

# POSTMODERNISM OR AN ABUSE OF CONCEPTS

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## 1. The concept of "postmodernism"

There exists at present in the world and among scientific circles in general a concept, though still not having a consistent meaning, but belonging to the most used and largely discussed, that is the concept "postmodernism". In Vietnam, this term has been also propagated in discussions, debates, conversations, but no articles have ever dealt with it in a comprehensive manner, no debates have ever raised the question *whether we have the need to make use of it, or if the word is necessary, and how to make use of it in literary researches*. In short, the term "postmodern(ism)" has not really been integrated into the literary researches and criticism of Vietnam.

Probably the term "postmodern" emerged for the first time in Vietnamese newspapers since 1991, in a translation of an article by Antonio Blash (Spain) entitled: "Some reflections on what is called postmodernist novels" (*Literature Review*, 1991, No. 5, translated by Nguyen Trung Duc). In 1995, I myself wrote a short account on a chapter by a French author Luc Ferry, under the title "The Decline of the Avantgarde Movement: the Postmodern Arts" (published on the review *Social Sciences Information*, 1995, No. 2). Then, in 1997, a translation introduced an article by a

Dutch professor of philosophy, John Verhaar, "On Postmodernism" (*Literature Review*, 1997, No. 5, translated by Loc Phuong Thuy). But these articles were only short informations, summarily introducing a few Western conceptions of postmodernism, but did not present all the aspects of issue. Three year later, in the review *The Writer* (2000, No. 2), another article by Prof. Phuong Luu appeared under the title *An Effort to Understand the Postmodernism*. As he said, he had to write very briefly to satisfy the requirement of the Review's editorial board. Actually, the article was but 3 pages long, and the author only introduced summarily some Western understandings of postmodernism and did not bring out his own remarks. This time, I attempt to introduce more comprehensively the various conceptions of postmodernism and to bring out my own remarks on how we should understand the concepts "post-modern" and "postmodernism", how their use in literary researches should be made.

## 2. The conceptions of postmodern and postmodernism

There exist at present many conceptions of postmodern(ism). But I will remark on a certain number of differences between

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the conceptions of postmodernism in the arts and the conceptions of postmodernism in various spheres of social activities. In arts, people pay much attention to the significant attributes of the concept, but in spheres of social life, the term is often used as a criterion to marking time in the periodization of history. That is, while in arts the significant attributes will make the criterions to define the postmodernism, in areas of social life the concept of postmodern(ism) exists a priori and does not depend on social characteristics. For example, when people say that the postmodern era is characterized by “conflicts of small scale” and “humane warfare”, it does not mean that these characteristics would define the postmodern era, but it more precisely means that when embarking on the postmodern era, the human society is characterized by conflicts and humane warfares. In this sense, one can expand the above-mentioned expression to any sphere. For example, at a certain moment, we will not be surprised if someone says that “the postmodern era is the era of AIDS”, or “the postmodern era is the era of environmental destruction”, or someone would feel fun to state that “the postmodern era is the era of coexistence with AIDS, with floods, etc.” That is for many people, the postmodern era *is simply taken for granted* as the period after the Second World War. *In this meaning, the word “postmodern” may mean everything, and therefore, it means nothing at all.*

But *in the artistic field*, apart from its meaning indicating time, the term of “postmodern(ism)” is still defined by the characteristics of the artistically significant attributes, although probably this definition has been largely imposed

by literary theorists and critics. And no doubt, as we have seen, the opinions are not convergent. Out of the diversity of interpretations, we can find three main groups of conceptions of postmodernism in arts as follows:

1. *Postmodernism as the high summit of modernism* (conception of Lyotard, Hassan), otherwise saying, it is “the paroxysm of modernism”;
2. *Postmodernism as a return to the tradition to oppose modernism* (conception of Smith, Portoghesi, Lipovetsky, etc.), especially in architecture and plastic arts, in which there is an eclecticism between the modern time and the past (after Christopher Masters);
3. *Postmodernism as an overstepping of modernism*, a new hybrid movement in contrast to modernism (conception of Jencks, Koehler).

