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Postmodernism in Context: Perspectives of a Structural Change in Society, Literature, and Literary Criticism

Dietmar Voss and Jochen C. Schütze

The participants in the discussion seem to agree on one thing: that there is the greatest possible disagreement as to what postmodernism is. The term itself is unspecific, unsuitable to express the self-understanding of an era.¹ It resists comprehensive definition and appears, at the same time, to accept content so arbitrary that some commentators are deluded into regarding this arbitrariness itself as an essential characteristic of postmodernism. On the other hand, the debate is characterized by a rigid polarization of undifferentiated supporting and negating positions. A prominent example of this is the controversy between Jürgen Habermas, who tends to equate postmodernism with the anti-Enlightenment and neoconservatism,² and Jean-François Lyotard, who favors postmodernism's strict examination of Enlightenment thought.³ Other authors give expression to the "searching movement of postmodern thought"⁴ by renouncing any monolithic view of the epoch and by following individual strands instead, which, nonetheless,

1. Michael Köhler, "Postmodernismus': Ein begriffsgeschichtlicher Überblick," *Amerikastudien* 22.1 (1977).

2. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Moderne — ein unvollendetes Projekt," *Kleine politische Schriften I-IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 44-46.

3. Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" trans. Régis Durand, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

4. Albrecht Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne. Vernunftkritik nach Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

can be bundled into a “cultural dominant.”⁵

In attempting to bring the discussion beyond merely fashionable attitudes and the dictates of the *Zeitgeist* to cultural and critical concreteness, one thing proves most important: if “postmodernism” is not to be understood solely as a phenomenon of style (as, for example, the impassioned debates on architectural theory suggest) but rather as “cultural logic” that correlates political-economic and social-psychological changes in late capitalism, then a distinction between critical and affirmative aspects should be possible. Of course, contemporary diagnoses are no longer limited to simple opposition in the classical pattern, toward whose normative claims and value-positing postmodernism shows the utmost skepticism.

The following essay is not a research report — the necessary historical and categorical distance is lacking for such a study — but an attempt to relate structural changes in several areas of society usually observed separately or taken as an occasion for aesthetic fascination, so that they shed light on each other.

I. Aspects of Structural Change in Society and Literature after Modernism

The Aesthetics of Disappearance

The critical intelligence of late-bourgeois contemporary culture is increasingly caught in the vortex of a *Zeitgeist* as Paul Virilio formulated it with the title “Esthétique de la Disparition.”⁶ That neatly summarized the postmodern tendency of contemporary philosophizing. Its milestones are the “loss of the real, of power, and even of the social,”⁷ the end of “the subject” and its “great stories of speculation and emancipation,”⁸ “the end of production”⁹ as well as “the end of history” and the “end of (the time of — D. V.) duration.”¹⁰ In light of the ideological boom of anti-Enlightenment thought and of skepticism toward reason, it is tempting to subject the above terms to an ideological critique and categorization and to reduce them to — certainly existing —

5. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 55.

6. Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Der reine Krieg* (West Berlin: Merve, 1984) 37.

7. Jean Baudrillard, *Agonie des Realen* (West Berlin: Merve, 1978) 41.

8. Lyotard 36, 30.

9. Jean Baudrillard, *Der symbolische Tausch und der Tod* (Munich, 1982) 22.

10. Virilio and Lotringer 50.

apocalyptic, eschatological, and theologico-mystical obsessions of "yesterday." But for a concrete, materialist critique of ideology, it is not enough simply to identify a class psychology or to insist upon the fundamental reflective and communicative characteristics of modern subjectivity.¹¹ Our purpose here is, without forgetting their mystical elements, to bring postmodern philosophical positions into productive contact with altered situations and structures of late capitalism, in order to render new modes of writing in contemporary literature and their seismographic capabilities comprehensible.

At present there is no lack of dizzying visions: from the diagnostically intended reduction of society's core structure to a net of language games or discourses which can be dealt with only by means of a pragmatic "agonistic";¹² through Baudrillard's obsessive thesis that the political economy of capitalism has reached its "aesthetic stage," in which "the system" functions only by virtue of a simulated spectacle of all that it once was (production, exploitation, etc.)¹³ to Virilio's centrifugal vision of the postmodern city no longer populating space but "the time of changing locations," having become a switching station for velocities, interchangeable with other locations.¹⁴ As bizarre as such speculations may be, they have a common and comprehensible basis, if one examines the material that they set in motion: the innovative and transformational processes of the last decades which have appeared in the course of increasing automation of social production, mechanization or digitalization of administrative labor, the development of electronic media and computerized communications systems, etc. We shall stress only those aspects from the fabric of perspectives of technological innovations that could mark a qualitative difference from classical modernity — the modernity of capitalism as well as of art and literature.

Modern Society's Imagination Spaces

The realistic novel of the nineteenth century already belongs to literary modernism inasmuch as it takes the prosaic constitution of the "fortuitous individual" as its content and as a foil for its formal

11. Cf. Jürgen Habermas and A. Honneth, "Der Affekt gegen das Allgemeine. Zu Lyotards Konzept der Postmoderne," *Merkur* 38.8 (1984).

