

THEMES AND DEFINITIONS

I

Themes of Postmodernity

STEINAR KVALE

Steinar Kvale's survey of postmodern thought shows it going in many directions, its themes not always compatible with one another. Among these themes:

A doubt that any human truth is a simple objective representation of reality.

A focus on the way societies use language to construct their own realities.

A preference for the local and specific over the universal and abstract.

A renewed interest in narrative and story-telling.

Acceptance that different descriptions of reality can't always be measured against one another in any final—i.e., objective and nonhuman—way.

A willingness to accept things as they are on the surface rather than to search (à la Freud or Marx) for Deeper Meanings.

Most of these themes seem to fit together, and yet a certain tension typifies the postmodern condition: on the one hand the tendency toward fragmentation, on the other a search for a larger framework of meaning. Kvale talks about an "expansion of rationality," a belief that reason appears in many guises. This has the

makings of another Enlightenment project, a search for the floor plan to a much more spacious Grand Hotel.

It is debatable whether postmodernity is actually a break with modernity, or merely its continuation. Postmodern writers may prefer to write history so that their own ideas appear radically new. Postmodern themes were present in the romanticism of the last century, in Nietzsche's philosophy at the turn of the century, with the surrealists and in literature, for instance in Blixen and Borges. What is new today is the pervasiveness of postmodern themes in culture at large.

"Postmodern" does not designate a systematic theory or a comprehensive philosophy, but rather diverse diagnoses and interpretations of the current culture, a depiction of a multitude of interrelated phenomena.

Postmodern thought is characterized by a loss of belief in an objective world and an incredulity towards meta-narratives of legitimation. With a delegitimation of global systems of thought, there is no foundation to secure a universal and objective *reality*. There is today a growing public acknowledgment that "Reality isn't what is used to be."

In philosophy there is a departure from the belief in one true reality—subjectively copied in our heads by perception or objectively represented in scientific models.¹ There exists no pure, uninterpreted datum; all facts embody theory. In science the notion of an objective reality is an interesting hypothesis, but is not necessary for carrying out scientific work.² Knowledge becomes the ability to perform effective actions.

The focus is on the social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality. In society the development of technology, in particular the electronic media, opens up an increased exposure to a multiplicity of perspectives, undermining any belief in one objective reality.³ In a world of media, the contrast between reality and fantasy breaks down and is replaced by a hyperreality, a world of self-referential signs.⁴ What remains is signs referring to other signs, texts referring to other texts.

A critique of *legitimation* is central in Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition. Legitimacy involves the question of what is valid, what is legal, the issue of whether an action is correct and justifiable. Habermas brought the issue to the fore in his book *Legitimation Crisis*,⁵ depicting a

general loss of faith in tradition and authority, with a resulting relativity of values.

Lyotard identifies "*postmodern* as incredulity towards meta-narratives," as a "paganism," where we pass judgement on truth, beauty and justice without criteria for the judgements. In a comment on the debate between Lyotard and Habermas, Rorty interprets Lyotard as saying that "the trouble with Habermas is not so much that he provides a narrative of emancipation as that he feels the need to legitimize, that he is not content to let the narratives which hold all culture together do their stuff. He is scratching where it does not itch."⁶ Rather than continuing the Cartesian attempts of "self-grounding," Rorty advocates a Baconian approach of "self-assertion."

A further theme of modernity is the dichotomy of the *universal and the individual*, between society and the unique person, whereby the rootedness of human activity and language in a given social and historical context is overlooked. In modernity the person is an object for a universal will, or for general laws of history or nature. Or the person is overburdened; man has become the centre of the world, the individual self-feeling being the cornerstone of modern thought, a self stretched out between what it is and what it ought to be.

If we abstract a human from his or her context, we are trapped between the poles of the universal and the individual—the way out is to study humans in their cultural and social context. With the collapse of the universal meta-narratives, the local narratives come into prominence. The particular, heterogeneous and changing language games replace the global horizon of meaning. With a pervasive decentralization, communal interaction and local knowledge become important in their own right. Even such concepts as nation and tradition are becoming rehabilitated in a postmodern age.

