ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POSTMODERNISM

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Edited by
Victor E. Taylor
and **Charles E. Winquist**

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Introduction

The *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* provides comprehensive and authoritative coverage of academic disciplines, critical terms, and central figures relating to the vast field of postmodern studies. With alphabetically listed, cross-referenced entries, the volume is accessible to readers with general interest in postmodernism as well as those with specialized research agendas. The editors and contributors have worked to produce an encyclopedia combining useful introductory material with more advanced historical and theoretical analysis, including detailed further reading selections after each entry. The goal of the volume is to assist the reader at several levels of research, providing clarification, analysis, and direction for continued study. The disciplinary essays, critical terms, and biographies follow a convenient format, focusing on historical or thematic connections to postmodern issues. The disciplinary essays, critical terms, and biographies form an interconnected study, defining in detail contemporary intellectual issues and debates in view of postmodernism's development across the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Since its inception as a literary term in the late 1950s and its wider use as a critical term in the 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism has emerged as a significant cultural, political, and intellectual force that defines our era. Definitions of postmodernism range from eclecticism and montage to neo-scepticism and anti-rationalism. Postmodernism, in its contradictory, sometimes misguided, and various deployments, has consistently challenged our understanding of unity, subjectivity, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, history, and politics. Initially conceived as a companion to *Postmodernism: Critical Concepts I–IV* (Taylor and Winquist, eds: Routledge 1998), The *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* offers a wide-spectrum of perspectives on postmodernism, illustrating a cohesion through the mutability and plurality of this critical concept that is so much a part of our intellectual and cultural context. In this regard, the volume does not adhere to a single definition of postmodernism as much as it documents the use of the term across a variety of academic and cultural pursuits.

The *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* resists the simple presentation of postmodernism as the newest style among many styles occurring in the post-disciplinary academy. Instead, the volume offers a perspective on postmodernism through a diversity of approaches. In documenting the use of the term, we acknowledge that postmodernism is more than a fad, with much deeper and longer lasting effects on academic and cultural life. In general, the volume rests on the understanding that postmodernism is not so much a style as it is an on-going process, a process of both disintegration and reformation within a multitude of artistic, cultural, and intellectual traditions. The editors and contributors see the volume as postmodern, providing the reader with clarifications as well as contradictions in the field of postmodern studies. It is the on-going, irresolvable dispute over the precise meaning of the term and its application that makes research in this area interesting and dynamic. We hope that this synergy of clarification and contradiction is reflected throughout the volume.

The *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* is the result of a multi-year cooperative effort. We owe immeasurable debts of gratitude to our contributors and advisory board members. We also are grateful to have worked with a very talented group of senior editors and editorial assistants from Routledge.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to our many students past, present (and future) for whom we have developed this project.

Victor E. Taylor
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Charles E. Winquist
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A

absence

Absence is a **lack** that disrupts or defers full **presence**. Insofar as traditional Western thought and its modern consummation involve a **metaphysics of presence**, the functions of "absence" prove crucial to postmodern critiques of Western thought. Within a metaphysics of presence, primal "truth" is equated with "being," and being is equated with "presence": to be true, or truly to be, is to be originarily and fully present. This tie between primal truth and ontological presence informs traditional and modern conceptions of God (the source of all truth as the full presence of being); of the human subject (the truth of whose thought and identity would be realized in rational self-presence); and of meaning in language (the truth of whose signifying movement would be sought in the presence of a signified).

Indebted to Martin **Heidegger**'s re-definition of ontological truth as a *differential* movement of "un-veiling," postmodern thinkers investigate ways in which the manifestation of any presence depends upon the concealment of some absence. Because the manifestation of presence is a differential movement, presence is not possible apart from absence; this necessity of absence to presence disallows that presence be original or full. Postmodern figures of absence thus subvert the metaphysics of presence, and that subversion decisively shapes postmodern approaches to the **death of God**, the critique of **subjectivity**, and the **deconstruction** of language.

If the full presence of being, conceived traditionally as God, is understood to constitute the primal source of truth or meaning, postmodernity confronts a crisis of truth or meaning insofar as it inherits, most notably from Friedrich **Nietzsche**, a deep sense of God's absence. In response to that crisis, thinkers as different as Jean-Luc **Marion** and Mark C. **Taylor** articulate the theological or religious significance of an absence in and through which God or the sacred might be concealedly revealed.

Postmodern thinkers likewise evoke absence to critique modernity's attempt to ground truth in the rational self-presence of the self-identical subject. From the nothingness of mortal existence in Heidegger, to the radical **unconscious** of Jacques **Lacan**'s split subject, to the **trace** of the other in Emmanuel **Levinas**'s phenomenology of the ethically obligated self, postmodern thinkers articulate figures of absence that haunt the subject so as to disallow the realization of its self-identity through self-presence.

