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MODERNISM MUMMIFIED

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IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO *THE IDEA OF THE MODERN*, IRVING HOWE QUOTES THE famous remark of Virginia Woolf, as everyone does since hyperbole is arresting, that “on or about December 1910 human *nature* changed.” Actually, Mrs. Woolf had written that “human *character* changed.” She was referring (in her famous essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” written in 1924) to the changes in the position of one’s cook or of the partners in marriage. “All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature.”¹

This search for a transfiguration in sensibility as the touchstone of modernity has animated other writers. Lionel Trilling, in temperament ever cautious and complex, while persuaded in his reading of the *Iliad* or Sophocles that human nature does not change and that moral life is unitary, nevertheless came to believe, as he stated in the opening pages of *Sincerity and Authenticity*, that in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries “something like a mutation in human nature took place,” and that a new concern with the *self*, and being at one with one’s self, “became a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years.”²

The answer to when and how what we call “the modern” emerged has a large historical canvas. One can date it with the rise of the museum, where cultural artifacts are wrenched from their traditional places and displayed in a new context of syncretism: history mixed up and consciousness jumbled by will, as when Napoleon ransacked Egypt and Europe to stuff the Louvre with his trophies; and yet vicarious emperors have always displayed their power by placing their heels on culture. For Jacob Burckhardt, the modern begins, of course, in the Renaissance, with the emphasis on individuality, originality, and putting one’s name in stone. One can say, and I would place great weight behind the argument, that the modern begins with Adam Smith and the proposition that the economy is no longer subject to the household or moral rules but is an autonomous activity, just as in this extension of liberalism one has the autonomy of law from morality (to be regarded

This essay is a reprise and a reflection on themes I advanced in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) and the essay, “Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self,” a memorial essay for Lionel Trilling, in the volume *Art, Politics and Will*, edited by Quentin Anderson, Stephen Donadio and Steven Marcus (1975) and reprinted in my collection of essays, *The Winding Passage* (1980).

principally as a set of formal procedures), and the autonomy of the aesthetic from all constraints so that art exists for art's sake alone. And if one believes that the fundamental source of all knowledge and sensibility is epistemological, one would have to date the creation from Kant, with the proposition of an activity theory of knowledge (as against the classical contemplative theory deriving knowledge from preexisting Forms), so that, as Kant says in the *Prolegomena*, "The understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, nature," a theorem that is carried out in modern art and in politics.³

What is clear, out of all these variegated elements, is that what defines the modern is a sense of openness to change, of detachment from place and time, of social and geographical mobility, and a readiness, if not eagerness, to welcome the new, even at the expense of tradition and the past. It is the proposition that there are no ends or purposes given "in nature," that the individual, and his or her self-realization, is the new ideal and *imago* of life, and that one can remake one's self and remake society in the effort to achieve those individual goals. Revolution, which had once been a *ricorso* in an endless cycle, now becomes a rupture with the endless wheel, and is the impulse to destroy old worlds, and for new worlds to create.

In all this it is clear that *capitalism* and *modernism* have common roots. Both were dynamic in their restless kneading of the dough; for both there was "nothing sacred"; for both there were no limits on the efforts of rugged individualism or the unrestrained self to tear up the past and to make it new.

Yet what is also clear, and this is the history still to be unraveled, is that brothers though they may have been in the womb, there was a deep fratricide whereby the rising bourgeoisie, sublimating its energies into work, feared the excesses and the flouting of conventions and cultural forms by the new *bohème*, while the avatars of modernism despised and held in contempt the money-minded bourgeoisie, for whom culture was only a commodity and a source of display, status, and consumption.

Capitalism and cultural modernism also had different trajectories. At its extreme, capitalism became concerned with efficiency, optimization, and maximization as it subordinated the individual to the organization. Cultural modernism opened an attack, often an unyielding rage, against the social order; became concerned with the self, often to a narcissistic extent; denied art the function of representation; and became unusually absorbed with the materials alone—textures and sounds—which it used for expressiveness.

