of approach was that it conformed to Immanuel Kant's suggestion in his *Critique of Judgement* that aesthetic feelings were or should be thoroughly disinterested, which is to say independent of the desires, preferences, and struggles of ordinary life. The value and aim of art thus led to be explained with regard to a number of rejections and negations: a rejection of personality; a rejection of suggesting intention; a rejection of any desire to represent the real world, or represent it realistically; a rejection of social rules and conventions, particularly the conventions of communication itself.

Such claims help to specify artistic postmodernism. Artistic
postmodernism may be described widely as a rejection of this rejection, a repudiation of the paragon of art's autonomy and break-up from the world. For some critics, this indicates a reappearing sense of the essential links between art and the social and political domain from which modernism had separated it. Where the paragon of aesthetic autonomy was consolidated for modernism is the notion that the work of art has to be regarded a complete and self-sufficient object, for instance, an opposite notion unfolds itself in the demise of the artistic object and the appeal for temporal process typical of main forms of postmodernism, such as the conceptual and performance art of the 1960s and beyond. Thus one may sum up the change in perspectives toward the work of art from modernism to postmodernism as a new interest for complexity over purity, plurality over stylistic integrity, and contingency or connectedness over autonomy.

Postmodernity denotes the failure of radical change of the forms of social, economic, and political modernity that had been predominant in most Western industrial nations from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The narratives of postmodernity thus produced are of different kinds. The reason that we cannot make assertions or arguments about such narratives related to the question whether postmodernity is regarded as a simple passage beyond or an concentration of the capitalist forces stated in modernity. This is also true for artistic postmodernism.

Daniel Bell's influential work *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, first published in 1976, gave the first coherent narratives of the
emergence of postmodernity. In Bell’s view advanced capitalism has changed from being an economic and cultural system rested upon the methods needed for production to one focused on the pleasures of consumption. It is thus we can claim that this in turn transforms the position of art and culture. Bell suggests that artistic modernism had been produced out of a severe opposition between the puritan ethic of work and harmony and the hedonist idolization of self-expression and self-enlargement typical of modernist authors and philosophers such as Nietzsche, Lawrence, Woolf, and others. A postmodern condition is achieved when these modernist values, which had previously been the support of a small and dissentient artistic minority, become generalized in a consumer society. Bell is only one of a number of writers who consider the defining condition of postmodernity as a certain aestheticization of economic condition. The autonomy of culture, reached in art, now starts to move over into the realm of life. The postmodernist attitude makes a claim for what was previously expressed in fantasy and imagination must be demonstrated in life as well. There is no difference between art and life. Therefore “anything permitted in art is permitted in life as well.”

Jean Baudrillard’s series of books, published from the late 1960s onwards, branched out from the similar origins and offered sharp criticism on those economistic hypothesis such as Marxism, which made the role of the economy the pivotal feature in social life and regarded the modes and forces of production as the main foundation of every economy. Baudrillard’s
works may be divided into two phases, each of which pursued a distinct interpretation of economic-cultural system. In his early work, he maintains that culture and the processes of representation and reproduction more generally had captured a supremacy over the economic "base" from which Marxist theory deemed them to be a secondary origination. Social study must learn to comprehend the pivotal role of social signs, codes, and languages in contemporary society. The central portion of Baudrillard's later work extends this study notably to maintain that the acceleration in the technological means of simulation and reproduction has created a superiority of signs over the real. The postmodern world (although Baudrillard rarely makes use of the term) is one in which experience and reality are codified and mediated to such a point as to have turned to be irredeemable in themselves. Where former ages can be distinguished by the various types of relationship gaining in them between reality and the socially generated images of reality, our contemporary world has observed the supremacy of the self-sufficient "simulacrum," the image that "bears no relationship to any reality whatsoever ... [and] is its own pure simulacrum." Such a condition occurs with and is in some ways established by the shift from a production economy to an economy rested upon consumption, in which goods are not produced to supply already existing demands, but rather as a secondary response to needs which are themselves invoked "in the first place" by advertising and marketing strategies.

This central insistence on the condition of postmodernity based upon
an economic-cultural transformation lies at the core of Harvey’s account which goes along with positions similar in some regards to those of Bell and Baudrillard, though with a very different attention and political ideas. Harvey’s theory of postmodernity, articulated in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), begins with the observation that postmodernity as the aftermath of an increase in the very energies of change and subversion which had been linked to modern capitalism, energies which, in homogenizing more and more realms of life to the logic of the marketplace, had given rise to a radical subversion of previously constant values, principles, and economic modes.

Postmodernity, according to Harvey’s account, creates a subversion of the very modes of social and political organization which had taken the place of traditional modes in modernity. In place of the clear boundary line of economic interests between the owners of capital and those who sell their labor, along with the clear paradigms of social opposition and identification, and even spatial-geographical modes caused by these boundary lines, the global economy of postmodernity is specified by temporality of interests, changeability of economic conditions, insecurity in models of employment, and plurality of class and political identification.

Harvey centers particularly on the “space-time compression” created by speeding up in travel and telecommunications. In a world in which distance no longer appeared as any type of material pressure upon economic activity, such that space is measured in the shorter and shorter intervals of time needed for passing across it, space, as on might say, melt into time.
Under these conditions, profit is not evaluated with regard to material increase, but as a gain in overturn time, or an increase in the rate of consumption. Where the supremacy of modern capitalism had occurred partly by means of the rationalizing science and technology that gave permission to space to be controlled at a distance, the intense speed of change in postmodernity brings about a sense of place that is paradoxical and ephemeral. Nevertheless, Harvey stands his ground on the idea that these economic and cultural changes are expansion of, rather than basic breaks in "the invariant elements and relations that Marx defined as fundamental to any capitalist mode of production." As such he does not, as Baudrillard so clearly does, quit the endeavor to offer progressive political comprehension of the present.

The most incontestable example of social and economic postmodernity, in Harvey’s view and for others like Scott Lash and John Urry (1987) and Alan Lipietz (1987), is the Ford motor corporation in the middle years of the twentieth century. Ford exemplified a form of production which rested on large, rationalized factories, devoted to the mass production of a nominally different single item. Such a mode of organization is centralized, focused on production, and managed by economies of scale. It has tendency to need and give constant and continuous patterns of employment. A “post-Fordist” paradigm of economic organization, by contrast, is much more decentralized; today a motor car will not be assembled in one factory in one site, but in a variety of locations and by a number of various workforces,
both of which are liable to sudden and unforeseeable change, in the search for efficiency or for political reasons. The scatter and mobility of production in post-Fordism is in tune with the sense of the diverse and changing paradigms of demand in a mass market that is no longer understood either as passive or homogeneous. Economies of scale, rested on the savings in the cost of production created by minimizing change in the product, allow itself to be overcome by post-Fordism to economies of scope, in which the mobility of taste and fashion is met by proliferating difference of the product. Therefore the largest and most powerful economic corporations are not producers of single, specified products, but multinationals, gathering a chain of different and constantly shifting interests and concerns which go across the boundaries of nation-states with ease.

These issues go hand in hand with the other basis defining status of social and economic postmodernity, namely the change from an economy rested on goods to one rested on the supply of information and services. It appears that images and life-styles are as much the issue of economic marketing and profit as the goods which go together with them, and certainly, an ever-increasing portion of economic activity as a whole is revolved around the creation and transmission of signs and reproductions: news, texts, films, images, music, software. One of the more troubling aspects of capitalist modernity is the heavy emphasis it placed on the anxiety that the homogenizing hunger of market might finish with wiping out culture altogether. So Fredric Jameson makes no hesitation to point to the incredibly converse aftermath produced by postmodernity, namely the “prodigious ex-
pansion of cultural throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself can be said to have become "cultural." It seems safe to suggest that:

Such developments lead to a move away from the clarity and permanence of affiliations and values in the sphere of political belief and practice, as a politics based upon class antagonism gives way to an "identity politics" based upon a more complex and dispersed sense of affiliation and power, and an uneven configuration of sexuality, age, gender, and ethnic identity.