12. Lyotard 16.

13. Baudrillard, *Der symbolische Tausch* 54-56.

14. Virilio and Lotringer 61-63.

processes.¹⁵ *Time* becomes the domain of fictional construction for the novel in the style of Balzac, Keller, or Flaubert, in contrast to the epics and dramas of bourgeois classicism. It simulates social time as qualitative, organic, developmental time. Blooming into a (re-)experienceable sense-continuum, the imagination of time develops the suggestive power to overcome the “unmitigated desolation of its matter,” and the fictional atmosphere of a chronological, dialectically mediated “stream of life cancels out the accidental nature of their experiences and isolated nature.”¹⁶ On the strength of the discursive effect of a closed organic time continuum that answers the modern reader’s insatiable hunger for meaning, the realistic novel can finally “strip off the prosaic form” from its figures, as Hegel demanded,¹⁷ and portray the individual’s fate as “typical” in Lukács’s sense.¹⁸ On the way to the typical figurations of social (class) characters, “the portrayal of the fortuitous individual demands the creation of an *artificial* (social — D. V.) *milieu*.”¹⁹ The novel is forced, according to its logic of form, to orient itself toward social spaces corresponding to the basic character of *that* familial space in which individual and class history were still mediated in a particular way, as most recently in the bourgeois interiors of historicism and art nouveau.²⁰ Its imaginary and discursive effects intend to portray “society” as a *comprehensible image space* of typical social characters and milieus.

The projects of modern literature of pouring the prose of an authentic socialization into a poetic form (for example, Proust, Benjamin, Nabokov) operate under the assumption that a privileged place can be found in the realm of the family in which a unique correspondence is formed between bourgeois class history and individual cathexis, between signs of social prestige and signs of desire. What distinguishes

15. Cf. Ferenc Fehér, “Is the Novel Problematic? A Contribution to the Theory of the Novel,” trans. Anne-Marie Dibon, *Telos* 15 (1973): 64. This “fortuitous individual” develops in industrial capitalism with its periodic crises which reveal that the modern relationship between personal and social (class) character is necessarily a coincidental one. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Werke* (Berlin [GDR]) 3: 76.

16. Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 125.

17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971) 15: 393.

18. Georg Lukács, *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1970) 128.

19. Fehér 65.

20. Cf. G. Selle, *Jugendstil und Kulturindustrie. Zur Ökonomie und Ästhetik des Kunstgewerbes um 1900* (Ravensburg, 1974) 67-69.

them from aesthetic realism, however, is the “subjectification of time,”²¹ the emphasis on the “experienced moment” that breaks open the quantified stream of time. The experimental novelist, too, “smashes his clock to set off in search for a new time no longer measurable with chronometers. . . . Consecutivity (to which the traditional novel still clung — D. V.) melts into simultaneity . . . and the times are confused with each other.”²² For Musil, the realistic narrative with its “unbroken thread,” the “orderly succession of events,” is no longer at all adequate for the depiction of social processes but is rather a symptom of an idealistically lived personal identity; and it is the novel’s readers who are “storytellers in their own basic relationship to themselves” in order to feel “somehow sheltered in chaos.”²³ Advanced montage novels by Dos Passos or Döblin entwine sequences of events that have the most differing times; they allow daydreams, work, love acts, street happenings, etc., to collide, each with its own rhythm, becoming simultaneous in the literary imagination, condensing to a “mythical panorama” in Eliot’s words. Such an image space is emancipated from the horizon of the individually experienceable, but not from the spatial paradigms of society. The montage novel can be considered an attempt to give the imagination of social spatiality a total and current form no longer dependent on the “necessary anachronism” of its subjects.²⁴

Explosive Spaces of the Collective

For Brecht, the socioeconomic function of a capitalistic factory was no longer visible in its photograph;²⁵ for him, the factory was indubitably important as a particular spatial construction of a collective that functioned manifestly, perceivably, and situationally. As a greenhouse of collective productive power, processes of cooperative learning and collective innervation, the factory was valid as a paradigm of a social space which (according to Brecht, Benjamin, E. Jünger, the Surrealists, and the Futurists) promised to burst apart the “drawing room” of the bourgeois order of life. In related collective spaces, such as the movie house, the metropolitan street, the sport arena, etc., the explosive

21. K. H. Bohrer, *Plötzlichkeit. Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 180.

22. Walter Jens, *Statt einer Literaturgeschichte* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1978) 23-24.

23. Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. A. Friesé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978) 2: 650.

24. Hegel 3: 359.

25. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967) 18: 161.

potential of the masses was to be developed and organized. The special aspect of the mass-occupied spaces of modernity was that, on the one hand, they represented spaces charged and streaming with collective instinctual and emotional tension, and, on the other hand, they virtually upheld the relationship to social being, to the current “front” of the historical process. As a result, they generated “authentic” connections between historical signs and signs of desire.

All of this points to an unrelinquishable sociohistorical referent of modernist imaginative strategies. Already in Baudelaire’s poetry, “the secret presence of a crowd is demonstrable almost everywhere.”²⁶ And montage novels such as *Manhattan Transfer* or *Berlin Alexanderplatz* outline “society” no longer from the experiential or spatial perspective of fictional representative individuals but rather from the polydimensional spatial or textual perspective of a fictional collective subject. They imagine “society” no longer as a dialectically ordered, suggestively unified space but as a disturbingly open, chaotic/anarchistic space, which could be mastered only by collective forces. The texts function, so to speak, as a substitute for a socially still utopian organizational power of the collective. Nevertheless, even the avant-garde’s image spaces are still an “attempt to give the whole in particulars; of course, the whole as chaos”²⁷ The particular and the times stand in a panic coexistence.

Empty and Homogeneous Time

A rather inconspicuous sociohistorical referent of literary modernism is the time structure of industrial production. Before the hegemony of commodity production, people’s concept of time was bound to qualitative cycles and — specifically respective to social position, religion, and field of work — molded by the inherent rhythms of concrete procedures, impingent nature, and communal festivities. With industrial capitalism, however, a chronometric, homogeneously linear, universal time prevails — discernible in the emergence of the concept of everyday and, in the eighteenth century, of the pocket watch.²⁸ All activities become socially synchronizable; but time becomes an extensity

26. Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 257.