The emphasis upon the local surpasses the modern polarity of the universal and the individual, of the objective and the subjective. The local interaction, the communal network, is the point of departure; universal laws and unique individual selves are seen as abstractions from man's being in the world. Rather than equating universal laws with the objective and the individual with the subjective and relative, valid interpretations of meaning and truth are made by people who share decisions and the consequence of their decisions.⁷ Instead of a subjective nihilism, we may here talk of a

contextual relativism where legitimation of action occurs through linguistic practice and communicative action.

With the collapse of the universal systems of meaning or meta-narratives, a re-narrativization of the culture takes place, emphasizing communication and the impact of a message upon the audience. There is today an interest in *narratives*, on the telling of stories. In contrast to an extrinsic legitimation through appeal to meta-discourses, or Utopia, Lyotard advocates an intrinsic legitimation through a narrative knowledge which "does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation, and . . . certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof."⁸ Narratives themselves contain the criteria of competence and illustrate how they ought to be applied; they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do. A narrative is not merely a transmission of information. In the very act of telling a story the position of the storyteller and the listener, and their place in the social order, is constituted; the story creates and maintains social bonds. The narratives of a community contribute to uphold the values and the social order of that community.

Postmodern thought focuses on *heterogeneous* language games, on the non-commensurable, on the instabilities, the breaks and the conflicts. Rather than regarding a conversation as a dialogue between partners, it is seen as a game, a confrontation between adversaries. A universal consensus of meaning is no ideal; the continual effort after meaning is no longer a big deal. The reply to the modern global sense-makers is simply "just let it be" or "stop making sense."

There exists no standard method for measuring and comparing knowledge within different language games and paradigms; they are incommensurable. A postmodern world is characterized by a continual change of perspectives, with no underlying common frame of reference, but rather a manifold of changing horizons. Rock music videos capture a world of continually changing perspectives and overlapping contexts.

Language and knowledge do not copy reality. Rather, language constitutes reality, each language constructing specific aspects of reality in its own way. The focus is on the linguistic and social construction of reality, on interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the lived world.

Human language is neither universal nor individual, but each language

is rooted in a specific culture, as dialects or as national languages. Current philosophy has undergone a linguistic turn, focusing on language games, speech acts, hermeneutic interpretation, textual and linguistic analysis. The language games take place in local communities; they are heterogeneous and incommensurable. Highly refined expressions in one language, such as poetry, cannot be translated into another language without change of meaning. There exists no universal meta-language, no universal commensurability.

The focus on language implies a decentralization of the subject. The self no longer uses language to express itself; rather the language speaks through the person. The individual self becomes a medium for the culture and its language. The unique self loses prominence; the author is today less an original genius than a gifted craftsman and mediator of the culture through his or her mastery of language.

In postmodern thought there has taken place an *expansion of rationality*. It is not just a "momentary lapse of reason," but a going beyond the cognitive and scientific domain to include also the ethical and aesthetic domains of life in reason. "Modern times" involved a restricted concept of rationality, with a dominance of a technical means-ends rationality. There has been an emphasis on plans and programmes, on calculation, prediction and control. Reason and science have been overburdened with visions of Utopia where all human problems would be solved in the long run by the methods of science and technology.

When the presupposed rationality is seldom found in the given reality, another deeper, more essential reality is constructed to account for the disorder we observe in the world around us. The overstressed conception of a rationality has, in its turn, fostered sceptical reactions in the form of romanticist and irrationalist movements.

Postmodern thought goes beyond a Kantian split of modern culture into science, morality and art, and involves a rehabilitation of the ethical and aesthetic domains. The positivists' split of facts and values is no longer axiomatic; science is a value-constituted and value-constituting enterprise. Appeals to formal logic recede before a rehabilitated rhetoric of persuasion. With the loss of general systems of legitimation, when actions are not justified by appeal to some higher system or idea of progress, the values and the ethical responsibility of the interacting persons become central.