It is in this respect that the enterprise of developing a number of procedures in which postmodernism in the arts is assumed to indicate or justify these shifts is the social and economic area. In this context, many artists lay stress on the balances between the playful variety of styles and blending of media typical of postmodernist art and literature and the shift from centralization to decentralization, the awareness of increased relativity of values, and the subversion of constant criteria and identities in social and political life in general. We are also prompted to assume that an art that drives self-consciousness to the extreme, admitting and rejoicing in its position as fiction or image, appears apt to a world that appears to be more and more
absorbed in the creating and reflection of images of itself. The most ambitious and encompassing statement of the relation between postmodernism and postmodernity is perhaps to be found in Lyotard’s influential *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), which argues that modernity exists with the substitution of divine or providential narratives of human destiny by more secular but no less universal narratives, or “metanarratives,” which give a sense of the inevitable linear progress of human history toward some singular destination- the fulfilment of fully self-conscious “spirit” in Hegelian philosophy, the universal emancipation of human beings in Marxism. The postmodern condition takes place with the breakdown of or extreme skepticism toward these universalizing metanarratives. Instead of a single narrative of the unearthing a necessary humanity, Lyotard suggests a multiplicity of various histories and local narratives that is resistant to being summed up or unified in one all-encompassing story. Postmodernist art and culture help this variety of identities and manners of speaking by standing against every kind of formalization, and supporting the utter complexity and incommensurability of human worlds.

It may be sufficient to note that the very condition of postmodernity is one in which the relations between the separate areas of social and economic life on the one hand and art and culture on the other have gone through a more basic change. Thus, one can assert that if it is true that there are vigorous balances between the innovative potencies of artistic modernism and the social and political violence of modernity, it is also true that artistic modernism is often distinguished by its sense of unyielding resistance to the
modern world which it dwells in. This remark clearly manifests:

…the very smoothness of the interchangeability between postmodernist art and social and economic postmodernity may seem less like a vital affinity and more like a collapse of the distance and differentiation necessary for art and literature to claim any serious or transforming function. For proponents of this view, such as Terry Eagleton (1986), the striking correspondences between postmodernity and postmodernism are a sign of the numb and inert compliance of postmodernist art with the forces of commodification.15

The extent to which the postmodern condition is involved in cultural life extends not only to modes of economic production but also to forms of writing about postmodernism. This notion here could be elaborated to suggest that if one of the important features of the postmodern condition is the growth of a generalized self-consciousness in cultural life, then it may appear to be suitable to claim that one of the most noticeable signs of the condition is the rise of “the postmodern” as a style or sensibility within critical writing itself, such that certain forms of writing about postmodernism, whether in philosophy, social theory, cultural studies, or literary criticism, develop to function and even consciously to support the values or qualities that are its object. The current situation of the postmodern is ambiguous. “The
postmodern” has become a widely recognized and referenced body of work, of interest to many kinds of scholars but at times outside education, characterized by a rich (and not yet absorbed) diversity of approaches and interests and also by a degree of (possibly cherished) marginality.

The ambiguity of the phrase “postmodern theory,” which does not support the definitions of “theory of the postmodern” and “theory as the postmodern” to be simply singled out, is therefore apt as well as confusing. If the postmodern condition is one in which previously categorized or opposed realms of forms start to join together, then one might certainly envisage postmodern theory to develop to bear a resemblance to its object. Much postmodern writing in philosophy, cultural studies, and women’s studies purposefully weakens the lucidity of the differentiation between fiction, art, and criticism (just as postmodernist art often imposes extremely hypothetical consideration upon its own nature and objective). Such writing may repudiate to accept the neutral voice and distanced aspect that are still conventional in academic writing, urging acceptance of the situated status of every utterance. It may suggest forms of dialogue between cooperating and competing voices as a polyphonic growing out of the authoritative closure of the single voice. It may, as in particular texts by Roland Barthes, such as his A Lover’s Discourse (1977) or Jacques Derrida, such as his Glas (1986) or Living on: borderlines (1979), appropriate some of the techniques of the modernist avant-grade, such as collage and typographical experimentation, to hold more than one position and entangle the experience
of the reading. Some feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray, in her *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), have tried to find in a similar way to produce forms of critical and theoretical writing that would delegitimize academic authority. Such writing perhaps endeavors to put itself in the position of the postmodernist avant-grade as suggested by Jean-François Lyotard, “working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done.”

There can be no doubt that the history of postmodernism- that is, of a body of events with origins in modern life, modernism in the arts, and post-war economics and politics, - events which are, some will say, still happening - is clear enough. The beginings of postmodern thought in literature can be traced particularly in the writings of Ihab Hassan, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Thomas Pynchon.

The term postmodernism was first popularized by Ihab Hassan, who made use of it in order to specify emerging tendencies in the literature in the 1960s. Such authors as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and later, Thomas Pynchon, reacting to the outstanding stylistic and conceptual achievement of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and the work of Samuel Beckett, started to write novels that played with the very concept of the novel - novels whose distortion of language, twists of plot, multiple narrative voices, obscurities of narrative order and disclosure, and stylistic games challenged the claims of the novel to objectivity and authority in identifying, describing, and, generally depicting its subject. Whereas the classic perception of the novel as expressed by Stendhal defined the novel as a mirror being carried along
a road, as if the novelistic form were nothing but a clear recording device that showed reality in its profoundest form, these novels centered on their lack of clear connection to reality- to the fact that they are acts of creative writing that emerge out of literary genres. By extension they mentioned the multicolored nature of reality itself.

It is not hard to see, therefore, that the epistemological self-suspicions articulated by the postmodern novel (suspicions no doubt already appear in developing form in such major modernist works as Joseph Conrad’s) may also be found in the early poststructuralist writings of the 1960s. This can all be more fully brought out by considering the writing of Jacques Derrida, whose evaluation of subjectivity, authorship, and truth, whose focus on the artifices, problems of dissemination, and intertextual nature of writing, whose disclosure of the contradictions in its conceptual organization, and whose play with language, are of a piece with these novels. Roland Barthes also saw the collapse of the novel as a genre, and brought up the question in his work of what it signifies to write in an exhausted art form (the question of the one who comes too late). The concepts of postmodernism and poststructuralism thus engage a certain undoing, and a certain overflowing, of traditional notions and classifications of thought.

These perspectives used in common by postmodern novelists and major poststructuralist authors developed a later interlinking between postmodernism and poststructuralism. Many theoretical views or explanations of the postmodern are maintained by poststructuralism, and these explana-
tions—whether sufficient or not—move into the framework of postmodern arts. Postmodern art has constantly depended upon poststructuralist concepts (about the evaluation of the unity of the subject, the breakdown of discourse to embrace the world through its conceptual “laws,” about the connection of language in the history of power, about the failure of traditions of philosophical objectivity and historical progress), and in its later stages on feminist and multicultural concepts, in expressing to itself its own interests and giving to its art theoretical power and lucidity.

The role of theory in poststructuralism and art differs widely in its political bearing and the extent to which it takes issue with the dominant tradition of modern art. This admixture of theory into the practice of the arts is itself a heritage from modern art, which had already depended upon its own hypotheses and the hypotheses of others in giving to its art meaning and force, in expressing its artistic experiments and providing it a conceptual and a political voice. Through theory accompanied with artistic experimentalism, art lays claim to make a declaration to the world about life, art, the institutions of art, to speak in a political voice. In turn, poststructuralism constructs its hypotheses partly in reaction to modern and postmodern art (Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, Valerio Adami, John Cage, Dada, Surrealism, and so on).