27. Günther Anders, *Mensch ohne Welt. Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur* (Munich, 1984) 20.

28. Cf. Klaus Laermann, “Alltags-Zeit. Über die unauffälligste Form sozialen Zwangs,” *Kursbuch* 41 (1975): 88-90.

from now on calculable and utilizable, "satanic time" (Baudelaire) and "empty time" (Benjamin). That is, the social organization of time separates from the limited, living constitution of the body and emotions and from their intrinsic time. Conversely, the economy promotes time to an essential factor of social progress — as Marx showed in his analysis of the problem of relative surplus value and the rate of capital circulation. Whether one considers the social imagination in terms of organic developmental time or anarchic simultaneity, i.e., whether one thinks of the realistic or the montage novel, a constantly recurring topos of literary modernism is to oppose the dominant time model and to imagine forms of time decisively in accord with the rhythms of individual life, of the body and of emotions.

As bitterly as the protagonists of opposing modernist strategies feud with each other as "decadent" (Lukács) or "psychological" (Döblin, Brecht), their common semiotic terrain is now becoming visible: the literary imagination of "society" in spatial arrangements, the orientation toward paradigmatic social spaces, the imaginary evocation of qualitative, oppositional chronicities, the impulse to represent the whole of society in a work, even where precisely the splits, accidents, and reifications are regarded as representative.

The Implosion of the Masses' Spaces

This common semiotic arrangement emerges into view at the moment when it is itself historically undermined. For apparently, with the presently dawning era of automated production and media-electronic networking, a far-reaching structural change is taking place in the spatial and chronological coordinates of the social field. When science becomes a direct force of production and reduces the work character of social production to a self- or computer-regulated system requiring virtually no more than repair, inspection, and regulation,²⁹ then any sensually tangible collectivity vanishes from the production process. The work of directing the flow of data at the terminal of a computer network, of watching the monitors of an automatic plant, etc., are highly socialized activities, of course. But the context of their cooperation is

29. Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. and ed. David McLellan (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 141-42, 144-46. In the FRG, the production of industrial robots expanded by 222% between 1980 and 1984. At the same time, employment in services rose to about 9 million, nearly reaching the number of production workers, which sank to 10.3 million from the 1979 level of 11.5 million.

“spiritualized” or “mediatized” (the video conference as optimum of concrete communication!), and the automated workers or even designers are in reality isolated as “tele-manufacturers” and could be, in principle, cottage industry workers.³⁰ If the collective (machine) hall was the general matrix of productive work in the era of the classical industries, then in the era of automation it will be the *electronic test pattern* which sends digitalized decisions into the uncalculability of the social function-system and is, at the same time, itself a testing medium. Production and the social sphere themselves do not disappear as a result of this, as Baudrillard contends,³¹ but the perceptibly significant spatial coordinates of the social context of production do disappear: the “factory” disappears as a privileged spatial structure of unmediated socialization, as a tangibly identifiable place of production; the “machine” as a perceptible concrete manifestation of *capital fixe*, whose workers appeared as “appendages” (computers no longer possess any machine-like, functionally manifest sensuality);³² and the collective as a sensually graspable form of bodily and situationally mediated interaction.

With that, the semiotic of social space worked out during modernity and characterized by the entwinement of sensual, affective significance and “authentic” signs of history breaks down. Admittedly, thoroughly new kinds of spaces emerge in the course of so-called postmodern culture — Jameson speaks of “postmodern hyperspace.”³³ The spatial scenarios of the traffic-free city center, however, turn the “authentic” experience of the metropolis or of history into streamlined commodities. Thus they further extend the diffusion, inherent in automation, of social space and its special semiotics. On the one hand, the original metropolitan streets and cinemas are becoming extinct. On the other hand, the complex meanings of “history” and “metropolis” are present only in an aggregate of commercial simulation in the “hyperspaces” of the postmodern city with its arbitrary sprinkling of architectural quotations from various epochs and cultures, its artificial bazaars and bistros, its covered malls of plastic, and computer game rooms. That is why the obtrusive impressionable sign language of the “trade in experience”³⁴

30. See Dieter Prokop, *Heimliche Machtergreifung. Neue Medien erobern die Arbeitswelt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984) 191-93.

31. Baudrillard, *Der symbolische Tausch* 32-34.

32. Cf. Jameson.

33. Jameson 80.

34. See Prokop 87-89.

lacks any direct sociohistorical referent. The “implosion”³⁵ of the collective’s and of production’s social space is complemented by the loss of the sociohistorical referent in existing space.

The Loss of Function of Linear Time

Like social space, the social time of big industry is now caught by a critical whirlpool. As increasingly conflict-ridden as it is under capitalism, the abstract quantity of labor time is, in the automated production process, as Marx predicted,³⁶ no longer a suitable measure of social value or mediation of individual work, and also not a usable measure of wealth. For if the socially necessary work is increasingly assimilated into a regulative, scientific service, then its “value” is no longer measurable in terms of expenditure of effort. Additionally, mediatization and decentralization of automated work make flexible-time shifts possible, which will undermine the traditional, temporal order based on the fixed workday. In electronic and computer-based media, communicative and remembering processes hardly require their own time expenditure, and data extremely far apart in space and time can be instantly quoted and universally exchanged. Even the military threat in nuclear age imperialism no longer requires an accumulation of time for mobilization, nor can it count on a time schedule for destruction.³⁷ With the atomic bomb, the “absolute weapon” (Virilio) has been found, and its implicit threat is omnipresent, permanently instant, and universal. Extended time or history, of course, does not simply disappear, as Virilio contends.³⁸ But, in the era of computer, media, and nuclear technologies, homogeneous, linear time will lose its ruling, socially centering role, and social time will be divided into segments of qualitatively distinct times. If someday, when capitalism itself loses its determining role, “disposable time becomes the measure of wealth,”³⁹ its inner measurement cannot be “homogeneous, empty time” any longer.