I have tried, in my work, to relate cultural modernism to changes in social structure. I have argued that in modernism—in painting, literature, music, and poetry—there was a common syntax which I have called the "eclipse of distance," and that in these varied genres there was a common attack on the "rational cosmology" that had defined Western culture since the Renaissance; that of foreground and background in space through mathematical perspective; of beginning, middle, and end, as the ordered chronology of time; and of a "correspondence theory of truth" in the idea of *mimesis* or the semantic relation of

word to object.⁴ I had tried to show that where the aesthetic was joined to politics, particularly in the twentieth century, the “world-view” of modernism had been principally reactionary or revolutionary (whether Stefan George and Gottfried Benn, or the German expressionists in theatre and art; whether Pound, Eliot, Yeats and Wyndham Lewis and the ambiguous politics of a Lawrence, or the early revolutionary stance of Auden, etc., etc.). And I had argued that contemporary bourgeois society, seeing its inflated, decorative culture collapse under the onslaught of cultural modernism, had in an astonishing *tour de force* taken over cultural modernism and flaunted it as its own culture—this being the cultural contradiction of capitalism.

Today, according to the winds of the *Zeitgeist*, modernism has ended. We have “postmodernism” wrenching modernism from *its* historical context, and jumbling it with different cultural styles (old hat, nouveau, and deco) in a new, bizarre syncretism (such as Philip Johnson’s pediment to the AT & T tower on Madison Avenue), and academics ransacking the texts to deconstruct the past and create a new presence. So the hoot owl of Minerva screeches in the false dawn.

II

What of America? Lacking a past and having made itself in a revolutionary act, America has been the only *pure* capitalist society we have known. But has there been an American Modernism? And if so, what was it?

Modernism in the United States existed in *form*, not in *content*. Not only is this an arbitrary distinction, but I am necessarily using these words in an arbitrary way. And it is by exposition, rather than definition, that this distinction can be made clear and, perhaps, useful.

In *content*, American culture (leaving aside nineteenth-century New England and the twentieth-century South—yet this remains a large country) was primarily small-town, Protestant, moralizing and anti-intellectual in the sense that Richard Hofstadter has used this term. If, as Santayana once remarked, Americans were innocent of poison, they were even more so of sexuality (not sex). Can one imagine a Huysmans, a Swinburne or an Aubrey Beardsley (though *The Yellow Book* was initiated by an American expatriate) or any other “dandy aesthete” (to use Martin Green’s phrase) on the American scene?

American *modernists*, as is obvious from the history, could flourish principally only in Europe: James leaving New York and Boston, Pound from Idaho, Eliot from St. Louis, Gertrude Stein from Baltimore, Hemingway from the Illinois suburbs, and the “lost generation” of the twenties going earlier to London or later to Paris. The little magazines took their cue from Europe. The painters, beginning with the Armory show, again hailed from Europe. The composers, again, spent the obligatory period abroad.

The two innovative American writers, Dos Passos and Faulkner, were experimental and modernist, but they were not part of a native *modernist culture* in the

sense that such writers as Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Proust were able to place their imprints deeply on a French culture. Dos Passos introduced a style of montage close to cinema and, to some extent, the political expressionist theater of Germany, but his influence was largely in the radical milieu of his time. And though Dos Passos continued his montage techniques when he abandoned his radicalism, he was written off by the critics as *passé*. Faulkner wrote powerful experimental novels, derived from the French influences (*The Sound and the Fury* can rank with any of the great modernist *romans fleuves*) yet he received little critical attention. Faulkner was revived only in 1945 when he sketched for Malcolm Cowley the map of Yoknapatawpha County, and Cowley then redefined Faulkner in the sociological context of the struggle between the Sartorises and Snopeses for the soul of the South—not as a modernist writer.

The two distinctive modernist innovations—as cultures—were jazz and photography, but jazz was outside the mainstream, regarded as sinful even in the jazz age of the twenties, and only became a major influence in American culture in the forties with the larger commercial jazz bands, while photography, despite Stieglitz, was aesthetically marginal to American concerns. The one great technical innovation, film, was regarded as “the movies” in the United States, a form of mass entertainment, and as “the cinema” in France, where it became an aesthetic and so provided the route back to critical commentary in the United States.