Art is not merely an aesthetic experience, but a way of knowing the world. Rationalist thought has abhorred the non-linear, the imprecise, the unpredictable, and has separated art from science. Mathematicians have been more open to an affinity of science and art, emphasizing the elegance and beauty of models as criteria of truth, cf. for instance *The Beauty of Fractals*.⁹

Postmodern art is characterized by *pastiche* and collage. Art in a postmodern world does not belong to a unitary frame of reference, nor to a project or a Utopia. The plurality of perspectives leads to a fragmentation of experience, the collage becoming a key artistic technique of our time. Styles from different periods and cultures are put together; in postmodern art high-tech may exist side by side with antique columns and romantic ornamentation, the effects being shocking and fascinating. In contrast to modern architecture, tradition is not rejected; nor is it worshipped as in the new classicism. Elements from other epochs are selected and put together in an often ironical recycling of what is usable as decorum. In literature there are collages of texts put together from other texts; the author's individuality and originality are lost in a pervasive use of and references to other texts. Eco's medieval detective novel *The Name of the Rose*, which may be read as a postmodern caricature of the modern meaning hunters, is thus filled with hidden quotes and allusions to other texts.

The reaction against modern rationality and functionalism was visible at an early stage in *architecture*. There was a protest against the functional, against straight lines and square blocks, against the cold logic and boredom of a modern architecture where function preceded form. Postmodern architecture is a reaction against what the painter Hundertwasser has called "the tyranny of the straight line." In the new architecture there is an emphasis on the curvilinear, on the unpredictable, on ornamentation and pastiche and on a non-functional beauty. Reflecting surfaces and labyrinths have become main elements.

On one side there is a return to the medieval village, with its tight-knit community and complex webs of buildings and places. The atriums of the Hyatt Regency Hotels appear as secularized cathedrals with quiet, closed and labyrinthine internal space, with an ornamentation of mixed styles. On the other side there is the Las Vegas trend of architecture, going to the extreme of learning from the most extravagant expressions of current architecture, as

expressed in Venturi et al.'s *Learning from Las Vegas*.¹⁰ There is a collage of styles, as in Caesars Palace with its antique statues and parking valets dressed as Roman legionaries. Here there is dominance of the surface, the immense lighted billboards attracting the customer to the less spectacular interior labyrinths of gambling tables and slot machines.

Postmodern thought focuses on the *surface*, with a refined sensibility to what appears, a differentiation of what is perceived. The relation of sign and signified is breaking down; the reference to a reality beyond the sign recedes. In the media, texts and images refer less to an external world beyond the signs than to a chain of signifiers, to other texts and images. A dichotomy of fantasy and reality breaks down or loses interest. There is an intertextuality where texts mainly point to other texts. The TV series *Miami Vice* may refer less to the vice in Miami than to other TV series, imitating and parodying for example the car chases, playing up to the viewer's expectations of a cops-and-robbers series. The image, the appearance, is everything; the appearance has become the essence.

The interest in surface, in what manifestly appears, is in contrast to a debunking attitude where nothing is what it seems to be. This hermeneutics of suspicion, inherent in much modern thought, was carried to its extremes in some versions of psychoanalytic and Marxist thought. An action may never be what it appears to be; rather it is an expression of some deeper, more real reality, a symptom of more basic sexual or economic forces. There is a continual hunt for the underlying plan or rationale, the hidden plot or curriculum, to explain the vicissitudes and disorder of what manifestly appears.

The modern quest for a unitary meaning, where there may be none, has as its pathological extreme the suspicion of paranoia. The debunking attitude may lead to conspiracy theories seeking for the mastermind plot; or, less extreme, to a continual search for an underlying order, constructing a deeper rationality where none is visible.