The Disappearance of the “Aesthetics” of the Social

The postmodern “aesthetics of disappearance” has its rational core in the tendency for industrial modernism’s “aesthetic,” spatial-temporal

35. Cf. Baudrillard 65.

36. See Marx 144-45.

37. Virilio and Lotringer 32-33, 58-59.

38. See Virilio and Lotringer 50.

39. Marx 145.

forms of perception of production and of the social to disappear. This objective loss of perceptibility correlates with the fact that experienceable everyday life is molded less than ever by collective and action-oriented experiences and increasingly by the media industry's floods of images and grids of simulation that program "experience" independent of any activity.⁴⁰ In the context of automation and electronic communication, the imaginary is realized increasingly outside the aesthetic realm. As a universal functional value, it enters into social activity and experience. What once belonged to the characteristic fascination of modernism — like the image of the antiquated in the new, of the paradoxical coincidence in an anarchic metropolitan space, of the sudden interruption of the flow of time — must lose its meaning when, for example, "antiquation" is part of the urbanization program of the culture industry, or when "sudden interruption" becomes routine practice in the media. In this situation, the imaginative practices of modern art and literature lose their semiotic innocence and their critical and expressive meaning. Given the "implosion" of the spatial-temporal forms of the social field, it comes as no surprise when, once again, the "death of art" is pronounced as a *fait accompli*.⁴¹

Reorientation of Literary Practices

Aside from its still modernist, provocatively necrophile aspects, Baudrillard also fails to consider new literary practices, new strategies of writing, and new text structures that, in marked contrast to modernism, could prove adequate to the "condition postmoderne." We have in mind, for example, Wolfgang Koeppen's last trailblazing prose work, *Jugend* (1976); Elfriede Jelinek's recent novels, *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983) and *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* (1985), as well as new forms of fictional arrangements such as Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1983). An analytic examination of these literary texts makes apparent first that, despite all their heterogeneity, they are comparable in eschewing the production of an *original* "poetic sign," the creation of an exquisite metaphoric arc of language, and their *own* linguistic image space of imaginary representation. Nor do they follow the "constructivist" practices of modernism in the style of Eliot or Joyce, who created a broken and paradoxical image space of language by employing

40. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *Metaphilosophie. Prolegomena* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) 246-48, and N. Postman, *Wir amüsieren uns zu Tode* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

41. See Baudrillard 118-19.

mythologizing quotations from classical literary works. Neither an experiencing self, hidden in grammatical forms, nor a collective self latent in the web of artistic construction speaks from their texts: a collective “we” whose brittle objectification is the “central fact” of modern art, according to Adorno.⁴² At most a “you” can be heard from them — explicitly in Calvino’s book, whose protagonist is the fictional reader who slogs his/her way from one novel fragment to the next, getting sucked into the vortex of the novel’s discourse. In that, the paradigmatic claim is made to turn the recipient into an actual part of a textual occurrence with the literary text serving as catalyst rather than objectification.

This literature goes beyond modernism in that it no longer proceeds from imagining the social field either as “sensual experience” or as artistic construction. It rather proceeds from the social world as a (*meta*)-lingual semiotic net, as a world organized and specified by “mythical metalanguages” and “sign functions,”⁴³ before all aesthetic experience and construction. Advanced literature contains the reflection that the often mentioned “sensual immediacy” of the poetic word is no longer valid in a functionally imaginary and thoroughly mediatized world, and that the corresponding ambition merely contributes to the “secondary mythologization” of language. Thus it frees itself from the pretension of the “literary signs” (Roland Barthes), as well as from precious literary metaphors, and turns the literary text into a combinatory fabric of *spoken, performative* language, a specific constellation of ideological, psychological, fictional discourses.

Intentionality without a Subject

“The novel develops out of a murmuring. Babbling of a spring. Two voices, not two persons. Only gradually does it become clear that a story is being told, the story of these voices.”⁴⁴ If it can be said that the texts of classical modernism wanted only to be rather than to signify, then texts after modernism begin to signify again. At stake is not the signifying intention of an identifiable, personal subject, but rather a paradoxical intentionality, pre-subjective and polyphonous. This intentionality is no

42. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 266-67.

43. Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974) 92-94. See also Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) 41-42.

44. Wolfgang Iser, “Vom Tisch,” *Text und Kritik* 34 (1972): 10.

longer based on the energy field of an author-subject who, however displaced or sublated, governs the fictional text. Here we sight an intentionality that emerges precisely from a literary “deconstruction” of personal unities (including the author’s): such unities are traced back to their respective socioculturally and instinctually bound speech forms and linguistic materials, that is, to discourses⁴⁵ from which they are ultimately composed. Instead of aiding subjects to (objectified) “expression” by means of language, texts after modernism show how “subjects” are composed and “constituted” by speech, by diverse (meta)lingual semiotic matrices and praxi from their dark instinctual desires to their daily/ideological role identities.⁴⁶ Jelinek achieved this in exemplary fashion in her novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, in which novelistic characters are still recognizable, yet in which they are never spoken “of” or “about.” Without involving a metadiscourse, literary language is completely absorbed by those speeches, language materials, and ideograms which, dynamized by desire and anchored in the social, make up the subjectness of the figures in the first place. Thus the protagonist Erika Kohut, for example, is nothing other than the textual crossing of motherly speeches of petit bourgeois career fantasies, of elitist discourses privileging romantic connoisseurship of art as well as of sado-masochistic discourses.

Texts of this sort function not as a foil for the expression of an already formed subjectivity but as the exhibition of “texts” that produce social and self-representation of subjectivity in the first place. They resort to the “incessant rustle” of discourses (Foucault), to the discursive fabric that is always prior to personal identity formation and self-preservation.⁴⁷ By detaching such discourses from their (in daily life) spontaneous subject mechanism, their implicit “mythologizing” function can itself be made clear and critically elucidated. By creating specific constellations of sense-making or subject-forming discourses in which

45. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung des Diskurses* (Frankfurt am Main/West Berlin, 1977) 8, 34-35.