These are theoretical conceptions of the essence of postmodernism. As for the characteristics of postmodernism, we can recognize that the majority of opinions emphasizes its irrational or antirational character, its non-determinate, non-subjective character, its fragmentation and mass character. *But, taken together, most of the opinions make modernism the basic reference element to define what is called postmodernism.*

The above-said remark is very important. It shows an incontestable family relation between modernism and postmodernism, despite opinions holding that postmodernism opposes modernism or oversteps modernism. Now we shall confront theoretical opinions with the literary and artistic practices to bring out this family relationship.

### **3. Modernism and postmodernism the common and the particular**

If there has existed postmodernism as

many authors have conceived, then in order to understand what it postmodernism, we should before all examine what was modernism.

“Modernism” was a main concept used to call artistic currents belonging to the avant-garde movement in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This avant-garde movement included concrete literary-artistic currents like expressionism, dadaism [or Dada], surrealism, cubism, abstractionism, etc. Of course, the modern literatures and arts include not only the above-mentioned currents, but also other original exploring tendencies like absurd prose of Kafka and Camus.

As for the concept “postmodernism”, it is being used by many people to designate all the currents in literatures and arts in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *except the traditional realism and socialist realism*. On the whole, people think that postmodern literatures and arts bear an irrationalist character, a non-subjective character, a fragmentation character, an undetermined in space and time character, a mass character, and an eclectic character (that makes combination between the modernity and the tradition). For many people, the most typical feature of postmodernism in architecture and plastic arts is the neo-eclectism and neo-expressionism, a combination between the modernity and the traditional past; in plastic arts, many people also consider op art and pop art as postmodernist currents; in theatre there is the happening; in music there is the rock-and-roll; in literature there are the *nouveau roman* [the “new novel”], the theatre of the absurd, the marvellous realism of Latin America (in which there is a combination of the modern with the marvellous past), with the continuation of the Italian writer Umberto Eco through the novel *The Name*

*of the Rose* (1980), of the Czech writer Milan Kundera, and of the British writer Angela Carter... John Barth (1984) considered G. Garcia Marquez, the famous marvellous-realist writer of Colombia, as “a typical example of postmodernism” (1, p.210). In relation to the socio-economic life, many still associate postmodernism with the tendency to abolish the time and space distance in the globalization process. And in the political domain, to propagandize social democracy, many conceive the characteristic of a new progressive society is a postmodern society, and the characteristic of a postmodern society is democracy, and the characteristic of democracy should be *dialogue*. From this premise, they assert that the state has *to dialogue* democratically with the people instead of *monologuing* in an authoritarian manner (here, postmodernism is not objectively born from modernism, but is a subjective human invention to point out a new era with new ideal that humanity wants to achieve).

Now let us consider whether postmodernism is different from modernism and if the difference exists, where is it.

People say that postmodernism is irrational. But since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of modernist currents have also attached much importance to intuition and sensitivity. The case of dadaism is typical. Reason was radically denied by dadaism through the statement by Tzara: “The rain water of devils falls on my reason” (2, p.143). Surrealism also opposed positivism and rationalism. It advocated a kind of “automatic behaviour of purely psychological character, [...], without any control of the reason”; and it believed in “the omnipotent power of the dream”; and

it also advocated a creative method similar to dadaism. And in expressionism, there existed the fauvist school and “Die Brücke” group which were two schools opposing scientist positivism. In 1929, M. de Vlaminck, a French expressionist painter from the fauvist school, declared: “Science kills painting”. The group “Die Brücke” also aimed to express the sensitive phenomena belonging to instinct. People say that postmodernism is without subject, that in postmodernism the subject has been disintegrated, bearing a fragmentation character. But let us see before the postmodernism, what has been advocated by dadaism for its artistic works: “The new artist creates a world the parts of which are at the same time the means, [...], it is a work without subject” (2, p.267). It was the same for surrealism. In cubism, the subject was more than ever fragmented (see cubist paintings by G. Braque, Picasso). And equally in the works by Kafka and Camus! Their heroes were people without individuality; in Kafka they had not even names. *In this aspect*, Kafka might be called the precursor of *nouveau roman* and of theatre of the absurd.