Pivotal to most all postmodern understandings of absence is the question of language and **representation**, addressed exemplarily by Jacques **Derrida**, who sees absence as basic to the way linguistic signs function. Against the view that signs secure meaning insofar as they re-present the presence of some signified that transcends the movement of signification, Derrida argues that the *absence* of any such "transcendental signified" is necessary to the very movement of signs: signs signify only in their differential relation to one another, and thus only insofar as they never reach the full presence of an extra-linguistic signified.

The figures of absence that inform postmodern thinking on the language and representation of

Being, God, and the subject, have been central also to postmodern literature, criticism, art, and architecture (for example, in Edmond **Jabes**, Maurice **Blanchot**, Anselm Kiefer, and Peter Eisenmann).

TOM CARLSON

acoluthetic reason

Acoluthetic reason is a term coined by the philosophical theologian Robert Scharlemann to describe a self-to-other relation, in which the inward subjective I responds to a call to follow that comes from its own **subjectivity** manifest in another person. In *The Reason of Following: Christology and the Ecstatic I* (1991), Scharlemann crosses and subverts the traditional boundaries between **theology** and **philosophy**. He investigates the meaning of christology for an understanding of selfhood and argues for the possibility that christology represents a form of reason, that is, a self-to-other configuration different from theoretical, practical, or aesthetic reason. Forms of reason are understood as ontological phenomena that appear in some discourse. Scharlemann proposes that christological reason is conveyed, for example, in New Testament texts that narrate that Jesus said, "Follow me!" and there were those who followed immediately. He maintains that these followers responded to a call that issued from their own subjective I. The mark of christological or acoluthetic (from *akolouthia*, following) reason is that the inward subjective I is confronted with its own subjectivity in another person; an I, not a he, she, it, or thou. The summons of the other, therefore, can activate my own free will and enable me to become what I already am potentially. The feasibility of acoluthetic reason is suggested by the peculiarity of subjectivity to appear whenever I say and understand the meaning of the word 'I' and the possibility of this interior I to 'stand outside' of its own time and space. As such, acoluthetic reason has no special relation to theology or ontology. Its components (self, other, and their relation), however, can become a symbol of being or God.

Acoluthetic reason is one of the fruits of Scharlemann's uncovering of notions of being-as-such, subjectivity, selfhood, and God that are forgotten in Modernity. Scharlemann draws largely on elements of European philosophy and theology, for example, **Heidegger**'s phenomenology of ***Dasein***, his 'destruction' of the history of ontology, and Tillich's theory of religious symbols.

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JAMES R. GRIT

Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund

b. 11 September 1903, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; d. 6 August 1969, Valais, Switzerland

Philosopher and social, political, and cultural theorist

The work of Theodor Adorno, the exemplary thinker of the **Frankfurt School** for Social Research and one of the leading exponents of that institution's critical theory, embodies the critique of philosophical systems that it sets out. It is extensive and wide-ranging, addressing aesthetics, **modernism** (in both its literary and musical manifestations), fascism, mass culture and the administered society of late capitalism, among other issues. Adorno's Nietzschean aversion to system is apparent in the content of his works, where phenomena are under analysis. Indeed, Adorno's own philosophical arguments, are not elaborated in an hierarchical or propositional fashion but are rather structured as constellations, a term he borrows from his friend Walter **Benjamin**. It is also evident in his dense and paratactic style, which refuses to subordinate or privilege the elements of his critique. Accordingly, reading Adorno is tough going: his texts demand that the reader always remain attentive to their intricate weavings and connections.

Adorno's complex relationship to **Nietzsche** and **Hegel** allow us to sketch his proximity to **poststructuralism**. From Nietzsche, Adorno

took his corrosive suspicion of metaphysics and the enlightenment, and his valuation of art as the other of reason; however, Adorno's was a melancholy rather than a gay science, and having narrowly escaped fascism in his native Germany, he was intensely sceptical of any conception of the experience of art as an instantiation of a "will to power." From Hegel, Adorno took a dialectical methodology and a conception of art as a medium of truth, but for Adorno the dialectic is properly negative: the truth of philosophy has no privileged vantage point over the work of art whereby that work might be transcended through the power of philosophical thinking. Rather, both art and philosophy offer partial truths that can only be completed, if ever, through their interaction.

Many of the key themes of Adorno's philosophy are most accessible in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which he co-wrote with another member of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer. In a rigorously dialectical fashion, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that modernity originates in classical times and describes a process by which myth becomes enlightenment and enlightenment becomes myth (see also ***Aufklärung***). Both mythic thought and modern instrumental reason are expressive of the same drive to dominate our inner and outer nature. In contrast to instrumental reason's drive towards mastery and objectification, the cultural artifacts and practices that Adorno analyzes – and in particular the modernist text – display a logic of disintegration, which undoes any illusory appearance of totality, and anticipates to a degree the later work of Jacques **Derrida**. However, for Adorno the disintegration of the work does not evoke the endless free play of signification. Instead, it betrays evidence of a possible bringing together of enlightenment thought and nature that does not involve the effacement of their differences under a false sublation or synthesis, but rather defends reason from irrationalism by finding traces of emancipatory reason among the instrumental. Adorno's critique of Hegel's dialectical sublation – a crude version of which constitutes instrumental reason – extends to Adorno's diagnosis of fascism, where identity thinking, with its characteristic effacement of difference, is symptomatic of a compulsion to demonize and reject whatever is other or incommensurable. This is far from having only philosophical consequences: in *Negative Dialectics*, he writes "Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death" (Adorno 1973: 362).