46. Cf. Louis Althusser, “Freud und Lacan,” in Louis Althusser and Tort, *Freud und Lacan. Historischer Materialismus* (West Berlin, 1976) 38-39; and, Althusser, “Ideologie und ideologische Staatsapparate,” *Marxismus und Ideologie* (West Berlin, 1976), 156-59.

47. Helmut Heissenbüttel’s surprising dictum regarding a protagonist of contemporary poetry: “Text becomes reality. The person Ernst Jandl no longer exists because the text Ernst Jandl exists.” Heissenbüttel, “Laudatio auf den Bühnen-Preisträger Ernst Jandl,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 20 (October 1984).

institutional signs and signs of desire are linked, literature becomes *explicit* "intertext."

Metaphor and Fiction in the Material State

What was once the *differentia specifica* of literary speech — namely to use language to create a fictional house for the imagination, a unique image space can no longer provide the motor for more recent literature. But instead of simply vanishing, the imaginative and fictional impulses are brought into play as *implied content* of literary objects, of the social world itself, in its material as well as personal aspects. What keeps Koeppen's work *Jugend* in motion is precisely the exposure of semiotic mediations already enclosed in experienceable real worlds prior to literature; the functional signs of daily mythology; fictions and clichés with their tremendous richness of images that have been disseminated into infinity in media society. Whether it is a question of things, landscapes, or persons, the object itself is always understood as a form long since caught in a semiotic net, and the text proceeds by extracting the metaphorical, fictional discourses out of the objects instead of devising them expressly. In today's avant-garde, which could invoke only surrealism (the early Aragon, for example) as predecessor, metaphors and fictionality no longer serve a constructive telos but operate as material in motion. "Miserable moss, pitiful lichen, nowhere the genuineness of the picture tube. . . . In the country the original doesn't count if the copy is better" (Jelinek, *Oh Wildnis*).

Literary Surfaces

Today, advanced literature no longer treats language as a medium to allow a whole, a "society," to take form as a special or even typical image space. Language itself becomes the primary form of society's presence. Thus the implicit claim of literature to situate a field of meaning or of images of society, history, or the whole hidden "behind" the traces of the text, falls "flat." In this context, Jameson's thesis becomes plausible: a "depthlessness," a "new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" is the mark of postmodern literature.⁴⁸ Because the semiotic qualities of social environments and subject forms yield the privileged material for literature and literature thus becomes intertext, language can advance to a direct mode of society's presence,

48. Jameson 60.

even without the mediation of an artistically evoked imaginative space.

If it was significant for literary modernism to oppose the quantified model of time aesthetically, to remove itself from the textual processes of society by fictionally stalling them, then texts after modernism are actually “without time”; that is, they have no qualitative time structure of their own, no fictional oppositional time, and, strictly speaking, also no fully justifiable closure. Exposing the mythologizing function of (meta)lingual meaning production, they could just as easily continue and, indeed, should do so in the reader’s heads.

II. Elements of a Poststructuralist Critique of Language and Literature

Theories of criticism, especially if they are to be critical theories, must take account of this cultural change called postmodern which has drawn the arts, as well as subjective conditions, world views, and social practices into its orbit. In considering the possibility of such a critical theory of criticism adequate to the changed cultural phenomena and their premises without simply accommodating them, it must be remembered that the evidence of a “thorough method of thought” (Kant), as which the Enlightenment could sanctify the business of criticism, has changed in the course of its institutional specialization from a faculty of judgment to a power of judgment. Therefore, postmodern revisions of the concept of criticism attack not only the role of the critic as advocate of “good taste.” They also question the role of the interpreter as such who is held responsible for the preservation and mediation of meaning strewn and alienated throughout history. Criticism’s paradigm shift thus reflects the general conditions of postmodern theory construction to the extent that it wants to dispense with logical oppositions and ontological hierarchies on which modernist criticism was still based.

In the following, we want to portray some tendencies of French cultural studies after structuralism which, under the name “poststructuralism,” are challenging the postmodern intellectual discourse and, in our opinion, open up new possibilities for the renewal of a critical theory. The categorization of poststructuralism — that literary, theoretical, and initially political movement in the late 1960s in France — as a form of postmodernism is not undisputed;⁴⁹ indeed, its themes and

49. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986), especially the essay entitled “Mapping the Postmodern.”

objects are derived primarily from earlier avant-garde movements attributed to modernism. But in its methods and theories, poststructuralist thought removes itself from modernist parameters and categories. It seeks to deconstruct them and to release itself, whereby it is certainly responding to the "*condition postmoderne*" but above all also participates in its ambiguity, which Wellmer has described as "the still unclear consciousness of an end and a transition."⁵⁰

Problems of the production and reception of art present themselves very differently today than in the first half of the century. Art and literature are to such an extent woven into the general production of commodities and images that they can no longer lay claim to a horizon beyond the social system from which they might be organized as committed criticism or contemplative refusal.⁵¹ They have not only lost the last remnants of sacral pathos that bourgeois society had always granted them but also foregone the dignity of standing in for that historical-philosophical hope on which theoreticians of modernism such as Bloch or Adorno could count. At the beginning of the century, the arts questioned their own role as societal institutions and rejected the traditional directives of genre, formal canons, and conceptions of aesthetic value.⁵² Abstract oppositions were erected against the standardized everyday world. The longing for an undamaged, fulfilled life was preserved in the contradictory "mimetic relationship to a petrified and alienated reality" in such a way that an explosive utopian overflow seemed quite plausible.⁵³ The provocative strength of aesthetic modernism has been absorbed in the meantime by the modernization of society. The critical, avant-gardist impetus has been almost fully dispersed in a hegemonic cultural system whose innovational dynamics live precisely from assaults and scandals, subversions, and shocks. Neither education nor rebellion, neither classical nor modern aesthetic reworkings stand up to a world blanketed with signs and texts, images and media of all kinds, and which has brought forth a culture that Susan Sontag says is based on an overproduction of sensations that dulls our sensory faculties.⁵⁴

50. Wellmer 57.

51. See Jameson.

52. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 20-22.