For the pretendedly undetermined in time and space character of postmodernism, we also remark its presence in surrealist painting or in the works by Kafka (*The Castle*); therefore when Chuchin-Rusov (Russia) said, “the postmodern man is able to be happy when finding himself free to fly in the fourth dimension of culture, without knowing any limits in time and territory, what his friend in the modern times could not think of”, then it is an opinion that is only true in the social reality of a present *globalized world*, but not true in literatures and arts, because since the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Salvador Dali has already allowed us to

travel in a non-temporal and non-spacial fantastic-surrealist world.

And what about the pretended mass character of postmodernism? We may accept the conception holding that the currents of modernist arts in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century somewhat stood aloof from the mass. Tzara has declared that ordinary people could not understand a dadaist work. But now it is also inexact to say that postmodernism is returning to the mass. It is difficult for the mass to understand a number of scenes sometimes extremist of the *happening*, the absurd plays of Beckett or Ionesco, the novels of the *nouveau roman* school, etc.

The opinion holding that modernism advocated monologue while postmodernism advocates dialogue is also inexact. In *nouveau roman* as well as in the absurd plays, dialogues *are quite few*. Encouraging *dialogues* for a democratic system is a logical action, but one cannot for that reason generalize that the characteristic of postmodern societies is “dialogue”. At any time, there exist social systems monopolizing “monologue”. And the idea of “democratic dialogue” is probably the common ideal of all times and is not of any particular times own.

People have also spoken much of an artistic characteristic which is to allow us to differentiate the postmodernism from modernism. It is the presence of an eclecticism under the form of a combination between the modern and the traditional past in postmodernism. But this characteristic is only clearly expressed in architecture, in plastic arts, and partly in literature of marvelous realism. In architecture, postmodernism bears an eclectic character, as represented mainly by Robert Venturi and Michael Graves of the United States, James Stirling and Ralph Erakine of Great Britain, etc., and

in sculpture by Anne and Patrick Poirier, etc (4).

But a closer examination shows that the tendency to return to the past is not of the postmodernist arts own. In previous modernist currents, some have already returned to the soul of primitive people. This is in no way contradictory to the modernist idea of breaking off with the past, because the tradition that modernism wants to break off is that of the bourgeois society in a crisis and not all kind of traditions of humanity. The tendency to return to the savage, primitive living, has become one among main tendencies of the artistic life at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Probably, *for the particular case architecture*, the difference between postmodernism and modernism has been the most obvious, because in the postmodernist architectural currents which strongly develop since the 1970s, eclecticism has been expressed in the combination of the modern and the traditional past to oppose the sterile rigidity and the abstract rationalism of the modern architecture in which *the international style* could be considered as the summit of this architecture.

And in politico-military field, some think that war is the characteristic of the modern time, while conflict is the characteristic of the postmodern time. But what occurred in Iraq in 1991 (the Gulf War), in the former Yugoslavia in the beginning of the 1990s, in Kosovo (of New Yugoslavia) in 1999, in Afganistan at the end of 2001 (the fight against terrorism), and recently in Iraq in March 2003, are real wars and not conflicts (and after all, war is but a form of conflict).

Thus, *theoretically speaking*, most of *what* has been prescribed by postmodernism's advocates have already

existed in modernism. Therefore here, in the field of arts, on what basis can we differentiate the postmodernism from modernism?

In my opinion, though many want to hold that postmodernism was born *from* modernism and not *after* modernism, as its prefix "*post*" points out, the word "postmodern" willy-nilly cannot avoid a meaning of designating time; and people, when refer to postmodern, willy-nilly have to make an association with the stage of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *after* modernism. Similarly, the notion "modern" willy-nilly is used to designate the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the two notions "modern" and "postmodern", *apart from meanings* having an artistic connotation, still have *a connotation* designating time.

One may add that the character designating time is a sure and *most consistent character* of the two above-mentioned movements, because in artistic features, both modernism and postmodernism *have not a unified character*.