A postmodern *attitude* involves a suspicion of suspicion, and a refined sensibility to the surface, an openness to the differences and nuances of what appears. It relates to what is given, rather than what has been or what could be—"be cool," "it is no big deal," "no future." The fervent critical attitude of the 1960s and 1970s—as anti-authoritarianism and anti-capitalism—has dissolved. The idea of progress and development, be it the progress of

mankind or the individual pilgrim's progress towards salvation of his or her soul, is out. An attitude of tolerant indifference has replaced the involvement and engagement in the social movements and the inner journeys of the 1960s and 1970s. What is left is a liberating nihilism, a living with the here and now, a weariness and a playful irony. Fascination may take the place of reflection; seduction may replace argumentation. There is an oscillation of an intense sensuous fascination by the media and a cool, ironical distance to what appears.

To the existentialists, the discovery of a world without meaning was the point of departure; today a loss of unitary meaning is merely accepted; that is just the way the world is. Postmodern man has stopped waiting for Godot. The absurd is not met with despair; rather it is a living with what is, a making the best of it, a relief from the burden of finding yourself as the goal of life; what remains may be a happy nihilism. With the death of the Utopias, the local and personal responsibility for actions here and now becomes crucial.

2

What Is Post-Modernism?

CHARLES JENCKS

Most of us are reluctant to identify a time when the postmodern era began—we prefer to mumble apologetically that it's more a state of mind than a distinct historical event—but Charles Jencks is not so diffident: He has written that, in architecture, the modern era ended promptly at 3:32 P.M. on July 15, 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis—once called a perfect modern “machine for living”—was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it had housed. That collapse coincided with the collapse of doctrinaire “high modernism” and its tendencies toward standardization.¹

It's clear—although maybe not quite that clear—that explicitly “postmodernist” schools and movements were rapidly becoming part of the cultural buzz in the 1970s. Jencks—who is not only an architect and architectural critic, but also a major theorist of post-modernity (architects use the hyphen)—offers his own description of the main themes and voices.

The Modern Age, which sounds as if it would last forever, is fast becoming a thing of the past. Industrialisation is quickly giving way to Post-

Industrialisation, factory labour to home and office work and, in the arts, the Tradition of the New is leading to the combination of many traditions. Even those who still call themselves Modern artists and architects are looking backwards and sideways to decide which styles and values they will continue.

The Post-Modern Age is a time of incessant choosing. It's an era when no orthodoxy can be adopted without self-consciousness and irony, because all traditions seem to have some validity. This is partly a consequence of what is called the information explosion, the advent of organised knowledge, world communication and cybernetics. It is not only the rich who become collectors, eclectic travellers in time with a superabundance of choice, but almost every urban dweller. Pluralism, the “ism” of our time, is both the great problem and the great opportunity: where Everyman becomes a Cosmopolite and Everywoman a Liberated Individual, confusion and anxiety become ruling states of mind and *ersatz* a common form of mass-culture. This is the price we pay for a Post-Modern Age, as heavy in its way as the monotony, dogmatism and poverty of the Modern epoch. But, in spite of many attempts in Iran and elsewhere, it is impossible to return to a previous culture and industrial form, impose a fundamentalist religion or even a Modernist orthodoxy. Once a world communication system and form of cybernetic production have emerged they create their own necessities and they are, barring a nuclear war, irreversible.

The challenge for a Post-Modern Hamlet, confronted by an *embarras de richesses*, is to choose and combine traditions selectively, to *eclect* (as the verb of eclecticism would have it) those aspects from the past and present which appear most relevant for the job at hand. The resultant creation, if successful, will be a striking synthesis of traditions; if unsuccessful, a smorgasbord. Between inventive combination and confused parody the Post-Modernist sails, often getting lost and coming to grief, but occasionally realising the great promise of a plural culture with its many freedoms. Post-Modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Its best works are characteristically doubly-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism. Its hybrid style is opposed to the minimalism of Late-Modern ideology and all revivals which are based on an exclusive dogma or taste.

This, at least, is what I take Post-Modernism to be as a cultural movement and historical epoch. But, as the reader will discover, the word and concept have changed over fifty years and have only reached such a clarification in the last ten. Seen as progressive in some quarters, it is damned as reactionary and nostalgic in others; supported for its social and technological realism, it is also accused of escapism. Even, at times, when it is being condemned for its schizophrenia this "failing" is turned by its defenders into a virtue. Some writers define it negatively, concentrating on aspects of inflation, the runaway growth typified by a multiplying economy.² But a critical reading of the evidence will show that fast-track production and consumption beset all areas of contemporary life and are not the monopoly of any movement.