The question of postmodernism, then, in architecture is articulated in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A major figure in postmodern architecture is Robert Venturi, whose book *Learning from Las Vegas* maintained that
the impulses of modern architecture— to enforce utopian shifts on the lives of everybody through an architecture whose purist assumptions could be expanded preceding on all actual building contexts— were almost completely wrong. Such a notion was a direct challenge to the modern buildings of Las Vegas which could act as admirable architectural paradigms for the United States in “virtue of their intelligent adaptation to the context of the automobile, their inventiveness, and their dramatic elaborations of architectural space.” Deploring the lack of theoretical rigor and appropriate vocabulary in modern architecture, Venturi set up a sharp attack on modernism by adding “wrong” architectural details to crucially modernist structures (e.g., his Guild House). Venturi’s view, had considerable influence on the concept of art:

More profoundly disturbational to the concept of art were Cage’s riotous interpolations of the sounds of everyday life into the space of music and Merce Cunningham’s recasting of dance form into vernacular [every day] movements produced in part by chance operations. Cage and Cunningham aimed to overrule those hierarchies according to which art is distinguished from the flow of life itself.¹⁸

Venturi’s picture of postmodern architecture is also perhaps an attempt to address what he sees as deficiency in modern architecture. Architecture, then,
could hardly survive uncertainly on a joking style, and it had tendency to relocate in a diversity of directions according to Venturi’s dictums:

1. To build contextually in accord with local vernaculars, in accord with the desires of local customers, the particular needs of cities, towns, and different populations.

2. To play the game of stylistic juxtaposition and pluralism.

3. To keep the game of high modernist dismantling (changing it into a somewhat flat joke).

Of course (as its critics always pointed out) it is true to say that architecture “also continued modernist stylistics in a number of ways, retaining modular construction, open plans, and (in some domains) theory-based architecture.”

The problem with this whole line of thought towards architectural pluralism is that it offers nothing more than a purely consumer products. Architectural pluralism started as free and remarkable aesthetic innovation but all too often distorted into pure consumerism, with the architect viewing the diversity of present styles as pure consumer products able to be located in a vast cultural department store called “the global museum” and putting side by side these for no other reason than to produce the newest architecturally new “look” for the customer to consume. As buildings changed into consumer products, focus on the perplexing issues encompassing stylistic appropriation and pluralistic context lessened. This distortion of the artist or architect into a pure consumer and the artwork into some-
thing to be cherished by its spectators as little more than a commodity is a common postmodern trend, one speculated as the aftermath of late capitalism’s colonization of the cultural realm by Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and others.

Other themes of architecture maintained avant-grade touchstones of theory-orientation pattern. Thus, for instance, the deconstructionist architecture of Peter Eisenman seeks to censure philosophically architectural totality and determinacy and for the notion of architecture as an event through its “deconstructionist” look. The assertion of the postmodern to speak through its striking look or hypothetical event - itself a heritage of avant-grade disturbed values - locats postmodern art safely within the space of the “society of the spectacle” (Guy Debord, 1976).

Visual arts could also be seen to be marching under the banner bearing a similar path to that of architecture in the 1970s and 1980s. Arthur C. Danto has thrown some light on visual art by pointing to the creative pluralism of the 1970s (in which visual art, like architecture, unchained itself from minimalist/modernist principles of purity and found the standards of free expression and juxtaposition. According to Danto, this pluralism makes room for “the painting of importance.” The main point, then, to note about this painting is that it came with a size, enigma, and motion of depth promised to influence the onlooker who delighted in being lured into the mirage of meaningfulness, and who desired to consume and gather greatness as if it were a fascinating product available with the promptness by which television broadcasts the news. The notion of meaningfulness substituted for its simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard), as we placed in the divine nature of the masterpiece (Barbara Kruger) Paintings by David Salle, Rodney Allen Greenblatt, and
Julian Schnabel are often cited in this respect, although each of these artists may also be offered a counterreading.

Other realms of postmodern art have sought to undermine this commodification of art. These realms have also taken a gloomy view of the history of representation and their place in this history. Such perspectives elaborated by theatricalizing art and its history in the way of Duchamp, bringing about games played in and around art that intend to reveal the practices of art as masks that silently encode ideas of omnipotence, ideology, gender, and immorality - art practices ironically enacted to pretend to be the beautiful, the natural, and the sublime. (Again, poststructuralist ideas have characterized this art.) An account of power practices was thus inscribed in principle in “visualities.”

At its best, postmodern art also comprehends that power is produced and conveyed (in part) through “visualities” by turning words into white hot images and images into spectacles (Debord, Michel Foucault). Such artists (Hans Haacke, Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman) simulate the guise of the media (photos, newsprint, ads, signage, etc.) in order to symbolically harness its power and subvert this power to the purpose of critique.

Postmodernism has been much concerned with sociology, political science, and other academic disciplines as manner of distinguishing changes in the structure not only of the arts but also of the greater processes of life in which the
arts are positioned. Postmodernism in the arts has been deeply marked by a clear desire for breaking away from the uncertain relation with modernism, however, it works within the aesthetic legacies that modernism had formulated. Postmodernism as an academic philosophical position casts doubt on modernity (the structures, processes, and myths of modern life). In this sense, postmodernism is:

...thus a debate about the dissolution of modernity or its preservation in transformed form (a debate also extending to the role of art in this). This debate is complicated, however, by the difficulty in producing a clear (much less a complete) list of the elements comprising modern life. Different theorists claim that different aspects of modernity (philosophical, cultural, political, economic, geographical, etc.) have broken up just as different artists write the epitaph for different regions of modern art (and, by extension, modern life).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrish Hegel is commonly considered as the prophet of modernity. He suggested as the pivotal structures of modern life those of the state (the nation), with its three forms of absolute spirit (art, religion, and philosophy), its ties to science, its perception of itself as existing within history, and its endless ability for self-reflection, self-reflection that could and had generated, in Hegel’s self-idolizing idea, constant historical progress. The most influential aspect of Hegel’s vision here is that he sees humanity as a singular, universal entity which can be
represented in the actions of the individual man. Such a perception encouraged the West to assert that its men (above all, Hegel himself) speak in the name of everybody. According to Gianni Vattimo, this state of ambitious self-conception cherished by the West may make the underlying myth of its modernity. It is worth noting how Vattimo regards this “underlying myth” as a demise of modern totality:

... the dissolution of this cultural myth and its powerful employment in the history of the West has in turn prepared the West for a multicultural liberation in which history may be written and society understood as multiplex tapestries inclusive of the stories and concerns of everybody, rather than as singular stories that silence the voices of this multitude. 

For Jean-François Lyotard, at any rate, the weight is clearly on perception of justice as the free forming of dialogue between different persons (such that none will be consented to offence) enforces upon art and culture the aim of observing differences between persons, thereby seeking (in the absence of pre-established rules) to find and invent ways of their speaking and listening to one another. In this view, realms of postmodern art rested on two representational schemes. First, those realms of postmodern art that try to observe how representational schemes are involved in processes of victimization (e.g. Kiefer). Second, those that view representational schemes as an expression of the identities of persons denied by society (Sherman, Nancy Spero).
Harvey’s account of postmodern condition and Baudrillard’s are so different from Vattimo’s and Lyotard’s. By contrast, Harvey supposes the conditions of modern life to be explained with regard to economics and geography. In his view, modern Fordist capitalism (the production line) has yielded to late or “flexible” capitalism in a world of postmodern “space-time compression,” with the results that:

I. Cultural life is commodified as information processes (computers, global market, telecommunications, etc.) turn to be the position of capitalism.