53. Adorno 31.

54. Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961) 13.

In place of an as yet unoccupied future⁵⁵ comes the experience of an always already surveyed field, whose offer of orientation is, of course, problematic if not catastrophic.

In this situation, the system-critical potential, be it in artistic or scientific areas, is forced to shift its ground. Experimental forays beyond the given no longer are written from assured transcendental positions but become research in immanence, in the repressed implications of a system, or become exploration of its boundaries in regard to their reality-denying constituents. The scientific, theoretical destabilization of scientific prescriptions,⁵⁶ the loss in credibility of normative-practical validity claims,⁵⁷ and the often observable abdication of authenticity in the arts point to a shattering of the worldly foundations of scientific and artistic activity that can no longer simply be registered as mere rhetorical or stylistic toying. The analytical sensibility, with which the subtlest and ostensibly humane mechanisms and branches of the contemporary alliance of knowledge and power can be explored,⁵⁸ has thrown the academically sanctioned axioms of the most advanced social and cultural sciences off balance in a way similar to the modernist avant-garde's destabilization of bourgeois art's claims of autonomy. In this multilayered process of dissolution, poststructuralism's linguistic and literary criticism has manifest importance.

Literature and Criticism

If hermeneutic skepticism was already an expression of the difficulty that the meaning of works of art cannot be once and for all objectified in interpretations, then, in the aesthetics of reception and effect, a new paradigm is emerging as a reaction to the refusal of meaning in modern art. The work of art's pragmatic dimension is now coming into focus. In place of the classical understanding of the unity of the work, which was destroyed in avant-garde productions, theory decided to understand literary texts as communication potentials, open not only in regard to divergent contexts but also requiring the reader as a precondition *sine qua non* for the unfolding of their meaning. Normative meaning and claims to universalistic explanations are overcome if

55. Habermas, *Kleine politische Schriften* 447.

56. Paul Feyerabend, *Wissenschaft als Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

57. Lyotard.

58. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).

a text can be viewed as a repertoire of perspectively constructed strategies for producing effects instead of a representation of hidden meanings. It becomes a coherent work only in interaction with the recipient. The pragmatic formalization of aesthetic criteria for truth admittedly escapes the hermeneutic circle by attributing the meaning of the whole only to the interpreter-subject's self-understanding,⁵⁹ but it itself can't avoid determining its essential goal of perception in the reconstruction of referential relationships between the subject and the object of the text system. The linguistic objectification of text structures and pragmatic rules for reducing contingency in understanding form the metatheoretical frame of reference for successful interpretations. The problem of objective criteria for aesthetic judgment which has disturbed critical discourse since Romanticism is naturally not solved with this but merely shifted into the area of transcendental prerequisites for intersubjective understanding and communication. After all, recent literary texts themselves nullify the categories of reception aesthetics. The model of the "implied reader,"⁶⁰ for example, is invalidated if the reader has already advanced to being the protagonist of the work, as is the case in Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. In a subtly arranged game of confusion, this text subverts conventional patterns of interpretation by anticipating them.

French literary criticism draws a completely different conclusion from the questions, virulent since modernism, of the recipient's relations with art. Since works of art can elude the discursive grasp to the point of unintelligibility, the process of understanding them is delegated to what could be called a congenial aesthetic experience. Those considerations that still occasioned Adorno⁶¹ to reserve the mimetic understanding of the work of art's individual logic solely for a philosophy of art are rendered invalid in the course of Barthes's "nouvelle critique." Modern literary discourse since Mallarmé (who distinguished himself by attacking the received division of languages and their societal classification) disturbs critical discourse, which until now could legitimate its authority of judgment through just that distribution of competence. A literature whose "literariness" realizes itself primarily

59. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation ed. G. Bardin and J. Cumming (New York: Crossroads, 1975) 238.

60. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 27.

61. Theodor W. Adorno, "Voraussetzungen," *Noten zur Literatur, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1974).

and essentially in linguistic material reduces the distance between form and content, the mediation of which conventional criticism took to be its assignment. In accordance with the thoroughly lingual constitution of its objects, criticism now reflects itself above all as language; language, in the form of different “modes of writing” (*écriture*), comes to the foreground as the common medium of both. Literary text and literary criticism are equally explorations into the area of socially preformed language which maintains the order of discourse by congealing meanings into symbolic power; ultimately they always aim for the representational model of language that is to put the functional ability of discursive social strategies beyond doubt.⁶² The new criticism is thus no longer a “revenge of the intellect on art,” as Susan Sontag once expressed it,⁶³ striving for an adequate reconstruction of literary works, but a genuine method of language criticism among others, placed alongside literature rather than above or behind it. Barthes even summarizes this nonparasitic relation under the term *literature* when he emphatically writes that “criticism and work, by uniting their voices, constantly say: *I am literature*.”⁶⁴ They unite to form an aggregation of plural modes of writing and readings of the “texte général” (Jacques Derrida) and of the whole of socially available languages, which they constantly displace and alter with the intention to prevent any petrification of discourse.⁶⁵

This tendency to abolish the genre distinction between literature and literary criticism — the two converge in a broadly defined concept of semiological practice — leads criticism to take account of the unreduced polyvalence of literary works, to join them, to participate in them, and to “write them forth,” as it were, instead of applying extrinsic ornamental standards to literary works. The concern is not the stabilization of an ideal referent that would secure the self-identity of a text but rather the variety of the text’s meanings, whose never completely controllable game criticism sets in motion in order to localize itself as a move in this play. The individual moves in the game are here of interchangeable value: the case is conceivable in which a literary text

62. J. Broekman, “‘Meaning in the use’ oder die praktisch-philosophische Bedeutungslosigkeit der Theorie der Bedeutung,” J. Broekman, A. Pazanin, and B. Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie und Marxismus 2. Praktische Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) 158-60.