Let us examine the case of modernism first. As for the opinion holding that modernist currents are of rationalist character in opposition to postmodernist currents of irrationalist character, I have demonstrated that it is inexact, because a number modernist currents were also deeply imbued with sensitivity and irrationalism (dadaism, surrealism, some expressionist schools). But there existed also some other modernist currents that were very rationalist, scientist, like cubism in plastic arts, futurism in literature and plastic arts. Thus, even in modernism, the currents were not of the same characters, but even sometimes they opposed one another, like the dadaism and the surrealism which opposed scientific

rationalism of cubism, of futurism and of geometrical abstractionism. Even to the viewpoint of many persons holding that modernism tended to serve the elite and that postmodernism has to correct this tendency by promoting the mass culture and arts, there existed the opposing opinions. Luc Ferry held that avant-garde arts (i.e. modernist arts) were not the elite arts separated from the mass (5, p.259). And, as I have demonstrated above, not all postmodernist currents and tendencies were close to the mass. Perhaps this mass character was true only in the case of advertisement art in pop art and of rock and roll music. In short, the term "modernism" has not been used to designate *any* unified current.

As for the concept "postmodernism", it has not been used to designate a consistent current or tendency in literature and arts or in the social life. It has been largely used in literature, arts, politics, economy and other social sciences as well as in the various fields of social life, etc. Why was there this situation? R. Boyne and Ali Rattansi tried to explain by arguing that all the fields of sciences and social life had a common condition: this was a crisis in the expression (1, p.121). But nowadays, according to Alvin Toffler, it is the time of "non-mass production"; therefore in my opinion, the use of the term "postmodernism" *cannot be determined by a sole condition*. More concretely, when the postmodernist literature and arts are considered "the paroxysmal experimentation of modernism", then a postmodern politics is considered "democratic" and "pluralist" one, and is not a paroxysm of the modern politics. And one can not say that both these fields are determined by "a crisis in the expression".

Thus, the modernism in arts is *an*

*encompassing term* used to designate various currents *except the traditional realism*, diverse in artistic characteristics but similar in time characteristic, i.e. it is used to designate literary-artistic currents belonging to the avant-garde movement in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but nevertheless still having in common a characteristic bearing both temporal and artistic dimensions, that is to say they all have a tendency towards *searching innovation, breaking with Western bourgeois tradition*. And the postmodernism in arts is also *an encompassing term* used by many to designate various currents, diverse in artistic characteristics but similar in time characteristic, i.e. It is used to designate literary-artistic currents *except the traditional realism*, appearing in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *after* the time of modernism, and having also the tendency towards *searching innovation*, even towards *extreme innovation, to an ultra-modern degree*.

However, in artistic characteristics, the two above-mentioned movements still have a certain degree of difference. As I have analyzed, postmodernism has its germs in modernism. Despite having a common theoretical basis, their differences are expressed in the degree of paroxysmal experimentation of postmodernist tendencies in comparison with the modernist currents in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *nouveau roman* was a paroxysmal experimentation of the dadaism and surrealism; theatre of the absurd was a paroxysmal experimentation of the absurd prose of Kafka and Camus; and the marvelous realism was a paroxysmal experimentation of the expressionism in arts, etc. Thus, if we do not take into account the excessively enlarged

meanings, and *apart from the special case of postmodernist architecture* - which returned to the tradition to oppose the abstract and rigid rationalism and the nonconformist attitude of *the international style* in modern architecture -, then we can say that the appreciation holding that ***postmodernism is the paroxysmal stage of modernism seems the most appropriate and encompassing. And this degree of paroxysm is the characteristic to differentiate postmodernism from modernism.*** Because of this degree of paroxysm, sometimes postmodernism was also called *meta-* or *ultra-modernism*. In short, in the concept of “postmodernism”, the prefix “post” has both the meaning of “*after*” and “*ultra*”. All the artistic characteristics of postmodernism can be found in modernism; the sole difference is that in the postmodernism, these characteristics are pushed to a critical degree. All attempts to neatly differentiate postmodernism from modernism, even to an opposition between them, lead only to the imposed forced assessments, at least in the field of literature and arts.

But why are the philosophers and theorists and critics making such a lot of fuss over the postmodernism? Since 1934, when Federico de Onis brought out the term “postmodernism”, he only considered it as an alternative of the modernism in decorative arts in the period 1905-1914. And political philosophers used the concept of postmodernism only to negate modern rationalism in the Enlightenment Age together with its heritages, in which there were Hegelianism and Marxism. But up untill nowadays, the philosophers and literary theorists and critics have gone too far *in their conception* of an opposition between postmodernism and modernism *in every field*. Has the term “postmodernism” a strange attraction? Or

is it simply a fashion in *the mania for new concepts*?