In his engagement with the texts and media of mass culture, Adorno anticipates developments in cultural studies, but as is evident form his extended debate with Benjamin, he is pessimistic about mass culture's emancipatory potential. Mass enlightenment for Adorno is mass deception. Yet for all his privileging of the elite modernist work, by itself it cannot supply what mass culture lacks, as it can at best offer only a semblance of reconciliation: it is only in some as yet unrealized, non-reductive dialectical synthesis of the two that freedom can come about. In his correspondence with Benjamin, he writes that mass and elite culture are two halves of an essential freedom to which they do not add up.

Yet modernism remained crucial for Adorno, not least because he was a modernist himself, having studied composition with Alban Berg in Vienna in the 1920s. His last text, *Aesthetic Theory* (left unfinished at his death), culminates his thought on modernist aesthetics, as it reaffirms his uncompromisingly utopian – and simultaneously deeply pessimistic – Marxist critique of modern society. In Adorno's account, the independence of the modernist work allows for a critique of social institutions as well as for a positing of utopian alternatives. But that independence is itself contingent upon the reification and class conflict of late capitalism. Adorno sees in modern art both the production and dismantling of the reified subject of advanced capitalism (see also **subjectivity**). Even though modern art is produced and consumed by this false subject that it sets out to unmask, it also evokes the voices of a repressed utopian collective.

See also: Dialectic of Enlightenment

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BRIAN WALL

African American Studies

Insofar as postmodernism seeks to destabilize notions of fixed or essential truths and identities, it is a body of thought both useful and problematic for the discipline of African American Studies. On the one hand, the creation and growth of African American Studies can be regarded as a triumph of postmodernism in the sense that the discipline represents a grand counter narrative to be posed against dominant, western European ideologies. By conceptualizing a "Black Aesthetic" or a "Black Sociology," African American scholars successfully resist the **erasure** of specific cultural perspectives. This activity can be labeled an *interventionist* postmodernism. Among other impulses, it generally represents the political desire to combat external forces that are detrimental to the African American community. On the other hand, if the injection of Blackness or Africanity into academic and public discourses is meant to portray foundational truths about all African Americans, then it runs counter to postmodernism and such discourse is subject to spirited challenge from Afro-postmodernists within the field. This objection is frequently less political – or at least less radical – than the viewpoint it opposes; it most likely involves celebratory talk about hybridity or multiple subjectivities, and sometimes calls into question the very idea of an African American community. This can be described as a *reflective* postmodernism.

Historical relationship of African American Studies to postmodernism

In this context, African American Studies mainly refers to the programs and departments that exist in colleges and universities in the United States. Largely propelled by Black student activism, African American Studies became a part of the administrative structure of academe in 1968, when the first department was established at San Francisco State College. Although definitions of the field vary, the organized study of social phenomena related to African Americans is its central mission. As programs and departments developed, they were staffed primarily by social scientists and humanities scholars, a configuration that sometimes proved to be an uneasy alliance. Political scientists, economists, and sociologists, for example, often felt that the discipline should revolve around their specializations and conceived of little need for, say, philosophers or literary critics. Indeed, in the 1960s, sociology was the privileged academic site for theorizing issues of race and ethnicity, which are concerns that lie at the heart of inquiry in African American Studies. In contrast to many social scientists, humanities scholars naturally considered attention to artistic, linguistic, and epistemological aspects of African American cultural formations to be indispensable. Whatever the tension between disciples of the social sciences and the humanities, it is apparent that the humanities scholars were the ones primarily responsible for importing, mostly by way of poststructural literary theory, self-conscious postmodernism into the field. The first major development along these lines occurred during the 1980s. Since then, many of the leading figures in African American Studies are associated with poststructural methods.

Contemporary issues

As would be expected, identity issues are at the core of postmodernism's relationship to contemporary African American Studies. Perhaps the most striking examples of the 1990s are the discourses surrounding the bi-racial movement and Afrocentricity. These discussions mark the poles of the continuum along which considerations of African American identity can be charted.

The bi-racial movement is the attempt to diminish Blackness and force government recogniton – by census categories, for example – of mixed race (usually meaning Black and White) status. Although there has always been contention about what constitutes acceptable Blackness, the academic debates hardly ever hinged on biology. The Blackness in question referred to politics and style.