In these senses, while there were *modernists* in the United States, there was no *modernist culture* in content. The one place where there was a modernist culture in the United States was in *form*—and this was the machine aesthetic. And, as the old saying goes, this was no accident. The machine aesthetic excluded the self and the person, it was abstract and functional, and fused with industrial design. Photography came into its own not with the periodical *Camera Work*, but with the business scene; the *Fortune* pages provided its showcase. The great functional factories and the huge functional skyscrapers, as well as the curving ribbons of the new concrete motorways, became the emblematic symbols of the new culture. The key term that defined its form was *functional*. Modernist artists such as Charles Sheeler, in his “precisionist” paintings and photographs, reflected these abstract geometrical designs. Abstract artists, such as Stuart Davis, fused the rhythms of jazz with the linear forms of the machine age.

A modernist culture began to appear in the United States after World War II with the collapse of the small-town Protestant hold on American life, the distinctive imprint of urbanism as the focus of economic activities, and the flood of French-European surrealists (Breton, Masson, Ernst) who influenced the new art of a Gorky or Pollock; the Russian émigrés such as Stravinsky or Balanchine, who shaped developments in music and dance; the large number from Central Europe such as Erwin Panofsky and Roman Jakobson, who influenced art history and linguistics, and the many German refugees who brought in continental sociology and philosophy (as well as physics and other sciences). The complete story of all those myriad influences remains to be told.

III

What of modernism today? It has become what culture usually becomes in periods of luxury and decadence, a decorative commodity or the last duchess on the wall. On the one hand there are the *culturati* who make up the new industry of galleries and museums and magazines, as well as entertainment, the purveyors and transmitters and cicerones of culture. And on the other, the corporations and banks that line their corridors with the requisite Newman, Motherwell, Noland, Morris Louis or Kline, where the thick impasto and the rivers of color sag and go limp against the neutral beige carpets and the whitewashed walls.⁵

Modernism today is the "official" high culture—because it is dead and stuffed. And its high taxidermist is Hilton Kramer and his magazine, *The New Criterion*, who identify modernism *with* capitalism and bourgeois society. In a recent *tour de farce*, "Modernism and Its Enemies," Kramer sets the glow of high culture in the Sixties "which witnessed an extraordinary expansion in cultural life. . . . the era that saw the building of a great many new museums and the expansion of a great many existing museums," the spread of "a public that was large and growing." As the capstone, *The New York Times* appointed him as its cultural critic because, "As the then executive editor of *The Times*, Turner Catledge, explained to me (with something of a sigh), 'Our readers are now a lot smarter about all this than we are.' To keep these readers and win still others the managers of the paper felt it necessary to redress the balance, and this meant—in some fields at least—joining the modernist tide instead of opposing it."⁶

There are two striking points in this exposition: one, modernism is to be explained by its audience, and by the existence of museums. Historically, it has always been the artist who establishes and writes the culture. The artist may have been adversary or entwined with court or church, but culture was defined by the artist. The museum was the place the artist avoided. If one turns to the bombastic outriders of modernism, the repeated cry in the Futurist manifestos of Marinetti is that the museums are "cemeteries of empty exertion, calvaries of crucified dreams, registries of aborted beginnings," and Marinetti urges the "gay incendiaries with charred fingers [to] set fire to the library shelves," and flood the museums.⁷

Second, other than the genuflections to the Abstract Expressionists of the postwar period (now thirty years in the past), there are few references to contemporary artists or writers who exemplify the creativity and vitality of high culture today. In fact, this modernist culture, the only true "high culture," must guard the portals against the new radicals—e.g., a Beuys—who beat at the gates, while defending a huckster like Julian Schnabel. Culture is high culture only when it is calcified in the museums of Modern Art.⁸

Who are the enemies of modernism? According to Mr. Kramer, there are the radicals who feel betrayed because modernism, instead of remaining revolutionary, has "turned out to be a coefficient of bourgeois capitalist culture." And there are the *philistines* (Mr. Kramer's, not Arnold's, designation), such as this writer, who

identify modernism as the begetter of the counterculture of the sixties. Mr. Kramer, as a veteran polemicist, skews his targets and misstates positions. The Marxists who have attacked modernism have not thought of it as revolutionary but as a derivative of bourgeois life. In my writings, I call the counterculture a “conceit” in its claims to be modernist, but say that the liberal culture was unable to draw the line between a modernism (and fantasies of murder and bestiality) lived out in the imagination, and the claim to justify the erasure of any distinction between art and life and to act out (albeit in street theater) the lifestyles of outrage.