I think that if it is not a mania for new concepts, at least it is an easy attitude among philosophers and theorists-critics. Some have simply deduced the concept of “postmodern society” from the concept of “post-industrial society”, in following a simple formal logic that once industrial society was the modern one, then the post-industrial society should be the postmodern society. In other case, others could easily attribute the label of “postmodernist” to a literary work simply because in the authors commentary on his own work, he has said some words on postmodernism, while his work had nothing to do with postmodernism in the meaning attributed by critics. The case of the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco is an example. Eco is an Italian professor of semiotics, and his novel is an illustration of his structuralist semiotics. One should add that Eco's structuralist semiotics is different from the structuralist theory of Lévi-Strauss in a point: While Lévi-Strauss conceived the artistic work as “an object endowed with precise properties” created in a close and distinct structure and “has the stiffness of a crystal”, Eco advocated an unlimited analysis of the signs, upheld the creative role of the reader in the analysis of the signs to interpret the literary work, especially for works composed in the open structure. In 1967, his book *The Open Work* was criticized by Lévi-Strauss. That was why the viewpoint of Eco was somewhat close to the viewpoint of poststructuralism. However, his viewpoint still remained different from poststructuralism in the fact that, while he held that the open work was only *a kind of deliberate creative poetics, mainly of modern literature and arts*, and not all the

compositions are open ones, poststructuralism conceived that *any* information act has a slipping of meaning, and therefore it bears a polysemantic and open character, independent from the will of the author, that is why readers (or hearers) can interpret it in many different ways. Thus Eco remained a structuralist semiotician and not a poststructuralist philosopher. Since 1971, he became a semiotic professor at Bologna University (Italy) and *The Name of the Rose* (1980) was but a work illustrating his semiotic theory.

The contagion of the concept “postmodernism” is spreading to Vietnam. In the present age of information, we should be aware of the appearance of new terms. Their study will be useful to us when we make contact with research achievements from foreign countries. But their knowledge must be conducted in a thorough and critical manner. In the case of the word “postmodern(ism)”, we should study it in the multilateral correlation in order to reveal all its dimensions, and finally to grasp it and thus to be competent to assess whether this term was used correctly or not among the foreign authors, and to discern “amateurish” uses and abuses of many persons in “the mania for new concepts” which may become very contagious in the era of information and globalization as nowadays, a contagious disease that can spread to economic and political spheres and vice versa as I have analysed above.

As an example, let us consider the abuse of the concept “postmodern(ism)” with an ideological intention in the philosophico-political domain. Here I want to speak of the case of Lyotard.

#### **4. From an artistic conception to a philosophico - political intention**

In the work *économie libidinale* (1974), the French philosopher Francois Lyotard

criticized the Marxism as the one which did not concerned itself with libidinal aspiration of each individual. He asserted that, by repressing this aspiration, Marxism had revealed its potential authoritarianism. This was a book initiating the criticism of “universal theories” (“théories universelles”) that he called “grand narratives” (“grands récits”) in his most famous book *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979).

In the above-mentioned book, Lyotard held that knowledge was propagated by the theories that he called “narrative” (“récit”); and the universal theories beginning by rationalism of the Enlightenment in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the theories of early 20<sup>th</sup> century that he called “grand narratives”, often had the ambition of explaining every thing of the world, staying beyond any criticisms and revisions; they asserted themselves as irrefutable theories for ever and, therefore, became themselves authoritarian theories. And Lyotard took Marxism as an example. Then, he decided to replace the “grand narratives” with “little narratives” (“petits récits”), i.e. to make use of individual motives to replace the universal theories, because, for him, “little narratives” had the capacity of responding to concrete goals and problems of each historical time of society, stimulated the diffusion and creation of knowledge, encouraged the creativity of each individual. Thus “little narrative” was the postmodern condition of society. This condition became what he called “paganism”. That is to say, according to him, in such a so-called “postmodern” society as our contemporary one, each individual had not the need to act following any absolute criterions, but only following the conditions of the concrete



situation. And when a coincidence occurred with the collapse of communism in East Europe, many Western philosophers enthusiastically stated that here Lyotard's criticism of "grand narratives" had taken effect!