Under the influence of postmodernism, the proponents of the bi-racial movement push the **deconstruction** of race – a move they share with several other groups of intellectuals – and the concommitant deconstruction of a Black essence. But ironically, as they carry forward the attack on racial essentialism, they also resort to physiological determinism, a decidedly unpostmodern perspective. They make a case for special status based on what they consider to be a fundamental difference in genetics between themselves and "pure" African Americans. Thus their argument largely rests upon maintaining the very categories they have deconstructed.

Afrocentricity means, in part, employing an African-centered vision, an African worldview, at the center of scholarly investigation. Afrocentricity, therefore, can be termed a modernist Africanity. It suggests a patterned explanation or justification for behavior; it offers a centering, or recentering, for African Americans. Thus it advocates a transcendent reality. The predictable postmodern criticism is that Afrocentricity is a totalizing, thus stifling, discourse.

To the extent that African American Studies intends to be a liberatory mechanism within the African American community, it is necessary to promote Black cohesiveness in order to successfully make group claims on powerful institutions through such initiatives as affirmative action. Afrocentricity potentially serves that end, and an interventionist postmodernism is sympathetic to any effort to disrupt dominance. But a reflective or passive postmodernism, a nihilistic acceptance of relativity, undermines the discipline's activist project.

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KEITH GILYARD

Agamben, Giorgio

b. 1942, Rome, Italy

Philosopher and literary theorist

In 1966 and again in 1968, Giorgio Agamben studied with Martin **Heidegger** during two seminars at Le Thor. Not only did Agamben work with Heidegger early in his philosophical career, but Agamben also dedicates *Stanza: la Parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture) (1977) to the memory of Heidegger. Agamben's work, therefore, begs to be read within the philosophical context of Heidegger's philosophy and especially his focus upon the relationship of language, presence, and Being (***Dasein***). Even though a number of significant parallels are evident in Agamben's and Heidegger's writings – for example, the privileging of language, the centrality of Being in each of their writings, the use of poetry as a vehicle for philosophical investigation, and the ongoing attraction to ancient Greek philosophy – Agamben's work needs to be understood as not merely an extension of Heidegger's German romantic philosophy, but rather as an important contemporary bridge that links Heidegger, ancient philosophy, and the postmodern philosophical present.

Not surprisingly, Agamben's work provides a careful explication of traditional philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, **Hegel**, **Kant**, and various medieval theologians/philosophers, but such contemporary postmodern thinkers as Ferdinand de **Saussure**, Sigmund **Freud**, Walter **Benjamin**, and Jacques **Derrida** also figure largely in Agamben's philosophical and literary landscape. Moreover, Agamben has also edited the Italian version of the complete philosophical works of Benjamin. As such, Agamben's writings map a philosophical genealogy that traces the degree to

which postmodern philosophy has continued to explore subjects that have been the mainstay of traditional philosophy: the issues related to representation in language, thought, and the arts; the question of form in relationship to ideas; and the social and ethical dimensions of being, *techne*, and *nomos*.

Perhaps the most significant contribution by Agamben has been his meditation upon how the postmodern emphasis upon identity politics prompts a return to the centrality of ethics in any discussion of the social. Agamben announces his exploration of the nexus of politics, society, and ethics at the very close of his *Linguaggio e la morte: un seminario sul luogo della negativita* (Language and Death: The Place of Negativity) (1982), where he concludes that language is in fact a collective voice and as such any moment is an annunciation of ethos, which must prompt a vigilant and ongoing consideration of ethics.

Agamben has continued to explore the interrelatedness of language, politics, society, and ethics in his more recent books, *Comanita che vienne* (The Coming Community) (1993) and *Idea della prosa* (Idea of Prose) (1985). In this way, the trajectory of Agamben's writing has continued to explore traditional philosophical themes (for example, Aristotle's discussion of language and society in *Poetics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* or Plato's explication of government and citizenship in *The Republic*), but Agamben's contribution has been to synthesize our contemporary understanding of knowledge, language, and politics with the fundamental social and ethical questions that have been posed, reconceived, and re-evaluated by philosophers throughout human history.

DAVID CLIPPINGER

agency

Agency is the state or capability to determine oneself and one's own actions in an individual, collective, or otherwise social sense. The term is used to describe the state of being present, active, or self-actualized in the performance of political, ideological, philosophical selfhood, or **community**, despite any system which infringes upon or otherwise precludes this ability. As a conscious state of activity, "agency" suggests a distinct, yet culturally variable, postmodern impulse toward self-consciousness with the intention to subvert or undermine social or political oppression.

The concept of agency brings into question the freedom and the power to act or choose voluntarily and deliberately. This aspect of the problem of agency was raised by **Althusser**'s concept of "interpellation." Louis Althusser (1918–90) suggests that all individuals are subjects of ideological influence, and therefore, have limited will or control outside of prevailing discursive systems. The question of the extent to which one has the freedom to act or to represent oneself on one's own behalf is an irony of postmodern thought. Given the concept of the varied and often contradictory positions of the subject, it may or may not be an agent in a given situation. The subject's ultimate **power** and freedom of choice depends upon the circumstances, and is therefore determined by predominant ideological influences in each individual situation.