There are also two striking omissions about the critics of modernism: Mr. Kramer completely ignores the large group of conservative intellectuals, followers of Russell Kirk, who have described Modernism as the invention of the Devil, and the source of *all* political heresy in the contemporary world. Yet, as “old believers,” they are as fervent as Mr. Kramer in their defense of capitalism and have even attacked the “neo-conservatives” for still clinging to the modernist heresy, something which is not true of that group—except for Mr. Kramer.

The second omission is Mr. Kramer’s amnesia about his own past. Writing in 1959, on the threshold of the hallowed sixties, Mr. Kramer remarked in the socialist magazine *Dissent*:

Everything in our economy and in the social organization of the arts conspires against the privacy and independence which would be indispensable if the spirit of the avant-garde were to survive. Once we find ourselves in a situation, as we do today, in which society has assigned vast bureaucracies to the task of seeking out and exploiting the last word in all the arts, and when the artists themselves have joined as eager accomplices in this orgy of self-exploitation—in this situation I think it is mere piety to deny that the avant-garde is dead. *The fact of the matter is that since 1945 bourgeois society has tightened its grip on all the arts by allowing them a freer rein.*⁹

Old polemical apparatchiks never die, they only change their targets.

Much of this would be merely sectarian if not for the fact that Mr. Kramer, almost alone, remains a defender of Modernism—at least in its petrified state. Irving Kristol and Peter Berger have conceded the point that capitalism is often a gross and unlovely system, to be defended primarily on the ground that it is an engine for increasing material standards of life and that it is “a necessary but not sufficient condition of democracy under modern conditions.” But neither Kristol nor Berger has defended modernism in the terms of Mr. Kramer.

Mr. Kramer defends Modernism not only as an aspect of capitalism, but also of democracy, and writes that “what is really at stake, then, in this attack on modernism [is] something central to the vital cultural life of our democratic society. . . .” But this is intellectually confusing and historically invalid. The avatars of modernism themselves have been overwhelmingly antidemocratic (and often as not, anti-Semitic); and Mr. Kramer, like an inverted Marxist, conflates his realms. Democracy is *not* dependent on capitalism, but on a set of traditions and legal concepts, such as the common law, that antedate capitalism, while capitalism itself has been compatible with fascism and authoritarianism, as in Italy or Chile.

Mr. Kramer writes: "The truth is, the culture of modernism has served all along as the aesthetic and spiritual conscience, and sometimes even the moral conscience, of middle-class life, and it is this which has made it pre-eminently the culture of democratic society."

But this is a slippery glissade. Modernism has been a savage and often destructive force *against* middle-class life (need one repeat the litany of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Pound *et al.*), and if modernism serves as an "aesthetic and spiritual conscience," Mr. Kramer clearly wears a hair shirt to bed at night. To say that modernism is preeminently the culture of democratic capitalism is to have embalming fluid rather than blood in one's veins. And if so, Mr. Kramer remains the walking mummy of modernism.

IV

The "sense of an ending," as Frank Kermode has remarked, is a recurrent theme in cultures that move toward an eschatological climax or are mired in cultural despair. If we have no fixed time as to when modernism began—one's starting point, as I have noted, can be based on sensibility, or self, or on the autonomy of institutions, economic or aesthetic—it is clear that "cultural modernism" has come to a close. As Octavio Paz, himself a child of the modern, stated in his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard:

Modern art is modern because it is critical. . . . Today we witness another mutation: modern art is beginning to lose its powers of negation. For some years now its rejections have been ritual repetitions: rebellion has turned into procedure, criticism into rhetoric, transgression into ceremony. Negation is no longer creative. I am not saying that we are living at the end of art: we are living the end of the *idea of modern art*.¹⁰