II. We live in Marshall McLuhan’s global village, in a condition of overstimulation by the plethora of information. According to Baudrillard it is the media that have created the ongoing “age,” a chaotic age in which we can no longer distinguish simulacrum from reality, in which reality has turned to be the object of scopophilic profit and the autonomy of the self is wiped out by the joyful duress of media(tion).

Undoubtedly, the most enduringly influential theory of the postmodern condition is Lyotard’s. Lyotard’s famous work The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge has raised some of the most fundamental and challenging questions about the nature of knowledge and culture in the postindustrial age, the conditions of knowing, the deeper problems inherent within the critical and meth-
odological tools available, and the limits within which contemporary theories and philosophy both produce what has come to be known as postmodernism and are produced by it. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard focuses attention on narrative and narrativity. Lyotard argues that the postmodern condition is one of “incredulity” toward metanarratives—stories that lay claim to settle the relations between the subject, humanity, objectivity, and the sociocultural or historical realms—the stories of Hegel, Karl Marx, Christianity, the avant-gardes, and the like. He, then, bears different types of narrative used in society to legitimize social practices such as science into close scrutiny.

These grand narratives are at odds with local language games. Lyotard makes a distinction between grand narratives, stories that usher in all modes of legitimation into a single unified story, and local language games. Lyotard maintains, first, that all-encompassing grand narratives, tailored to legitimize claims to truth in various fields, are unable to include the event completely:

> In contemporary society and culture—postindustrial society, postmodern culture—the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.

Second, Lyotard maintains that legitimation happens within particular rule-driven
linguistic practices, described as language games. Any social practice can be explained in accordance with a language game, namely, in accordance with the rules on proper and improper statements controlling correct moves within the practice (the rules of chess, for example). He claims that language games are "incommensurable," because there can be no common system of rules for the resolution of conflicts. Therefore, there can be no universal core for legitimation, because such a core would have to function as a bridge between incommensurable language games. What should be clear from these claims is Lyotard's poststructuralist anti-Hegelianism, that is, "his opposition to the possibility of totalization and to the resolution of difference through dialectics." The basic thread running through Lyotard's claims here, seems to be his attention on a politics and ethics rested upon otherness. He also argues that there is no common discourse that can legitimate all true statements. So to speak, there is much stress on true statements in one language that cannot be rendered in others.

Lyotard's ideas increasingly focused on what we conceived as "avant-garde" underneath the aesthetic veils:

Once modern art, philosophy, and politics are defined in terms of grand narratives, the link between Lyotard's work on narrative and the modern-postmodern debate in aesthetics become clear. Some artworks depend on and serve to further the dominance of grand narratives, whereas others testify to the illusory quality of that dominance and to the limits between language games. This
allows an understanding of Lyotard’s deep commitment to the avant-garde.25

Thus:

The aesthetic avant-garde creates works that escape from the formation of aesthetic and political consensus by creating new artworks that call for forms of judgment counter to established rules and values. The avant-garde work is a break with tradition; it challenges viewers and readers to reevaluate their systems of values and beliefs. Indeed, the ineffable shock generated by the break with the consensus on the meaningful and the beautiful is itself a testimony to the independence of events from discourse.26

We cannot here allow a dangerous confusion concerning the modern-postmodern debate to pass unnoticed. Although Lyotard is considered as a postmodern philosopher, this does not mean that he defends what is commonly understood as postmodern art and literature. We find that his account of the avant-garde often accorded with modern avant-garde works of art—Abstract Expressionism in painting or modernism in literature, for instance—and with the radical assertion that avant-garde works always have the capacity to revolt and to create new ways of thinking and feeling. This status must be separated from the postmodern age and standard accounts of postmodern art as anti-modern and counterrevolu-
tionary; the historical period of a work is not a factor in Lyotard’s account of avant-garde. When Lyotard tries to answer the question “what is the postmodern?” his response makes a distinction between avant-garde works in their time, that is, works that forced a reevaluation of pregiven values and norms and works that supported the tradition. What is significant in this distinction is Lyotard’s idea that avant-garde works do not lose their capacity to revolt and make us think anew. Thus, the avant-garde is as timeless as the modern-postmodern distinction. This clarifies why Lyotard attracted to definitions of feeling, desires, and events that are not historically conditioned. This does not mean that works cannot become less and more powerful or revolting. Instead, it suggests that even when the influence of the avant-garde is weakening, its capacity to revolt is still possible.

This perspective changes the significance of art. For Lyotard, the most vital role of art, especially the postmodernist art, is to present the incommensurability of languages and the multiplicity of the world. Lyotard’s adherence to the principle of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment* is crystal clear here. Kant depicted “the experience of the sublime as the dizzying sense of a failure of correspondence between an experience or idea, and the conceptual structures we have available to understand it.” For Lyotard, then:

...the principle of the sublime is not so much that of inconceivable largeness, as it was for Romantic aesthetic philosophy, as the unencompassable complexity of human relations and events (Lyotard, 1991, trans. 1994). Lyotard’s promotion of a
postmodernist art of the sublime is intended to preserve that parado­

General speaking, it is a widely acknowledged fact that the postmodern
condition will take different shapes depending upon whether it is considered as a
point of new favourable moment for the West or as a point of collapse and corrup­
tion. It can then be argued that, on the one hand, we have Baudrillard’s gloomy
view and, on the other, Vattimo’s and Lyotard’s optimistic one.

Each of these theoretical views and approaches makes use of a set of
eamples that paradigmatically emphasize the truth of its analytic groupings. Each
of these hypotheses therefore may be interpreted as “an implicit Hegelian (i.e.,
modern) assumption that the postmodern is a univocal zeitgeist with an underlying
shape capable of being explained in terms of that single analytic category that the
theory provides.” Thus, the vision of postmodernism as “simulacrum”
(Baudrillard), as “the commodification of art” (Jameson), and as the “transfor­
mations in the context of the crisis of narrative” (Lyotard) relies on the choice of the
media, on regions of art and architecture, and on the shift of information into capi­
tal. The flaw in theorizing postmodernism also derives from the fact that:

... all these theorists fall into the Eurocentric mode of theorizing
the postmodern (and the modern) to the exclusion of most of the
world. Little attention is given to the diversity of (plausibly)
postmodern cultures. Indeed, even the various cultures of the
United States and Europe exhibit distinctive postmodernist features. For example, Italian postmodern art is closer to traditional aesthetic features of the beautiful and the expressive than its counterparts from New York.\(^a\)

The thematic range of these theories, and the variety of perspectives they provide on the “post” in postmodern, show how interdisciplinary and multiperspectival the world is, and elucidate a wide variety of choices available to, or actually made by, different thinkers in different contexts. Finally, various hypotheses (and various works of art) discuss the “post” in “postmodern” variously. Some wish to, hope to, intend to, or lay claim to create or hypothesize a radical break with whatever came before the “post” (the avant-garde, modernism, modern life, the nation-state as the standard modern foundation, modernity as an organized array of ideas inclusive of those of objectivity, subjectivity, historical progress, justice, etc.). Others see their “post” aspect as a continuity of the past in a modified form, as a pause from it, or even a negation of it. There is no one way in which the past is accommodated, discussed, or hypothesized, but rather many.