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LISA M.ORTIZ

allegory

Allegory derives etymologically from Greek *allos* (other) and *agorein* (to speak). In its broadest sense, allegory can include all literature, since all texts can be read "otherwise." While scholars continue to debate what exactly distinguishes the genre of allegory from all other allegorical possibilities, there

seems to be some consensus that what defines allegory as a genre is the degree to which it is aware of its own artifice. Gordon Teskey (1990) points out that allegory, unlike the related forms of parable and fable, offers clues to its own interpretation. By this definition Western narrative allegory begins with Prudentius's *Psychomachia* (4th century CE), in which personified virtues and vices battle over a human soul. Allegory became immensely popular throughout the Western Middle Ages and into the age of Enlightenment in a more satirical form (for example, *Gulliver's Travels*), finally losing favor with the rise of realism and romanticism until its resurgence in the modern era.

Because allegorical narratives so overtly and convincingly construct another level of meaning, they have been mistakenly dismissed as limited and transparent, though critics in recent decades have tried to dispel that notion. Allegory, according to Maureen Quilligan, "names the fact that language can signify many things at once" (1979: 26). Departing from traditional views, Quilligan defines allegory in terms of its obsession with language, thereby including traditional as well as postmodern texts. For Quilligan, "All true narrative allegory has its source in a culture's attitude toward language, and in that attitude, as embodied in the language itself, allegory finds the limits of its possibility. It is a genre beginning in, focused on, and ending with [words]" (1979: 15). Perhaps the most striking feature is that, unlike other genres, allegory requires the reader's full and active participation in the production of meaning.

Renewed fascination with language in the twentieth century quite naturally prompted a new interest in allegory, as witnessed in the writings of Walter Benjamin, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, James Joyce, and Franz Kafka. Postmodern artists, literary as well as visual, find in allegory's overdetermined signs and overburdened artifice a way to undermine and destabilize rather than reinforce universal truths. Brian McHale attributes the resurgence of allegory to "postmodernism's ontological poetics" where "allegory offers itself as a tool for exploring ontological structure and foregrounding ontological themes" (1987: 141). McHale also notes a consistent trend in postmodern allegory to establish "warring principles" or "semantic oppositions personified" (1987: 142). Instead of the medieval "good versus evil," opposition, however, these "Manichean allegories" "tend to prefer the Nietzschean opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, rational order vs. mindless pleasures" (1987: 142). At times, postmodern allegory mocks its own form by setting up overly simple correspondences only to reveal greater complexities than can be sustained by the superficial artifice, and the allegory collapses on itself.

Theresa Kelley explains modern allegory's reinvention as an outgrowth of its literary past: "With each return to its earlier moments and forms, allegory becomes incrementally different, yet strangely familiar" (1997: 14). Over the centuries the form has evolved, adapting to the varied cultural landscapes in which the allegorical impulse finds itself. This new allegorical breed is extremely versatile, meshing well with magical realism, science fiction, political satire, critical theory, and even anthropological commentary. Innovative allegorists of the postmodern era include Thomas Pynchon, Angela Carter, Iris Murdoch, Jerzy Kozinski, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Wole Soyinka.

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HELENE SCHECK

altarity

The term "altarity" was coined by Mark C. **Taylor** in *Altarity* (1987) to evoke the religious significance of the otherness or **alterity** that is excluded or repressed by modern conceptions of the human subject. In *Altarity*, Taylor argues that the operations of irreducible **difference** constitute a postmodern concern insofar as modern philosophy, in its conception of the human subject, seeks to reduce all difference to identity. Grounded in a **metaphysics of presence**, the modern conception of the self-identical subject begins with René Descartes (1596–1650), who, by seeking truth in the self-certainty of the thinking subject, ultimately conceives the subject's relation to otherness as a mediated form of self-relation. This attempted return to self through the consciousness of otherness reaches its summit in G.W.F. **Hegel** (1770–1831), who, in seeking to realize the full self-consciousness of the rational subject, epitomizes the modern dream of a total self-presence undisturbed by **absence**. While recognizing that Hegel sought to reconcile opposites without destroying difference (so as to avoid both the unreconciled oppositions of **Kant**'s philosophy and the dissolution of difference in post-Kantian identity philosophies), Taylor insists that Hegel's conception of absolute subjectivity ultimately subordinates difference to identity. Setting out to deconstruct that subordination, Taylor explores figures of difference that radically disrupt the self-presence of modern philosophy's self-identical subject.