No doubt, the conception of Lyotard in particular and of so-called postmodernism in philosophy in general had been criticized by many people. According to Stuart Sim, on the whole, the postmodern philosophy can be defined as *an updated version of scepticism*, it was rather more concerned with rejecting all other theories together with their ambitions for truth, than making effort to build a positive theory for itself. In this sense, the poststructuralism is also considered as a member of postmodern philosophy, for it opposes resolutely the ambition for truth of the structuralism, opposes the opinion supporting the firm and invariable structural-systematic relation between the significant and the signified in the conception of structuralism; and it conceives the world as formed by differences and capacities of chaotic, paradoxical, polysemantic, unsystematic and open combination. Therefore, postmodern philosophy may be considered as a philosophical development in order to undermine the authoritarian imperatives in our culture, at both the level of theories and the level of politics (7). We should know, however, that poststructuralism is a theory for analyzing the work, but if we consider it as a postmodern philosophical theory, it does not mean that all its objects of analysis are postmodern products, for if it be so, then all literary works would be postmodern ones, because the poststructuralism considers any information act as a slipping of meaning, that is it opens a limitless capacity for the

interpretation and all of works will be objects for a poststructuralist analysis.

But in Sim's opinion, postmodernism, to some extent, would become its own "grand narrative", and in its turn, it would become a target for criticism. Indeed, the postmodernist philosophers have too much exaggerated the decline of "grand narratives" in this world called "postmodern", while in fact we can clearly see that in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world witnessed a more eloquent coronation of great "grand narratives" than ever before: there are "grand narratives" like globalism, "global Americanization", extremist nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and one cannot overlook another terrible "grand narrative" which is the international terrorism!

Lyotard himself attributed to postmodernism another vague meaning when he held that in the history of culture, postmodernism and modernism had replaced each other and would continue to do so in endless cycles! Thus, according to Lyotard, we have had the postmodernism in the past, like Rabelais (the writer of the French Renaissance, 1494-1553), or Laurence Sterne (the English writer, 1713-1768), and we shall have also *many* modernisms and postmodernisms in the future (5,p.14). And following the theory of Lyotard, now we are already entering into the *post-postmodern world* (or the *modern world*), for the humanity is witnessing the reconstruction of what Lyotard calls "grand narratives"! In the end, with such an argument, the concept of "postmodernism" is drawn into a vicious circle without any exit, where its meaning is difficult to attain a convincing preciseness.

The easy spread of the concept

“postmodern(ism)” has led many people to receive in an entirely passive way, or even in an *imitative way*, the Lyotard's viewpoint on “grand narrative-little narrative” or the Baudrillard's viewpoint on the simulation of reality that is *hyperreality*. For example, an overseas Vietnamese resident thinks that, to join the world literature, Vietnam would do better to reject some ideological “grand narratives” such as follows: “Vietnam is a height of human intellect and good sense”, “The Vietnamese nation is a heroic one”... Here, the viewpoint has rather a political nuance than a literary one, and the appeal to join the postmodernism is also an appeal of “grand narrative” character in a gratuitous and easy way. If there exists a real postmodernism *in literature*, then the stimulation to join it does not necessarily ask such a *political motive*. On the other side, if following the conception of Lyotard on never ending alternate cycles between the modern and postmodern, how can we know which one is more innovative to advocate it? Because the coronation of a certain modernist current would be then as glorious as a postmodernist one. Meanwhile, those who advocate the postmodernism are not conscious of the reality that other philosophers have seriously criticized the viewpoint of Lyotard, and these philosophers hold that the postmodernist viewpoint of Lyotard on the negation of “grand narrative” is also a “grand narrative”. And those advocates of postmodernism do not see that when Lyotard spoke of postmodernism in literature and arts, then he also spoke that it was the summit of modernism of the avant-garde arts; they do not see that the deep origin of Lyotard's philosophical thoughts is his position against rationalism of the Enlightenment Century. And this