Michel Foucault’s profound and sensitive analysis of the eighteenth-century discourses of aesthetics clarifies the fact that the eighteenth-century discourses of aesthetics - ironically and regardless of their clear intentions- played a role in the articulation of a heterogeneous pattern of power (national, colonizing, and male). His conclusion is that despite their weights on the paragons of artistic autonomy, on art’s ability to produce a free play of the human imagination and its role in
introducing a moral community of persons, aesthetic discourses have given help to the interests of the museumizing imagination by defining fine art and the beautiful in abstraction from art’s role in the flow of cultural life. To make matters more clear, these discourses served to legitimate the change of art from particular cultural context to museum, and the deposit of the museumizing gaze, a gaze now believed to be “aesthetic” because it is extracted from specific interests, desires, concepts, and forms of cultural life. The emphasis on power and the culture of museum in Foucault’s thought forms the basis for postmodern feminists’ critique of aesthetic discourses. The assertion of aesthetics that art is there to give pleasure and joy of a pleasing and formal kind was, moreover, exactly what the museum needed when it feminized the object before the selfish and dominating gaze of the nationalist, Western, male spectator. No epistemic (or moral) question could therefore appear in the watching and interpretation of artworks since they were intended to be watched “aesthetically” in abstraction from their flow of life - no problem of the spectator’s own ability to know, understand, appreciate, discern, or search out them, no question of their subjectivity. Therefore, a postmodern approach to the history of aesthetics would depict these discourses objects of uncertainty: on the one hand, the suggestion of ideas about art we cannot dispense with and, on the other, profoundly concerned in the history of power. Feminist evaluations of aesthetic discourses are of this kind.

The following brief account of a postmodern approach to aesthetics may help to explain why so many thinkers and artists of otherwise diverse persuasion have come to be grouped under the rubric “the postmodern aesthetics.” A
postmodern approach to aesthetics would also repudiate universal accounts of art and instead emphasize the variety of art objects, the contextual nature of artistic formation and definition, the role of art in the flow of life in general, and the obscurities of artistic interpretation. It would also, conforming to the idea of Foucault, find the aesthetic to be a central feature of the social formation of bodies, whose systems of pleasure and taste are partly products of the history of power. A consequence would be the reclamation of ancient notions associating the aesthetic with the erotics of pleasure.

Indeed, we may call attention to the fact that both modern styles of (Hegelian) explanations which fail to locate the complex set of postmodern events in a single explanatory framework (narrative) and the extreme postmodernist situation that claims that neither “object of study” nor “discourse of analysis” can give us any coherent account cannot manage to integrate the compelling events that shape the postmodern world. Wittgenstein’s view on language games will delight those who wish to locate postmodernism beyond the critical clichés of Hegelian bittersweet mood and atmosphere, for Wittgenstein offers new and different ways of understanding the postmodern. His work depicts “the identity and integrity of concepts in terms of strands of crosscrossing similarities and organic interconnections that hold them together.” A Wittgensteinian approach to the postmodern, then, would regard it as a group of connected discourses and events (embracing events in the history of theory), connected not in one manner but in various manners, the variety of interrelationships defining the notion of the postmodern— or, the postmodern “world.” Postmodernism is an interlocking chain of language games, connected in diverse manners: nothing more and nothing less. Let us further choose
an idea from Wittgenstein and proclaim that in various contexts of debate, various notions of the postmodern (and various representative examples of it) will be useful or needed. Since we abandon the Hegelian premise that there is an epoch called the postmodern with a single historical form that can be hypothesized according to a single analytic category, we are thereby freed to use all hypotheses, to test each for its realm, its limits, its contexts of use. All will have some use or other. (The solution is to steer clear of becoming a consumer of hypotheses like the artist or architect who consumes rather than reshapes styles, something all too uncontrolled in the academy.)

Wittgenstein carefully shows that his contextualist idea that our notions rest for their integrity and use upon a vast and “interwoven background context will open us up to the right range of explanatory sources for the postmodern - namely, everything.” Wittgenstein’s brilliant work, like Beckett’s and Joyce’s in literature, led to further refinements in studying the postmodern, the field of philosophy.

III

Postmodern Change of Art

The acceptance of a theory of art, like that of any other aesthetic phenomenon, is determined by specific historical and cultural conditions. Therefore, it would be certainly necessary to rely on a number of historical and cultural events to determine the nature of postmodernist modes of art. However, I will consider only the case of painting.
Here, it is helpful to have a sense of the longish history of painting before its importance to postmodern theory can be understood. One of the most important and most controversial developments in the art history of the Western world during the twentieth century has been the influence of the New York school on painting. In the Western world, the art history of the generation that came after World War II was predominated by the success of the New York school, particularly Abstract Expressionist painting. This period—approximately 1945 to 1965 or 1970—is, art-historically, late modernism.

The term “Abstract Expressionism” brings to mind the crowning moment of what may would consider as the pivotal theme of Western art in the twentieth century: the abstract sublime. Having the sublime at its core, modernist abstraction has been hypothesized in different ways since the end of the era itself. Two approaches were of especial significance here:

In its own day, the work was theorized primarily either through the metaphysical approach articulated by Harold Rosenberg or the formalist approach of Clement Greenberg. Greenberg’s view, for better or for worse, clearly become dominant, and has continued to exercise an amazing dominance in certain contexts. In this view, Abstract Expressionism was “pure painting,” meaning that it lacked any external referent whatever. It was form without content. It is clear that some of the artists involved felt misrepresented by this claim, but nevertheless that is how the work was widely
understood in its day.\textsuperscript{33}

As the reference to "Formalism" began to become a dominant theme, Greenberg drew on and extended the theory put forward by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*. To support his views on "three faculties," Kant appropriated the idea from Plato, as Richard Röty called it "the Plato to Kant axis," but Kant's account of the theory was the most important for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For Kant, the human personality is composed of three faculties—each of which he dealt with one of his *Critiques*: a cognitive faculty (dealt with the *Critique of Pure Reason*); a social or ethical faculty (the *Critique of Practical Reason*); and an aesthetic faculty (the *Critique of Judgment*, or the *Critique of Taste*).

The fact that Kant's distinction can ultimately be sustained is at the root of his use of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The most influential aspect of the work of Kant is really his changing stress from the faculties themselves to the relationship among the faculties, which he discussed was one of separateness or isolation, formulating the three faculties on the model of the senses. It is from conceptions of this nature that the reformulations of the separate faculties in the work of Kant develops. Just as one cannot make use of the hearing or touch senses to prove or disprove the visual sense's feeling that it is seeing red, so one cannot make use of either the cognitive or ethical faculties to prove or disprove a judgment of quality that the aesthetic sense has produced. The faculties, like the senses, concern with completely separate realms and can have nothing to say about one
another.

Accordingly, Greenberg's distinction provided him with a basis for attempting to deal with the wider issues of the isolation of the faculties. In Greenberg's theory, if the aesthetic faculty is radically isolated from the cognitive and ethical ones, then the artwork should repudiate all cognitive and social references. The overall aim of Greenberg's theory was to develop the claims of painting as the abstract working of color and line. There should be nothing in the work that requires to be understood by the cognitive faculty (no language, no concepts, no representations of recognizable objects, no factor of narrativity or iconography) nor anything that requires to be understood by the ethical faculty (no social anguish, appeals for tenderness, problems of love). Nothing was to be permitted into the pure painting but the abstract working of color and line, whose plea would miss out the other faculties and target the aesthetic bull's-eye only.

This trend engendered new artists who minimized the cognitive aspect of art (painting) and emphasized the subjective factor. The artist was supposed to be a maker of pure feeling whose sensibility directed straightly into the personal and collective unconsciousness, unearthing configurations of line and color that were and continued unexplainable.

This "intensified mode of the Kantian theory" was reformulated as "Formalism" in the United States in 1945 to 1965. All this was vigorous and refreshing at the time, and formalist polemic served a useful purpose in chassing off the remnants of what we called "painting for painting's sake" school. Disappointingly, though, the Kantian theory began to look crude, and a theory that the most valu-
able painting is “the abstract working of color and line.” None of this has stood the test of time very well.