In his deconstruction of the modern subject via the thought of altarity, Taylor relies on the critique of Hegel developed in twentieth-century France among structuralist and poststructuralist theorists indebted not only to Ferdinand de **Saussure** but also to Friedrich **Nietzsche**, Sigmund **Freud**, and Martin **Heidegger**. In drawing on such theorists, Taylor explores linguistic, psychological, and temporal operations of alterity that disrupt the self-identity of Hegel's modern subject. Always already constituted in relation to an otherness that it never fully comprehends, the postmodern subject would exist temporally between a past that was never present and a future that never arrives; it would suffer a desire that knows no fulfillment; and it would inhabit a language whose differential condition of possibility spells the crisis of linguistic plenitude.

For his interpretation of the crisis into which postmodern figures of difference throw the modern subject, Taylor depends above all on Jacques **Derrida**'s notion of *différance*, which Taylor's own altarity repeats, but with a difference: for altarity elicits a religious significance of difference that *différance* itself may have repressed or avoided. Taylor develops this religious significance through a return to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55). By reading postmodern thought as the attempt to elicit a difference that Hegelian philosophy leaves unthought, Taylor can argue that postmodern thought constitutes an extension of the attack on Hegel that Kierkegaard initiated in the name of a religious otherness not comprehended by Hegel's rational system. The critique of Hegel developed by Derrida and other thinkers of difference thus provokes a return to Kierkegaard that might allow one to consider the sacred character – the altarity – of postmodernity's alterity.

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TOM CARLSON

alterity

Alterity designates that which is either opposed to, separate from, or controlled within a closed system. Not easily identified with any individual or school of postmodern thinkers, the notion of alterity or

otherness holds a prominent place in the thought of nearly all postmodern philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and artists. In an age haunted by a recent past that responded to the problem of alterity with the horrors of racism, sexism, and genocide, it is not surprising that postmodern thinkers should be fascinated with the problem of alterity and should seek more tolerant, more patient, understandings of alterity. One therefore cannot speak of the postmodern concern for alterity without acknowledging its ethical or political significance.

Almost unanimously, postmodern thinkers have rejected the understanding of alterity and otherness which is found in the dialectic and logic of G.W.F. **Hegel**. Within Hegel's thought, the other is opposed to the self or the I (see **opposition**). This other is a negation of the self, which is in turn negated through the process of self-realization whereby the self comes to see itself in the other. In the other, the I recognizes itself outside itself and then becomes fully present to itself in and through the negation of the alterity of the other.

In the postmodern reading of Hegel, such a negation of alterity is suspected of being closely allied to the catastrophic events of the twentieth century. At least two important ways of rethinking the problem of alterity can be identified in postmodern thought. First, certain postmodern thinkers have articulated a notion of alterity in which the other is not the opposite or negation of the self, but is wholly or absolutely other. On such a reading, the alterity of the other is not defined by its relation to the self. Rather, the alterity of the other is articulated as such. It is different without being opposed. The early work of Emmanuel **Levinas**, aspects of the thought of Gilles **Deleuze**, certain feminist and ethnic thinkers, and some theologians wrote important works in which such a notion of alterity figures significantly. Second, another school of postmodern thinkers has conceived alterity as a lack within the whole. Indebted to Freudian notions of the unconscious and the repressed as well as to Heideggerian notions of forgetfulness or the oblivion of Being, this notion of alterity holds that the other is present only as absent from the whole or the same (see **absence**; **Freud, Sigmund**; **Heidegger, Martin**). The alterity of the other is that which must be excluded from or controlled by the totality if the self-identity of the same is to be realized (see **Derrida, Jacques**; **Foucault, Michel**). The other is thus integral to the identity of the same at the same time as it is different from it.

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JEFFREY KOSKY

Althusser, Louis

b. 16 October 1918, Birmandreis, Algeria

Marxist philosopher

Louis Althusser's project was to reconstruct Marxism in the wake of structuralist and poststructuralist theories of discourse. He advanced a sustained critique of humanism, historicism, and empiricism, as the conduits of the influence of bourgeois ideology on contemporary Marxist theory. Althusser argued that these bourgeois modes of understanding blocked a scientific theorization of history as the contradictory articulation of structures, with the economic determinant in "the last instance." Humanism obscures the fact that subjectivity is a product of the mode of production and hence historical. Historicism, meanwhile, needs to be countered by a theorization of any historical conjuncture as contradictory and complex, constituted by the articulation of antagonistic and heterogeneous processes and materials. Empiricism, finally, undermines a genuinely scientific understanding of history which presupposes that knowledge is only made available through an

internally coherent problematic which constitutes the "object of knowledge" (as opposed to the "real object").

In his reconstruction of Marxism as the science of history, Althusser furthermore reworked Marxist epistemology by introducing the concepts of structural determination and overdetermination. These concepts contest the forms of essentialism Althusser saw as introducing bourgeois ideology into Marxism. Structural determination, in which causes are only present in their effects, rather than self-present essences which are ontologically privileged over mere epiphenomena, challenged mechanical models of causality and those which rely upon a Hegelian notion of totality. Overdetermination, meanwhile, is intended to account for historical antagonisms and breaks which could not be explained on the assumption of the unfolding of a homogeneous historical essence.