Virtually the first positive use of the prefix "post" was by the writer Leslie Fiedler in 1965 when he repeated it like an incantation and tied it to current radical trends which made up the counter-culture: "post-humanist, post-male, post-white, post-heroic . . . post-Jewish."³ These anarchic and creative departures from orthodoxy, these attacks on Modernist elitism, academicism and puritanical repression, do indeed represent the first stirrings of Post-Modern culture as Andreas Huyssen later pointed out in 1984, although Fiedler and others in the 1960s were never to put this argument as such and conceptualise the tradition.⁴ This had to wait until the 1970s and the writings of Ihab Hassan, by which time the radical movements which Fiedler celebrated were, ironically, out of fashion, reactionary, or dead.

Ihab Hassan became by the mid-1970s the self-proclaimed spokesman for the Postmodern (the term is conventionally elided in literary criticism) and he tied this label to the ideas of experimentalism in the arts and ultra-technology in architecture—William Burroughs and Buckminster Fuller, "Anarchy, Exhaustion/Silence . . . Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis . . . Intertext . . ."—in short those trends which I, with others, would later characterise as Late-Modern. In literature and then in philosophy, because of the writings of Jean-François Lyotard (1979) and a tendency to elide Deconstruction with the Post-Modern, the term has often kept its associations with what Hassan calls "discontinuity, indeterminacy, immanence."⁵ Mark C. Taylor's curiously titled *ERRING, A Postmodern A/Theology* is characteristic of this genre which springs from Derrida and Deconstruction.⁶ There is also a tendency among philosophers to discuss all Post-Positivist thinkers to-

gether as Post-Modern whether or not they have anything more in common than a rejection of Modern Logical Positivism. Thus there are two quite different meanings to the term and a general confusion which is not confined to the public. This and the pretext of several recent conferences on the subject has led to this little tract: "What is Post-Modernism?" It is a question, as well as the answer I will give, and one must see that its continual growth and movement mean that no definitive answer is possible—at least not until it stops moving.

In its infancy in the 1960s Post-Modern culture was radical and critical, a minority position established, for instance, by Pop artists and theorists against the reduced view of Modern art, the aestheticism reigning in such institutes as the Museum of Modern Art. In architecture, Team Ten, Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi and the Advocacy Planners attacked "orthodox Modern architecture" for its elitism, urban destruction, bureaucracy and simplified language. By the 1970s, as these traditions grew in strength and changed and Post-Modernism was now coined as a term for a variety of trends, the movement became more conservative, rational and academic. Many protagonists of the 1960s, such as Andy Warhol, lost their critical function altogether as they were assimilated into the art market or commercial practice. In the 1980s the situation changed again. Post-Modernism was finally accepted by the professions, academies and society at large. It became as much part of the establishment as its parent, Modernism, and rival brother, Late-Modernism, and in literary criticism it shifted closer in meaning to the architectural and art traditions.

John Barth (1980) and Umberto Eco (1983), among many other authors, now define it as a writing which may use traditional forms in ironic or displaced ways to treat perennial themes.⁷ It acknowledges the validity of Modernism—the change in the world view brought on by Nietzsche, Einstein, Freud et al.—but, as John Barth says, it hopes to go beyond the limited means and audience which characterise Modernist fiction: "My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century Modernist parents or his nineteenth-century pre-modernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naiveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-

modernist marvels (by my definition and in my judgement) as Beckett's *Stories and Texts for Nothing* or Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. He may not hope to reach and move the devotees of James Michener and Irving Wallace—not to mention the lobotomized mass-media illiterates. But he *should* hope to reach and delight, at least part of the time, beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the Early Christians: professional devotees of high art.”⁸ This search for a wider audience than the Early Christians also distinguishes Post-Modern architects and artists from their Late-Modern counterparts and from the more hermetic concerns that Ihab Hassan defined in the 1970s. There are of course many other specific goals on the agenda which give Post-Modernism a direction.