63. Sontag 7.

64. Roland Barthes, *Kritik und Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967) 83.

65. Roland Barthes, *Leçon/Lektion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980) 63.

critiques a critical text.

This revised criticism involves a general dismantling of dogmatic discourses with the help of literature. It finds its critical measure in a theoretical displacement of the concept of the sign, which literature has always practiced of its own accord. For "dogmatic discourse supports itself with a signified; it tries to make language appear significant by pointing to the existence of an ultimate signified" while "on the level of literary speech . . . the signified is always in arrears in relation to the play of the signifiers."⁶⁶ Derrida drew conclusions from such findings and tried to reorder the relation between signifier and signified, between written and spoken word.

Sign and Text

The poststructuralists expose one of the last refuges of Western metaphysics in linguistic structuralism's idea of the sign, as Ferdinand de Saussure⁶⁷ conceived it: as the unity of signifier and signified. If one follows Derrida's reading of Saussure, the latter's insight (in itself critical) into the nonsubstantial, differential character of language falls into self-contradiction where, in its concept of the sign as separated into idea and sound image, it holds fast to a presupposition that is at the foundation of every dichotomous logic. With this distinction, the possibility is left open that the signified could, at will, be considered a content of the language form isolatable from it, as a "concept signified in and of itself, a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to language, that is, of a relationship to a system of signifiers."⁶⁸ The "transcendental signified" is the metaphysical idea of a truth shining through from behind the signs; it is *arche* and *telos* of those intentions to name that define themselves as adequate representations of an extralingual, intelligible logos. It maintains the confidence of the structuralist and systems-theoretical disciplines that the changes of system-immanent elements can be taxonomically controlled from an establishable, present center. In order to obliterate the "transcendental signified" (in Barthes's sense, that "weight" that

66. Roland Barthes, "Vergnügen, Schreiben, Lesen (Gespräch mit Jean Ristat)" and "Über die Semiologie der Mode und der Literatur (Gespräch mit Raymond Bellour)," *Antworten der Strukturalisten*, ed. A. Reif (Hamburg, 1973) 30, 13.

67. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983) 65-70.

68. Jacques Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva," *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 19.

makes a meaning dogmatic), Derrida subjects the concept of the sign to an operation full of consequences. He claims that the signified truth, the meaning of a text, cannot be discovered before or outside of its "writing," because every signified *always also* stands in the position of signifier and is originally marked by it: "There is not a signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language."⁶⁹

But with the reintegration of the "transcendental signified" into a potentially endless "play of differences" — for which "writing" is only another name — the possibility is removed of setting a nomothetic and durable limit to the process of signification. Signs and texts, in perpetual processes of transformation, enter ever new contexts of referral, which are ontologically not perfectly containable. While the uncontrolled exchange of signs can and must be interrupted by practical interventions if communicative language acts are to be possible at all, there is no identifiable reason to idealize such imperative regulations in speech or writing theory. After all, they do not transcend the chain of signs either but rather are also subject to the principle of difference, which undermines their structural consistence.

By setting the spatial exteriority of writing against the "logocentric" and "phonocentric" prevalence of immediate self-perception in the voice by which the history of Western philosophy is marked,⁷⁰ Derrida wins a model of language-critical analysis that proceeds methodically from the primacy of difference. Everything that appears is already separated from itself, its pure identity or self-presence, by its first articulation, without which no speech comes about, and is placed within a linguistic-social classification system; every act of signifying adds to the signified a sign that never represents it by itself but as a "supplement." Thus, not only do various signs stand in temporal and spatial difference to each other, but also each to itself, since its meaning, far from ever being completely "with itself," is owed to manifold differentiations in regard to other meanings.

Derrida adopts here Saussure's fundamental insight, but in order to radicalize it against him: the chain of distinctions that constitute a single meaning does not run along presupposed system borders, but possibly

69. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976) 7.

70. Jacques Derrida, *Die Stimme und das Phänomen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), and *Of Grammatology*.

into infinity.⁷¹ Structures of meaning, discourses, and languages function, indeed, only under the condition of relatively closed systematicity. Because their elements are put together, though, from the traces left in them by the differentiation from other elements, and because this differentiability includes the origin, the structure, and the closure itself, the same systems cannot be fully mastered from any point.

In the context of this essay, the philosophical controversies surrounding this attempt to continue the critique of metaphysics in the spirit of Nietzsche and Heidegger must be ignored.⁷² Of interest for poststructuralist literary criticism, however, is that Derrida's concept of "writing," which defines language as the constitutive failure of any intended ideality of meaning, can serve as a nonontological point of reference for critical "deconstruction."⁷³ "[T]he history of writing is indeed that of articulation."⁷⁴ From the beginning of linguistic articulation on, writing is the absolute supplement in the double sense of supplement as "addition" as well as "substitution"; instead of meeting with preceding truths in language, one can only circumscribe them as supplements and substitutions. The principle of difference, inscribed into language by writing, forbids the illusion that breaking off the signifying act could ever mean reaching the thing itself. The conclusion from this for criticism is that criticism's criteria also remain suspended, may not be reified into self-sufficient instances, and always require contextual self-criticism. Derrida can also show that Barthes's early challenge, rather than being a moral postulate, is founded in the structure of the revised concept of the sign: "Every criticism must, in its discourse . . . contain an implicit discourse about itself."⁷⁵

What at first seems extremely arbitrary reveals itself on closer inspection to be an opening of thought onto necessarily uninterpretable spaces of language and as a conscious attempt to appropriate a reality that is socially ordered and administered by conventional symbols and codes but not thoroughly controlled with equal fullness of power. The

71. Manfred Frank, *Was ist Neostrukturalismus?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

72. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

73. French poststructuralism, in the form of "Deconstructionism," has conquered, above all, American literary studies and criticism. Cf. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (London, 1983), and Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, and W. Martin, *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983).

74. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 270.

75. Roland Barthes, *Literatur oder Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 65.

poststructuralists' expanded concept of the text is understandable against the foil of the new dynamic concept of the sign, and can be interpreted as a strategy to break up the "textual" constitution of social reality where it has attained symbolic power. According to the poststructuralists, a "text" is open to a contextual "fabric of signifiers"⁷⁶ as well as "diachronic traces"⁷⁷ that other texts in it attest to; it produces itself "only in the transformation of another text."⁷⁸ "Text" is thus something double: not simply an object to be interpreted (as such it would still remain the object of a subjective reconstruction) but rather itself a praxis of investigation, a "productivity" that intervenes "constructively-destructively" in the order of languages. In the realm of the text, a number of statements originating in other texts intersect and neutralize each other.⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva has called this phenomenon "intertextuality," which stands for a highly differentiated, ideologically critical semiotic procedure on "materialistic foundations."⁸⁰ Artistic works as well as readings and criticism belong in the realm of the text, of intertextuality (this is of importance for questions of method in literary criticism); here the theoretical ground has been prepared upon which a nonhierarchical interaction between texts and interpretations or critiques can be understood as a common signifying practice. Texts form the incoherent cross-sections of social discourse. Such incoherence is no longer a deficient condition to be hermeneutically corrected by criticism but rather precisely the mode in which criticism continues to write a text by other means.

Aesthetics and Experience

Taking his cue from Oscar Wilde, Ihab Hassan — a convinced representative of American postmodernism — formulated the provocative thesis "that the aim of the critic is to see the object as it really is not."⁸¹ This attack against institutional academic criticism proves rationally practicable in the framework of poststructuralist theories of the

76. Barthes, *Leçon/Lektion* 25.

77. R. Brütting, "Écriture und "texte." *Die französische Literaturtheorie "nach dem Strukturalismus."* Kritik traditioneller Positionen und Neuansätze (Bonn, 1976) 99.

78. Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology."

79. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984).

80. Julia Kristeva, "Der geschlossene Text," *Textsemiotik als Ideologiekritik*, ed. P. V. Zima (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) 28.

81. Ihab Hassan, "The Critic as Innovator," *Amerikastudien* 22.1 (1977): 51.

text. The conventional intention — to see the object as it really is — reduces itself either to a mere duplication or it overcomes the object with extratextual means. Derrida argued, against this, that every leap outside the text lands nonetheless in texts, so that reading and criticism are not representational but productive acts.⁸² They must first create the “signifying structure” that results from the relationship between a text and other simultaneous or preceding texts: by naming it, they change it and create it anew. The spectrum of such procedures ranges from the extreme hedonism of the “pleasure of the text”⁸³ through the “experimental testing” of works⁸⁴ to their “deconstruction” (Derrida), a method of brushing them “against the grain,” as Walter Benjamin had formulated the task of the historical materialist.⁸⁵ They all presume the modern experience that artistic and critical activities have approached each other in the analysis of the structures, rules, and functions of their objects. Beyond that, they break with the scientistic optimism that was associated with modernity up until structuralism, as well as with the maxim that art should be a “critique of life” (Matthew Arnold).

This option is based on a new experience that requires new aesthetic strategies. “Our modernity,” wrote Barthes, “makes a constant effort to defeat the exchange. . . . And even so, modernity can do nothing: the exchange recuperates everything, acclimating what appears to deny it. . . .”⁸⁶ Postmodernity appears (at least where it is not simply an affirmation of “official culture”) to want to escape the unlimited cooptation by abandoning usable negations. Certainly it is a difficult tightrope act, but postmodernist texts attempt it. They stage inspired counterfeits, like the mysterious translator in Calvino’s aforementioned novel. They mislead the reader, withholding information that the text requires, or they deny declarations just made, as in Thomas Pynchon’s novels (*The Selling of Lot 49*, *V*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*). Jelinek (*Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*), or Paul Wühr (*Das falsche Buch*) inundate their readers with the teeming metaphors and metonyms of a simulation culture gone out of joint, whose stupendous meaninglessness they outline

82. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 157-64.

83. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 3.

84. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986).

85. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 257.

86. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text* 23-24.

in deformed meanings. Lack of proportion is a mark of postmodern literature; it allows no meaningful, authorial, or mimetic distance from the complex reality of life.

Poststructuralist literary theory corresponds to this literature in that it, too, intervenes in an already described and inscribed world. As semiology, it develops, on the one hand, the tools for an increasingly exact investigation of social reality mediated linguistically and symbolically by codes and discourses. The “logic of difference” stands for the intention not to accept any social-cultural phenomenon as natural or immutable. On the other hand, it challenges aesthetic fantasy, employing it as a corrective to a petrified culture of experts that scientifically penalizes spontaneous forms of reception. Productive, playful intimacy with the arts is still the privilege of an exclusive community of aesthetes, but the self-reflective theory of literature opens, by means of its “thought experiments,” a view of hitherto suppressed creative desires and potentials of aesthetic experience of everyday life. Even if official postmodern culture cannot be expected to recognize them, that same official culture still cannot deny that increasingly it depends on the production of knowledge rather than on its acquisition.⁸⁷ The ambivalence of postmodernism is evidenced once again: progressive productive forces in culture are more than ever in danger of rapidly being demoted to system-stabilizing effects. Postmodernism has still shown no way out of this labyrinth; such a way out can, apparently, be initiated only from within.

Translated by Mitch Cohen and Carol Lüdtkhe

87. See Lyotard 52.