Althusser's theory of ideology has also been of major significance. He critiqued the notion of ideology as an illusion which simply reproduces in spiritual form man's alienation. He argued instead for an understanding of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." Furthermore, he argued that ideology is material, and hence needed to be understood in relation to the practices which maintain and reproduce it. He thus introduced the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses to account for institutions, in particular the media and education, which reproduce ideology by producing subjects as its bearers. Althusser suggested that this process takes place through what he called "interpellation," whereby the individual is produced as a subject who recognizes him/herself in existing reality, and hence recognizes that reality as the only possible one.

Althusser's aim was to defend Marxism as a mode of scientific theory and critique which can grasp the limitations of existing capitalist society and produce the knowledge required to transform it into socialism. However, Althusser never adequately integrated the concepts of class struggle and revolution into his reconstruction of Marxism. He therefore left open the possibility of appropriating his conceptual innovations for a post-Marxist project which, by privileging overdetermination over structural determination, substituting for Althusser's scientific realism a full scale conventionalism which denies any knowledge of the real, and using what for Althusser was still a critical notion of ideology to support a relativist understanding of ideology as self-representation, post-Althusserian post-Marxism has moved ever further away from a scientific, revolutionary politics.

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ADAM KATZ

Altizer, Thomas J.J.

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Theologian

Thomas J.J. Altizer has been since the mid-1960s one of America's foremost "death of God" theologians. From the groundbreaking *Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966) to works like *The Genesis of God: A Theological Genealogy* (1993), Altizer's dialectical thinking has drawn consistently on eschatological biblical language and on the great apocalyptic visions of western philosophy (especially G.W.F. **Hegel** and Friedrich **Nietzsche**) and literature (especially the Christian epic tradition from Dante and Milton to William Blake and James Joyce) in order to demonstrate the theological significance of modern culture's atheism.

For Altizer, the pronouncement by Nietzsche that "God is dead" can be read as the fullest

realization of the original – but forgotten – message of Jesus that the kingdom of God is "at hand" or present in the "here and now." The God who "dies" for Altizer would be the transcendent God of classical theism who, as eternal and unchanging, remains beyond this world and its history in such a way as to judge and condemn them; through his death, that God would enter fully and irreversibly into the human and historical world, thereby liberating humanity from the guilt or unhappy consciousness that it suffers in face of unattainable divine transcendence. Altizer thus reads Nietzsche within a Hegelian conception of kenosis and incarnation: the negation of God's other-worldly transcendence occurs in the self-emptying through which God becomes fully incarnate and thus immanent in this world and its history. God becomes totally present there where he loses any identity distinct from the human here and now, and in this sense the most deeply atheistic culture of modernity, which realizes a new and universal humanity, becomes also the very self-embodiment of God.

While his death of God theology is crucial for such postmodern religious thinkers as Mark C. **Taylor**, Charles **Winquist**, and Edith **Wyschogrod**, Altizer insists that "there cannot yet be a postmodern theology" insofar as "a fully modern theology has not yet been written or conceived" (Altizer 1993: 2). Such a "fully modern theology," toward which Altizer himself works, would articulate a universal faith within a wholly secularized world, a purely human faith that transcends both any distinctly Christian identity and any identifiable God. For some avowedly postmodern thinkers, Altizer's contention that God's total presence is realized in a new and universal humanity might remain bound to a modern philosophy of the subject and a "metaphysics of presence" which, in light of post-Hegelian thought from Martin Heidegger to Jacques Derrida, themselves call for a more radical deconstruction.

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TOM CARLSON

anamnesis

Anamnesis is a Greek term meaning "recollection" or "reminiscence," from the verb *anamimneskein* (*ana*, again, and *mimneskein*, to call to mind). The doctrine of *anamnesis* is a central tenent of Plato's philosophy, proposed in response to the paradox of learning presented in the *Meno*: "It is impossible for a man to discover either what he knows or what he does not know. He could not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for" (*Meno* 80e). This *aporia* is resolved by the myth of reminiscence: to learn is to remember. Knowledge is recollection of an Idea that was once present to the immortal soul in a mythic time, but has since been forgotten or effaced.

The doctrine has been a point of reference for contemporary discussions of memory, notably those of Jacques Derrida (in *Memories*, and elsewhere), for whom memory does not simply recall what is already there, but is also an unforseeable event, necessarily linked to the future. Derrida has frequently called attention to the difficulties of the notion of recollection, which concern the link between memory and forgetting, the bridging of the rift between the past and the present, the coming to presence of the non-present, and so on. *Anamnesis* has been discussed by thinkers in several disciplines: history, particularly in relation to the memory of the Holocaust (Wyschogrod); art, particularly with regard to the efforts of artists such as Anselm Keifer to depict the past (Benjamin); and religion, as in efforts to reinterpret the function of repetition in religious myth and ritual (Taylor).