But because its meaning and tradition change, one must not only define the concept but give its dates and specific context. To reiterate, I term Post-Modernism that paradoxical dualism, or double coding, which its hybrid name entails: the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Hassan's “postmodern” is, according to this logic, mostly Late-Modern, the continuation of Modernism in its ultra or exaggerated form. Some writers and critics, such as Barth and Eco, would agree with this definition, while just as many, including Hassan and Lyotard, would disagree. In this agreement and disagreement, understanding and dispute, there is the same snake-like dialectic which the movement has always shown and one suspects that there will be several more surprising twists of the coil before it is finished. Of one thing we can be sure: the announcement of death is, until the other Modernisms disappear, premature.

3

“I Love You Madly,” He Said Self-consciously

UMBERTO ECO

Umberto Eco's best-selling novel The Name of the Rose is often cited as an example of postmodern literature. It transcends the boundary between popular and serious literature, between low culture and high, and it parodies another genre (the detective novel), the great expression of the modern era's search for certainty. In a postscript to his novel, Eco presents his own idea about the postmodern attitude—finds in it a kind of transcendence, and a kind of parody, of our own experiences of life.

Unfortunately, “postmodern” is a term *bon à tout faire*. I have the impression that it is applied today to anything the user of the term happens to like. Further, there seems to be an attempt to make it increasingly retroactive: first it was apparently applied to certain writers or artists active in the last twenty years, then gradually it reached the beginning of the century, then still further back. And this reverse procedure continues; soon the postmodern category will include Homer.

Actually, I believe that postmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category—or, better still, a *Kunstwollen*, a

way of operating. We could say that every period has its own postmodernism, just as every period would have its own mannerism (and, in fact, I wonder if postmodernism is not the modern name for mannerism as metahistorical category). I believe that in every period there are moments of crisis like those described by Nietzsche in his *Thoughts out of Season*, in which he wrote about the harm done by historical studies. The past conditions us, harries us, blackmails us. The historic avant-garde (but here I would also consider avant-garde a metahistorical category) tries to settle scores with the past. "Down with moonlight"—a futurist slogan—is a platform typical of every avant-garde; you have only to replace "moonlight" with whatever noun is suitable. The avant-garde destroys, defaces the past: *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is a typical avant-garde act. Then the avant-garde goes further, destroys the figure, cancels it, arrives at the abstract, the informal, the white canvas, the slashed canvas, the charred canvas. In architecture and the visual arts, it will be the curtain wall, the building as stele, pure parallelepiped, minimal art; in literature, the destruction of the flow of discourse, the Burroughs-like collage, silence, the white page; in music, the passage from atonality to noise to absolute silence (in this sense, the early Cage is modern).

But the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further; because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly." At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure

play the game of irony. . . . But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.

Irony, metalinguistic play, enunciation squared. Thus, with the modern, anyone who does not understand the game can only reject it, but with the postmodern, it is possible not to understand the game and yet to take it seriously. Which is, after all, the quality (the risk) of irony. There is always someone who takes ironic discourse seriously. I think that the collages of Picasso, Juan Gris, and Braque were modern: this is why normal people would not accept them. On the other hand, the collages of Max Ernst, who pasted together bits of nineteenth-century engravings, were postmodern: they can be read as fantastic stories, as the telling of dreams, without any awareness that they amount to a discussion of the nature of engraving, and perhaps even of collage. If "postmodern" means this, it is clear why Sterne and Rabelais were postmodern, why Borges surely is, and why in the same artist the modern moment and the postmodern moment can coexist, or alternate, or follow each other closely. Look at Joyce. The *Portrait* is the story of an attempt at the modern. *Dubliners*, even if it comes before, is more modern than *Portrait*. *Ulysses* is on the borderline. *Finnegans Wake* is already postmodern, or at least it initiates the postmodern discourse: it demands, in order to be understood, not the negation of the already said, but its ironic rethinking.