Was modernism "co-opted" by capitalism, as Herbert Marcuse has suggested, or was it a contradiction of capitalism, as I have argued? Marcuse stated the problem from the standpoint of culture, yet one can argue that the psychological force that became dissipated in this last century was not culture but capitalism. Marcuse claimed (in his *One-Dimensional Man*, published in 1964) that all aspects of life—art, technology, working-class rebellion, black resentment, youth *Sturm und Drang*—had been flattened out by the technological rationality of society, only to find himself hailed, a few years later, as the Pied Piper of Revolution by the raucous students of Berlin and Paris.¹¹ Capitalism, said Marcuse, was based psychologically on "surplus repression," imposed by the severity of the superego through the agency of the family. (In the United States today, almost one out of every two children will spend some period of their youth in a one-parent or a fatherless family!) Yet, if one looks at capitalism today, one can put Marx on his head. It is culture with its varying demands that has become the substructure of Western capitalist society and the production system reorganized to meet its voracious appetites—material; erotic

and aesthetic; high, middle and low; punk and rock; *Hollywood Squares* and TV bang-bang.

A society demonstrates its vitality through wealth, power, and culture, high and low. Power alone breeds sterility, as we see today in the Soviet Union, North Korea, or Albania. Wealth alone breeds decadence. And culture? A culture derived from religion and sustained by its commanding faith can give us the great Buddhas of the Orient or the Christian art of the Middle Ages. A period of great expansion, nineteenth-century Paris, an era open to change and discovery, to geographical and social mobility, can break from mythology for the vivacity of *plein air*, the excitement of the spectacle, the presentation of the self.

Bourgeois society (not early adventure capitalism, the capitalism described by Sombart) forced a cleavage between high and low culture, deploring the adventurousness of the one and the vulgarity of the other. Modernist culture was extraordinarily creative because it lived, sociologically, in tension with bourgeois society and, because, as Paul Tillich once observed, it reached down to the taproots of the demonic and transmuted those surging impulses into art. Today, bourgeois society has collapsed and the demonic cavorts everywhere, for there are few taboos. Alfred Jarry could open his *Ubu Roi* with the clownish king saying "Merdre," but how much of a shock is that today against the desecrations of a Genet or a Burroughs?¹²

Today we have a culture that is eclectic and syncretistic because the rational cosmology and the mirror of nature have been shattered. The disjunction of forms, growing out of the tension with mimesis, has vanished, and formalism has become largely self-referential. The disjoined and alienated experiences (articulated now largely by women writers) too often are expressed in sociological clichés, or lack "shape" (to use the term of Jean Rhys), and fail to engage society other than through narcissistic reflection.

The new vogue term is "postmodernism." Its meaning is as amorphous as modernism itself, but the term also contains a set of paradoxes as startling as the engagement of modernism and capitalism in the past two hundred years. Postmodernism—if we date it from the subterranean writings of Michel Foucault and, in the United States, of Norman O. Brown (with a small nod to Norman Mailer)—proclaimed not only the "de-construction of man" and the end of the Enlightenment Credo of Reason, but also the "epistemological break" with genitality, and the dissolution of sexuality into the polymorph perversity of oral and anal pleasures.¹³ For them, this was the liberation of the body, as modernism had been the liberation of the imagination. The sexual revolution that followed broke into the gay and lesbian movements as one current, and the somewhat overlapping rock-drug culture as another. Imagination had come out of the closet and lived out its impulses openly.

Foucault and Brown had gone "beyond," a transgression of the taboos, a posthumous rendering, so to speak, of modernism. But by a strange twist of fate, the

term “postmodernism” itself was appropriated through the media by a successive generation of artists who, often conventionally, reacted against modernist formalism and expressionism, and were immediately hailed by the chic *culturati* ready to follow the new winds of fashion. The practitioners of “postmodernism,” by and large, have substituted pastiche for form and cleverness for creativity. In architecture, Michael Graves mixes Moorish fantasy with heavy Byzantine arches, as in his Portland, Oregon building, and his proposed superstructure to the Whitney Museum. In literature, there is the affectless flat prose of Ann Beattie. In painting, we see the reintroduction of shadowy figuration, like X-ray images, in the canvases of the neo-expressionists. And on the stage, there are the hypnotic dream imagery and dissociated slow-motion tableaux by Robert Wilson, underscored by the monotonic minimalism of Philip Glass.

Much of this was foreshadowed by Pop Art, an art which largely recycles images through collage or juxtaposition, on silkscreen or phosphorescent acrylic. Some original artists like Jasper Johns or Jim Dine can subdue the image by expressing it through the tension of technique and texture, as in their prints. But with a Rauschenberg, the technique becomes too obvious; with a Warhol, the image too blatant. In both cases the outcomes finally become tiresome.