It may here be relevant to mention that the change from the Formalist discourse to another was slow, and made its way at first through an epoch of pluralism in which the somewhat imposed critical consensus that had preserved the hegemony of Formalism broke up. The indirect challenge posed to Formalism by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns has led to many artists adopting a position of cautionary skepticism toward the value of formalist claims in the 1950s. For Rauschenberg, painting required to bridge the gap between art and life. Johns’ usual antimodernist maneuvers focused on the use of everyday objects and representations of them in his paintings. Their skepticism about the efficacy of formalist claims can then be understood as a response to the naive enchantment of the Greenbergian doctrine of the extreme isolation of the artwork from the rest of the world.

The “doctrine of the pure painting” was widely criticized in the 1960s when the United State’s concern in the war in Vietnam speeded up. It brought the whole society in crisis. Movements such as Black Power and women’s movement relying on civil rights, provoked a widespread antiwar movement throughout the country. It made “pure aesthetic abstraction” seem useless idea. Many artists started to think what good this status of communication was if it did not permit one to communicate about the most crucial problems of society. To many it led to be not simply an asocial belief but actually an antisocial one, in that it repudiated art as a force for social change and sent away the artist to the margin. Carolee Schneemann
once mentioned, of that period, that it was as if the artists were children who were sent to the nursery to play with their crayons while the grown-ups, in other room, discussed the real problems of life.

Some creative artists who had acquired formalist training in art schools, and started in good faith to follow the guidelines they were trained in there, felt misled. The search for liberating alternatives to formalism, undertaken by such artists as John Baldessari, became prominent in painting in the 1960s. His act, in 1968, of burning all his paintings, then displaying an exhibition of the ashes, was an anti-formalist action typical of the time; it was also feature of the time that Formalism was more or less regarded as the same with the tradition of painting, and for a time the anti-formalist position asserted itself mainly through assault on painting. In his justly celebrated panel in Los Angeles Vito Acconci gave a brief account of this view when, being asked in his eyes what was the most hazardous word in English, he answered, “Beauty.” But perhaps what lies at the core of his anti-formalist attitude is the idea that the hierarchy of values was thoroughly changed: whereas the artist had once been instructed that he should act only on the direction of pure beauty, he now was to make himself ready to attack beauty because it was a deceptive face or pretty mask for the gloomy problems of society.

My point here is that this opposite change of the artist’s direction was the first stage of what has come to be called postmodernism in the visual arts, that first stage could be called antimodernism, since its task was the subversion of the basic notions of modernism, a clearing of the field, as it were, so that something else could occur upon it.
It soon become clear that the cosmopolitan spirit of these foundational ideas is manifested far beyond the realm of art, prevailing for several centuries. They cover "the idea of progress" which support the reason for colonialism and imperialism.

G.W.F. Hegel, who is without doubt the most important Western philosopher on this subject, took the view that history is the incarnation of the force of progress; that is, history has, made as a firm and necessary part of it, a particular path; it is moving toward a particular end or goal, and that is why Western (capitalist, democratic) societies think highly of the dynamic of change—because the urge of changes reveals that a society is on its way toward the goal of history; a static society, on the contrary, has been unable to move somewhere along the path. Especially in The Philosophy of History, Hegel developed the idea that "World history happens in Europe," and that Africa, China and so on, were "ahistorical." The self-styled "advanced" nations of Europe were bound to take the responsibility for the world and pull it into history. Empire was "the white man's burden," as Rudyard Kipling put it forward.

"The idea of progress" revolves around the notion of the "hierarchization of cultures": if all human societies are naturally moving, towards "some singular destination," yet there is a lot of differences among them, then it may seem fitting that one of the most striking explanations of these differences is that some societies are more forward towards the destination than others. It may now seem that the idea of hierarchization was supported in turn by the placing of transcultural universals that alone could give grounds for the claim that one society was more ad-
advanced than another. Western society, allegedly, was pushed directly in the univer-
sals, which other societies had failed to seize.

A much more sophisticated version of the Kantian-Hegelian doctrine is
provided by the Romantic doctrine of aesthetic which was more or less the high-
and late-modernist one, included the Kantian principle of sensibility with a supple-
mentary historical view provided by Hegel and the so-called analytic art histori-
ans, especially Karl Schnaase. In his book *Netherlands Letters (Niederländische
Briefe)* (1834), Schnaase carefully scrutinized “the global doctrine of Hegel” to
the small specialized domain of visual art. He believed that the forward-rushing
progress of history could be viewed most purely and obviously in the develop-
ment, from generation to generation, of connected chains of formal problems and
solutions in the visual arts. As this concept developed in the Romantic period, the
principle of genius demonstrated an individual status of the global process. The
urge of originality and innovation in art indicated the duress of progress. The (claimed
art-historical leadership of the West indicated the hierarchization of cultures, and
the idea that pure painting can soar beyond the world, to restore views of a time-
less beyond, indicated the established universals.

This ideology and other more complex ones are claimed to be engaged in
the art activity in the Western world in the late-modernist period. By the 1950s
and 1960s, the modernist myth of progress and the myth of European culture,
showing the way to “the rest of the world to culmination of history,” were sub-
jected to rigorous critical commentary since their first expositions. Severe opposi-
tion against these has stemmed from two world wars, the Holocaust, the prolifera-
tion (and real manoeuvering against a non-white culture) of nuclear endgame weaponry, the dizzying growth of ecological calamities -these and other aspects had brought to light the dark side of the Hegelian myth: the end of history that we were allegedly progressing toward was not to be a rosy ending; it would be nothing less than the annihilation, or self-annihilation, of our world. It has often been pointed out that Malevich’s *Black Square* is based upon the void of darkness and amnesia following this annihilation.

In a discussion in 1986 on the beginning of postmodernism in America, John Barth argued that postmodernism emerged on 22 November 1963 from “the assassination of John F. Kennedy.” He indirectly remarked that at that time many Americans started to understand clearly with an anxious sense of surprise, that history seemed to be leading us in some vicious direction we did not want to go.

The first sign of this change appeared in the arts inevitably in the postwar period. It started to put forth shoots almost unvisible within the rich garden of Abstract Expressionism. In the late 1950s, performance art started with works such as Claes Oldenburg’s *Happenings*. In 1963, Henry Flynt coined the term *concept art*, which Sol Le-Witt, in 1967, changed to *conceptual art*, the term that turned to be settled. Both these developments require to be regarded as reactions against the Kantian heritage (although most Americans consider it as Greenbergian).

The Kantian trichotomy of faculties was too controversial to remain unchallenged. It became increasingly clear that formalism, excluding the cognitive aspect from the art experience, no longer seems a very useful approach to art, so
conceptual art sought to bring cognition into the center. Performance artists carried the program further and represented a striking extension of the range of cognition. Formalism had omitted the social or ethical from art, so performance artists brought the social or ethical to the fore. This was particularly true of the early era. Known as body art, in which Hermann Nitsch, Chris Burden, Schneemann, and others made their own bodies the setting of the artwork, often involving themselves in actual physical hazard. Because it involves the artist's real body, and because the artist often lays his or her body on the line, performance art is inherently ethicist in its objectives; its relationship to ancient ceremony and its conflicting procedure for social authority made it inherently social as well.

Thus it has been argued, with a fair show of evidence, that in the anticomodernist, or early postmodernist, era, the 1960s and early 1970s, both these movements continued to reverse the Greenbergian hierarchy: cognition and ethicism, previously omitted, were now at the center, was now on the margin and neutralized. Yet even from this narrowed perspective, as long as the artist was creating an artwork, design decisions could be unavoidable but through “the use of randomness or chance.” One curious aspect of this notion is that classical conceptualists of the 1970s really attempted to remove the aesthetic view from their work altogether, but always there remained design decisions, and always the design decisions violated sensibility. The point became to recognize but decry, or somehow nullify, the shocking aspect of aesthetic sensibility. This was the origin of many conceptualist strategies practised with surgeonly precision with the critical scalpel.