fact, in the last instance, has no relations to modernist currents of avant-garde arts in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [That is, the modernist currents of the avant-garde arts were not “grand narratives”. This means also that the so-called “postmodern philosophy” has a specific meaning, it cannot wholly explain the concept of “postmodern(ism)” as used in arts.] Moreover, when many are advocating the preservation and development of cultural diversity in the current process of globalization (even Lyotard also held the preservation at any price of differences in the postmodern world to oppose authoritarianism [a “grand narrative”], but there he spoke of the politico-philosophical area), then the call for “postmodernizing literature” will run the risk of drawing literature into a uniformizing of the “grand narrative” kind. And thereby, the risk of being platitudinous and stereotyped will be unavoidable. In the end, we may come to a paradoxical conclusion: if postmodernism is the abandon of the “grand narrative”, then the very refusal of postmodernism may also be considered as an act bearing a no less postmodern character than the repudiation of the “grand narrative”!

The above-mentioned analyses show that the concept “postmodern(ism)” has many very different connotations, depending on philosophical, political, military, cultural, or artistic and literary fields. They also show how the term “postmodern(ism)” has a gratuitous and easy character. If we do not differentiate its nuances and do not pay attention to intentions which sometimes bear a politico-ideological character of the user, and make use of the term in an arbitrary manner, and easily transfer it from one field to another, then we shall come to deviated conclusions

lacking in persuasion. We must remember that until now, its meaning has not been completely and unanimously accepted, and many persons do not still approve it or do still criticize it.

### 5. Conclusion

In short, we have to distinguish the concept “postmodern” in the sphere of social life with “postmodern” in the field of arts. At the same time, we have to recognize that the arbitrary and easy use of this term in the social life has spread contagiously to the artistic field. *Many people simply attribute the label of “postmodern” to all creations outside the traditional realism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only because in their opinion, those creations appeared in the age that they called “postmodern era” for granted.* Thus, in this way, “postmodern” may have too many different and indefinite meanings, but just thereby, it has also no meaning at all. This situation has brought ambiguity to defining the status of contemporary arts as I have analysed above. Here I can only state that, *in the field of arts*, despite different conceptions of “postmodern(ism)” among many persons, we may conclude that it is more exactly to use this concept only to designate the summit or the “paroxysm” of modernism; and it still bears a temporal character to designating the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the meaning of “paroxysm”, the term of “postmodern” can be entirely replaced with the term “modern”, or more precisely, with the term “meta-modern” or “ultra-modern”. Besides, we should be vigilant against the abuse of the concept “postmodern” which is being used fairly popularly in the current socio-political life, and most of these cases of abuse only want to make impressions of the “ultra-new” (or “ultra-modern”) character of the events. Just because of this abuse, the concept “postmodern” runs the risk of becoming

platitudinous, leads to becoming meaningless because of bearing too many different and indefinite meanings, and thereby loses its effectiveness and usability.

For my own part, I think that we should use the concept “postmodern(ism)” only for architecture and painting. As for other fields, especially for literature, we should not use it, and instead, we shall make use of the concept “modern(ism)” or at the most, we shall use the concept “ultra- or meta-modern(ism)” which will be precise and very appropriate. *It is not necessary that, whenever to make impressions of the newest, one should have to recourse to the term “postmodern(ism)”, and then to be at a loss in making efforts to find the characteristics in order to ascribe them to the term to demonstrate its legitimate existence, but in fact, these characteristics are not of its own.*

### REFERENCE

1. See Mihaela Constantines. *Forme in miscare: Postmodernismul*, Bucuresti, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, 1999 (text in Romanian).
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3. Quoted from L. P. Evstigneeva and R. N. Evstigneev. “*Ekonomicheskaja globalizacija i postmodern*”, *Obshchestvenye Nauki i Sovremenost*, No. 1, 2000, p. 5 (text in Russian).
4. See *Microsoft Encarta 99*, the entry “Postmodernism”.
5. See Luc Ferry. *Homo Aestheticus*, Paris, Ed. Grasset et Fasquelle, 1990, p. 259 (text in French).
6. See Stuart Sim. “Postmodernism and Philosophy”, in *Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (edited by Stuart Sim), Ed. Routledge, New York, 1999.