What passes for high culture today lacks both content and form, so that the visual arts are primarily decorative and literature self-indulgent babble or contrived experiment. Decoration by its nature, no matter how bright and gay, becomes, in its finite and repetitive patterns, mere wallpaper, a receding background incapable of engaging the viewer in the renewable re-visions of perception. Self-referential literature, when both the self and the reference repeat the same old refrains, becomes a tedious bore, like Uno showing that he can stand on one finger in a circus. A culture of recycled images and twice-told tales is a culture that has lost its bearings.

“Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation,” Herbert Marcuse wrote in *One-Dimensional Man*. Paradoxically, the only cultural currents of negation, *as an irrational form*, have been segments of popular culture that have broken all boundaries, set themselves up against the traditional social values of American society, and are marketed wildly and successfully, as sex and rebellion, by the purveyors of capitalism and mass culture.

Today, television soap operas are the Streets of Libido, the softcore pornography deliberately titillating the viewers with a fantasy life they can act out in their own homes. Heavy Metal and hardcore rock appeal to youths who feel angry and discouraged about the dead-end prospects of earning a living. Sex-obsession as exhibited by a Madonna or Prince takes an ever more explicit form. One can imagine the graffiti on the walls: Genet lives!

Is this so different from the rock-and-roll initiated by Elvis Presley in the late 1950s, or the sweet inducements of LSD sung by the Beatles, or the hard stomp of Mick Jagger’s Rolling Stones? In one sense, as with any enlargement of a cultural phenomenon, there has been a “widening gyre” in which more and more of what

has been assaulted continues to crumble, and more and more of what had been forbidden now goes on publicly. But what also seems to be true is that the youth culture, and especially lower-class culture, now is exploited more crassly by the commercial interests. With regard to sex and violence, the appetites of the young turned out to be voracious, and as Martha Bayles, a critic on the *Wall Street Journal*, has written: "After all, raw sexuality and anti-social anger are the two preferred weapons of the adolescent against his elders. And when the entertainment industry discovered how endlessly marketable these distillations of black culture were, it ceased to see reasons for restraint."¹⁴

For the entertainment industry—movies, TV, rock music records, and publishing—all of this is free enterprise and free speech, and the government must not be allowed to interfere with the libertarianism/libertinism of the market place. Again a cultural contradiction of capitalism? A century and a quarter ago it was Baudelaire and the bourgeoisie condemning *Les Fleurs du Mal* as an outrage against public decency. Today is it Foucault and *Hustler* magazine as brothers in "negation"?

Cultural fashions, especially in popular culture, come and go in spasms. With the rising threat of AIDS, the campaigns against drugs and tobacco, the sheer exhaustion of the ugliness of sexual violence, as demonstrated in the film *Sid and Nancy*, we may be on the verge of a "new sobriety." That remains to be seen; and that is also another story. "Never call retreat" is a maxim of the ideologue, not of culture.

If this is the case, when all is said and done, we can now be grateful for modernism as a culture that itself was once committed to shock. It is safely in the museums, and on the corporate walls, ready for the closets of History. Such old contradictions never die; they just fade away.

NOTES

¹Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays* (New York, 1967), 1:320-21. (Italics added.) When I first read this phrase and quoted it in my book, I wondered what may have happened to Mrs. Woolf herself in 1910 to give rise to this startling assertion. In 1910, if one follows the detailed events in Quentin Bell's biography, Mrs. Woolf began to speak up for the feminist cause, signalled the importance of Roger Fry's "First Post-Impressionist Exhibition," and bathed naked with Rupert Brooke by moonlight in the Granta. While Bloomsbury had become "licentious in its speech by 1910" as Mr. Bell notes, as a sociologist I was relieved to find that it was primarily in social situations that this momentous change had occurred.

²Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 19.

³*Kant's Prolegomena*, ed. Paul Carus (La Salle, Ill., 1945), 82. If the reference to politics seems strange, I have in mind simply the view one finds in classical Greek thought that the natural order, the moral order and the social order are all akin in having an entelechy defined by the *telos*, and that the proper ends of nature, morality and the social are given in the unity of purposes that exist in the constitutive structures of *physis* and *nomos*. Modernity, beginning with Hobbes, dirempts that unity, and insists that ends are individual and varied.