Anti-sensibility proper was the banner of professed or presumed concep-
tualists. Painting as the modernist project of making reality pretty and postulating an impending sublime was discredited. It encouraged the claim that painting was dead. Abstract painting above all seemed strangely unacceptable, like a wicked force that one had luckily driven out just in time. In the museums of Europe and the United States, the 1970s are almost invisible, because of their particular avoidance of the aesthetic object.

Painting was, then, exhumed in the late 1970s. Young artists who belonged very firmly to the conceptualist and performative evaluation of formalism set out to defend painting against the charge of "pure painting" that had so often been leveled against it in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thus it is not hard to imagine that this was the most significant moment of the postmodern revision, because it was painting itself, once the idolized vehicle of modernism, that now was carrying forward its evaluation. This is an acutely important point, because it reveals the end of the first, or antimodernist, stage of postmodernism.

Conceptual painters understood that they had to wrestle with the ideology of pure painting in order to free themselves from the tyrannical hands of modernism, and they succeeded by taking "appropriation" or "quotation" as the strategy. In the 1980s, conceptual painters, often self-consciously postmodernist, conducted an evident and thorough deconstruction of the ideology of pure painting. Most centered their endeavors, with quasi-scientific accuracy, on one aspect or another of the ideology. One of the ideal strategies was appropriation or quotation.

Occasional artists have accepted to an extent the open appropriation or quotation of celebrated works by earlier artists since the 1950s. The method was
adopted and further developed by Pop artists who "appropriated" - or "quoted" - images, usually from popular cultural sources such as comic books and advertising; this too was an early declaration of the postmodernist mood, aimed to smash the shield of metaphysical self-importance with which Abstract Expressionism had protected itself. In the 1980s the painting world increasingly turned toward "appropriation" or "quotation" as a way to mock the Hegelian idea of progress. For postmodernist artists of the early and mid-1980s, repetition of images, styles, or motifs from earlier ages, plainly revealing the imitative nature of the practice and mocking the notion of genius or innovation, was regarded as a purposeful demolishing of the notion of history as progress, and of the notion of the originality of the artist as the manifestation or instrument of progress.

Such young artists set against Romantic rule of innovation, the admiration of the future, by returning to the past enthusiastically. Properly speaking, they placed considerable importance on historical sequences - such as, say, the shift from Geometric to Archaic, or from Mannerism to Baroque - that had seemed sacred and unavoidable within the modernist idolization of history now were mockingly cast into a state of confusion and wickedly thrown up into the air to fall where they might.

A direct confrontation with shaky historical linearity, and with it the notion of progress was unavoidable: hidden depth could not always be covered. This in part explains why the different artists and their styles seemed not linear and transcendent but contemporaneous and relative.

There was also a strong trend in the "quotational practice" hostile to the
project of "modernist purism," the project which put too much faith in the notion of "commitment to a style." This commitment seemed to capture the spirit of a number of late-modernist artists who believed that it was based upon "unchanging universals." It is clear that if we insist on having universal style, we ought to endorse any claim that does not entail the existence of any change. This claim was supposed to meet the challenge of the quotational practice. The late-modernist admiration of style as signature, as sign of selfhood, as fingerprint, of style as a manifestation of truth, was plainly mocked by the quotational practice, in which styles turned to be simply pieces to be moved about in a metagame or metastyle in which all specific styles are only relative and it would be senseless to engage enthusiastically to any.

One of the important ideas embodied in late-modernist art, with the idea of the separateness of the faculties, is that language, in broad sense, should be excluded from the artwork as an irrelevant cognition. Language in conceptual art, especially in the early phase of postmodernism, made a timely appearance. Language was no longer considered as an entity irrelevantly cognitive but become a vital subject of concern in the 1980s, when painting returned from exile and these two modes were subverted somewhat, language was reintegrated with the image in different ways.

Conceptual artists, most of them women, such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, claimed themselves as the heiresses of the conceptual belief and consolidated linguistic elements, often engaging social protest (hence both the cognitive and the ethical faculties), with visual presences rested upon nonexpressionistic,
technology-based media. Holzer's style appeared to rest on "the light sign" while Kruger's depended on "the found photograph," usually from magazine advertising.

Neo-Expressionist painters, many of them men, such as Julian Schnabel and David Salle, drew on an ideology of pure form to reject language at the very beginning of the decade of 1980s. But the late 1980s was predominantly concerned with conceptualism and language as well. In the early 1980s, Schnabel had been the most criticized by those sustaining the saintlike line of conceptualism; but, beginning in 1985, his paintings became extremely conceptual, regularly incorporating language, sometimes employing only a linguistic element presented in a painterly style.

By the late 1980s, a kind of Hegelian synthesis of these conflicting forces shaped a new conception of the artwork mainly based on the Aristotelian-Kantian trichotomy. Regarded according to the Aristotelian-Kantian trichotomy, it was an enlarged direction: that the artwork should include all three of the faculties in some way or proportion or other. This was considered as a recognition or acceptance of the wholeness of human experience, a wholeness fulfilled, paradoxically, through the multiplicity and contradictory nature of the different forces acting together to drive a human self.

This aspect of the wholeness of multiplicity and contradictory struck both Kruger and Schnabel as highly promising during the late 1980s. In an important sense, the aesthetic faculty was clearly accepted, while the cognitive faculty was present in the linguistic element, as well as in other, mostly language-like, icono-
graphic ways, and the ethical faculty was accepted through a trend to connect the work always with some social issue. For Kruger, it was often “a feminist critique of patriarchy” negotiated by ironic side-glances; for Schnabel, it appeared as a lamentation for AIDS. Content and intelligence had returned directly to art.

The proportion among these three faculties, depending upon the artist’s sensibility, provided another instance of a promising advance which did go far enough. Some artists appealed to the ethical matter, making it the heart of the work. Leon Golub’s work and Nancy Spero’s masterfully outlined the renewal of political protest. Sue Williams and some other feminists did explicitly take a stand on “violence against women.” This and similar examples have led us to see each of the three faculties was vigorously supported by its cluster of artists; the general aftermath was that all were accepted and the interactions among them became a new center of attention in the scrutiny of the artwork.

The Surrealists, early in the twentieth century, received the credit for being the first artists to deeply question the superiority of sameness over difference. They served their purpose by arraying objects alien to one another, by giving preference to difference over sameness. On the basis of this preference, they achieved some kind of sublime. As the essence of the quotational art of the 1980s was in the air, different artists, instead of quoting a single iconic image, made use of combining contradictory visual languages, grasped as “provocative and humorous.” Generally speaking, as in the work of Malcolm Morley, Gerhard Richter, and Salle, contradictory visual languages from the same practice were combined - say, Abstract Expressionist painterliness mixed with Neoplasticist geometry or
naive representation. As a result, the contradictions depicted were intercultural.

Underlining the quotational artists’ achievements, we can confidently say that such artists, like Alexander Kosolopov and Masami Teraoka, brought to light the multicultural dimensions of our postmodern experience. Alexander Kosolopov, a Russian émigré living in New York, created multiculturalist quotational paintings that usually mixed an image from American popular culture with an image from Soviet Marxist culture—say, the Coca-Cola logo with the official profile of Lenin, over the message: “It’s the real thing.” Masami Teraoka, Japanese-born, currently living in Hawaii, combined, in a very different manner, images from traditional Japanese culture with images from contemporary American popular culture—say, McDonald’s hamburgers and foil-wrapped condoms.

The mid-to late 1980s was replete with such quotational works created by many nations. Thus one might be tempted to suggest that the early phases of postmodernism, in which the West would deconstruct its own tradition, had yielded to a larger and more mature phase in which the openness temporarily generated by this deconstruction would be provided by the influxing force of other cultures.

It is certainly true that many attempts to define postmodernism appear to be based upon the view that we can refer to various fields of study like economics, aesthetics, politics, philosophy, and tele-communication science, and postmodernist philosopher-artists are, I believe, quite right to make such attempts to demonstrate the need for postmodernism. It is also I believe quite right to point out to the plain facts of history, namely colonialism. Like Modernism, Postmodernism has been defined in different ways. Some who have scrutinized it have emphasized
communications technology, which has brought cultures from around the globe into one another's homes, unavoidably relativizing additional qualities. Others have felt it, in a secret-Hegelian daydream, as a secondary phenomenon of the inflex of the unavoidable, the appearance of ambiguity being only a flourish or trick. To yet others it occurs as an indefinite liberation from history, the "nightmare from which I am trying to awaken," as Stephen Daedalus put it forward in *Ulysses*. Perhaps the most sensible idea, the idea most established in the clear facts of history, deems the issue in accordance with passing of colonialism.

Put most simply, modernism was the ideology of colonialism, while postmodernism is the ideology of the postcolonial condition. The issue is really vital for it engages one of the most lively disputes now going on in the philosophy of art. It seems reasonable to say when Michel Foucault discusses decentering, when Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari concentrate on nomadism, when Homi Bhabha employs the idea of hybridity, and so on, they are all discussing the upmost bottom line: that in 1950 there were about fifty nations in the United Nations, and now there are some 180. The collapse of colonialism began with the British withdrawal from India in 1947 and took more rapid steps throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, but it nearly completed in 1967. So to speak, the postcolonial condition might be claimed to be explained in terms of relativism and skepticism. With the end of colonialism, the number of voices in the world community increased. Many of these newly heard voices stood their grounds angrily on stating clearly viewpoints that varied mainly from those of the Western colonizers. With the proliferation of viewpoints, a general relativism and skepticism came into be-
ing; the universals established by modernism were repudiated, as was the hierarchization of cultures.

What was the role of artists on this picture? At a general level, it was clear that they wished to emphasize "the reality of non-Western societies." Joseph Beuys and Singmar Polke both depicted Native America culture as a heroic one. In the United States Mel Chin, Mark Dion and others made use of colonialism and its twilight the subject of perplexing works.

It appears that in the postcolonial condition, the image of a culture's self or consciousness, and the art activity that contributes to it, can promote the rise of new intercultural relationships. A culture's visual tradition, when exported, acts as a sort of ambassador, and visual borrowings and combinations make a secret level of foreign policy.

In the light of the high-and-late modernism, the most reasonable goal and the meaning of human life was crystal clear. A linear Hegelian stream of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, new antithesis, new synthesis, unendingly untwisting with meaning and logic as somewhat supernatural driving forces. The meaning and logic might obscure around the edges, but they seemed to sustain true, like a limelight, at the center.

Postmodernism attempted to shake this structure. But the more appealing positive theory faces difficulties of its own. The very boldness of the difficulties naturally leads to the question whether there is any real postmodernist shock or it is just a slight revision of that structure. The postmodern move might be acceptable if we view postmodernism as a new periodization of the advancing "denial of
periods (and of advance).”

Essentially postmodernist painting comprises five stages. The first stage is a severe attack on the basic principles of modernism. It appeared to be antimodernism—the severe conflicting reaction, in the late 1960s and most of the 1970s, against the belief of pure painting, the Kantian-Greenbergian ideology of the autonomy of art, and the Hegelian myth of history as progress. Conceptual and performance art in this period were conducted puristically, with a sharp repudiation of any surviving modernism that could be understood as such.

The second stage aimed to undermine the authority of the Western tradition and its canon. It concerned with the return of painting around 1980, but in a new pattern: quotational painting, particularly, was employed to deconstruct the authority of the Western tradition and its canon, making the use of the iconic moments and motifs of Western art history in manners that opposed on another and, to a degree, put them on show to mockery. Connected strategies, such as the combining of visual languages that would have been suppressed severely in the era of modernist purism, we developed with serene attention until the end of 1980s.

The third stage connoted either some mode of transnational interrelationships between the cultures of two or more countries, or it suggests in a more limited manner the broader dimensions of multiple cultural identities within the boundaries of a single nation. It was the development of quotationalist practice from the evaluation of Western culture to mocking multicultural pastiche including mixtures of elements from various cultures, mixtures that would once have seemed blatantly improper. The visual languages that were combined were no longer various visual
signatures from one culture, but elements from various cultures cast as if wickedly together.

The fourth stage concerned with postcolonial matters and paid a close attention to the works of non-Western cultures. It was the hostile conflict with postcolonial issues by Western artists, mostly in installation art of the mid- to late 1980s. These artists guided the onlooker toward the products of other cultures, despite the fact that they themselves were Westerners.

The fifth stage engendered a new shift towards the contemporary works of non-Western cultures as independent centers. It considers the emphasis change from Western artists’ moves toward non-Western cultures to the contemporary products of non-Western cultures themselves. This process started in the 1960s but culminated (if really it has yet culminated) in the early 1990s. It embraces the proliferating awareness, on the part of previously colonized cultures, that they are now their own centers; the proliferation of two-year exhibitions is a main sign of this development.

Postcolonialism traces ideas about culture, wealth, and technology which postmodernism finds in different postmodernist philosophers’ views and connects these up with themes in the contemporary world. For example, post-Marxists, criticism of “the commodification of art” by, and of, opposites are brought to bear on present-day issues concerning the structure of economics. A challenge, here, concentrates mainly on cultural-economical account which is presented as “postmodern cynicism.” In this vein, a vital attack is launched by Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquero. He maintained that the cultural discourse among nations has
really moderated in a fresh manner, and previously marginalized perspectives such as the Cuban have started to believe again in voices that they deem to be their own. Still, he censured, this cultural rambling change is not dwelt on the economic level; wealth and privilege remain in the north, poverty and disfranchisement in the south. The whole value of cultural discourse is put into question by this observation.

Foremost among these cynical views towards postmodernism is that: Could the cultural and rambling shifts known as postmodernism even be only a new form of mask for the economic reality - as if the Western hegemon were thinking, We’ll let them write and paint now, and pay close heed to their books and pictures, if that will keep them happy while we continue to rob them blind in the ways that matter on the bottom line?

A more troubling objection is that there are those - often in the United States, encompassing feminists, African Americans, and Marxists - who claim that postmodernism cannot really be a social force, that is must be a mask for yet another hegemonic gesture because it is basically a discourse of white Western males boundlessly playing their sub- Hegelian and sub-sub-Hegelian games. Even if, after picturing postmodernism as so, one may remain skeptical about the demise of the hegemony of the West, one can also acquire a deeper appreciation of the postmodernist level of discourse, especially image-discourse of the visual arts.
Doing justice to the postmodernist discourse, we may claim that around the world we can find artists, critics, and theorists who are consciously engaged in the multicultural project of sameness - in - difference. Artists such as Gieve Patel, and Gulam Shikh are vigorously involved in the visual diplomacy if remaining established in their individual legacies while finding ways to introduce them meaningfully into a pluralistic global discourse.

Leaving the crucial notion of hegemony undecided, I must conclude this discussion by agreeing with the fact that the focal point of art has changed from the quest for aesthetic universals to the quest for images that will disclose cultural identity, at the same time demonstrating and directing its changes. In a shifting world, art does not simply define the present moment; it both urges it to change and redefines it as it does so, in a fresh active relationship among image, self, history and the world.
Notes on Chapter 1


5 Ibid., P 251.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., P. 251-52.

9 Ibid., P.64.


15 Ibid., P.431.

16 Jean-François Lyotard, P.81.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid. P.60.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Jean-François Lyotard. P.37.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Michael Payne, P.321.

28 Ibid.

Verbal formulation of the visual facts of New York School is predicated on the paintings of the School of Paris, most particularly Picasso and cubism.