⁴This theme was first stated in my essay "The Eclipse of Distance," in *Encounter* (London) May 1963. Needless to say, I have not tried to write a general "theory" of modernism, but to look at these aspects which relate to "external" forces, rather than its own immanent trajectories.

⁵I have no objections, *per se*, to corporations or museums or collectors buying the canvases of these worthwhile artists for display on their walls. How could one? What becomes objectionable is that the buying of "modern art" is by now obligatory as a means of demonstrating "support for the arts," or as a way of showing that one is "with it." It is in that sense that the Museum of Modern Art becomes the seal of "Good Housekeeping" for the corporations, and the arbiter of taste for the society. A Duncan Phillips, exercising his own independent judgment, was able to build a marvelous gallery (including the first purchases of Morris Louis) in Washington. But a Joseph Hirschorn, buying art by the carload, gets his name emblazoned on the malls of Washington as a benefactor of culture. Fortunately, the sifting of taste will make such collections leaner and, in the years to come, few people will know of the vulgarity of Hirschorn, as few today recognize Frick as the ruthless head of the Carnegie Steel works who ordered the shooting of the workers in the Homestead strike of 1892.

⁶Hilton Kramer, "Modernism and its enemies," *The New Criterion* March 1986: 5.

⁷"The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint (New York, 1973), 43.

⁸And not only the museums. New York's "newest antiques and decorative-arts fair," reports *The New York Times* in a cultural front page article of November 21, 1986, is "Modernism: A Century of Style and Design, 1860-1960." "It's the most exciting 'antique' show I have ever seen," burred Christopher Wilk, assistant curator of decorative arts at the Brooklyn Museum. Those artists shown include Hector Guimard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Russel Wright, and Charles Eames. "Although there are some selections at \$100 or less—perfume bottles, early plastic jewelry, ceramic plates—" writes Rita Reif, "the majority of offerings are from \$500 to \$10,000, and master works command as much as \$235,000." High, high culture, indeed.

⁹Hilton Kramer, "To Hell with Culture," *Dissent* Spring 1959: 166. (Emphasis added.)

¹⁰Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 148-49.

¹¹In 1970, Marcuse appeared on the stage of the Free University of Berlin and was hailed rapturously by the students who chanted rhythmically, "Her-bert," "Her-bert," "Her-bert." And when they broke into the singing of the *Internationale*, Marcuse whipped off his coat, raised his elbow with a clenched fist, and joined in the singing of the last chorus. When the noise finally died down, he stepped forward and cried: "Studenten! . . ." At which an angry volley shouted back: "Studenten? Es heisst Genossen!" Old professors never die. The story is told in Melvin J. Lasky's collection, *On the Barricades and Off*.

¹²*Ubi Roi*, with sets elaborated by Bonnard, Vuillard and Toulouse-Lautrec, was the first of the public utterances of obscenity. The word, *merdre*, set off a pandemonium that lasted throughout the evening. Presented in 1896, it could not be staged again until 1908. Yet even Jarry had given a spin to the word *merde* by adding one letter, so that the word has been translated, variously, as *shite* or *pshit*. Though used privately as the *mot de Cambronne*, a remark of one of Napoleon's generals at Waterloo, the public utterance of the word in 1896, as Roger Shattuck has observed, was "unthinkable." Compare this *scandale* with Genet's graphic depiction of homosexual rape in *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (and the film made of his fantasies) or Burroughs' description of the sexual ejaculation of a man while being hanged, in *Naked Lunch*. *Merde*, of course, is now the commonplace word for good luck for a student going off to an academic examination or a talisman for a friend going on a journey. Does everything, in time, become tamed?

For a discussion of Jarry and *Ubu Roi*, see Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years* (London, 1959) ch. 7, esp. 161. The play has been fully translated under the strange title of *King Turd* by Beverley King and G. Legman (New York, 1953).

¹³For a previous and more extensive discussion of Foucault and Norman O. Brown as going beyond modernism, see my *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, 51-52.

¹⁴I take this comment from the prospectus for a book on popular culture which Ms. Bayles will be writing for The Free Press. I am grateful for her permission.