See also: mimesis; representation

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DAN SMITH

anthropology

Anthropology's mission of documenting the cultures of the world and demonstrating the fundamental humanity of all peoples consolidated itself in the early twentieth century, just as many of its traditional subjects found their lives profoundly transformed by colonialism, capitalism, and world wars. With the publication of *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) by Claude **Lévi-Strauss** (1908–), anthropology's humanism bifurcated into projects asserting a perceived need to "preserve" and to "protect" the world's "traditional" cultures from Western dominance, based on strong claims to difference and incommensurability, and projects concerned to prove the deep, underlying laws of human culture, based on strong claims of sameness and comparability. At the same time, especially after the Second World War, anthropology, like the other social sciences, entered a phase of positivist empiricism, seeking out forms of data based less on the anthropologist's participation in an alien ethos and more on the anthropologist's ability to "extract" and objectify elements of cultural life in order to test hypotheses about generalized psychological, social, and cultural laws. At mid-century, anthropology was relatively unified under three main approaches, each of which aspired to the model of the natural sciences: (1) structural-functionalism, which sought to identify social structures through the extrapolation of social rules from kinship and political processes; (2) psychocultural anthropology, based on assertions about the impact of cultural patterns in shaping personality; and (3) evolutionism, sometimes weakly rooted in Marxist historical materialism, based on assertions of unilineal or multilineal progressions from "simpler" to more "complex" forms of society due to adaptations to natural and social environments.

Although these three approaches to anthropology maintained their dominance for some time, anthropological theory experienced a period of reconceptualization during the 1960s. The impact of Lévi-Straussian structuralism on the field transformed structural-functionalism and psychocultural anthropology by introducing new conceptions of structure and mind. As well, the conservative political climate transformed evolutionism into adaptationist and ecological arguments.

Two theoretical moves in the late 1960s and 1970s further impacted the field. The first change involved a turning away from structuralism and toward hermeneutics. Clifford Geertz (1926–) was the pivotal figure here, bringing to anthropological theory a concern with the textual form of ethnographic writing and a theoretical attention to the richness of ethnographic description. He also relocated "culture" out of people's heads and into public life, bringing attention to public symbols and interactions without structuralism's drive to derive deep mental structures from observed phenomena. The second change involved a turning away from functionalist systems theories (of which Geertz himself occasionally partook) associated with Talcott Parsons and based on consensus models of society. New forms of Marxism, especially French structural Marxism, and feminism were central here, contributing conflict models of society, attention to inequality, and a break with the idea that societies are internally homogeneous entities.

In 1984, Sherry Ortner's influential article summarizing anthropological theory since the 1960s made a case for "structuration" or "practice" theories, borrowed from Anthony Giddens and Pierre **Bourdieu** (1930–). These theories were seen to have the advantage of avoiding the extreme subjectivism of certain interpretative and psychological frameworks, and the extreme objectivism of

varieties of functionalism and Marxism. Shortly after the publication of Ortner's essay, however, other trends emerged which pushed anthropology further toward its present post-paradigmatic position. These trends can be traced to the influence of postmodernism, to a reconsideration of the textual form of anthropological writing, embodied in the critique of ethnographic **representation** and informed by postmodern theories, and to a reconsideration of the subjects of anthropological inquiry, embodied in the turn toward analyzing the cultural forms of modernism and postmodernity and developed from critiques of disciplinarity as well as theorizing about the "postmodern condition."

The critique of the textual form of ethnography was a reaction against the continuing dominance of scientistic anthropology and also a response to Geertzian hermeneutics. Criticisms of Geertz had centered on the question of judgment and the evaluation or replicability of ethnographic work, especially since Geertz's emphasis on public symbols gave little direction on precisely whose symbols anthropologists should be concerned with. The Geertzian definition of culture as a system of meaning embodied in symbols seemed to reify the old notion of culture as internally coherent and monolithic, a notion that had been challenged by Marxism and feminism as well as critiques of anthropology's complicity in colonialism. At the same time, however, Geertz's work led to the recognition that ethnographies are not transparent recordings of "facts" or "experiences" but rather are texts, cultural artifacts in themselves which could be analyzed using the apparatus of literary theory.

The publication of Clifford and Marcus's edited collection, *Writing Culture* (1986), was a definitive moment in this move to problematize textuality in anthropology. Ethnographic textuality came under a number of different, often complementary, attacks. The most important of these was the attack on authorial authority, the voice of the anthropologist-as-expert writing "above" those written about and hidden from view as participant in the social milieu studied. This attack resonated powerfully with Bourdieu's project of objectifying the practice of objectivism in the social sciences.

Yet immediately after the publication of *Writing Culture*, innovative efforts to address ethnographic forms tended to emphasize reflexivity and "voice" – the voice of the native and the voice of the anthropologist – rather than engage in sustained critique of anthropological projects. Reflexive ethnographies often came under scrutiny for being too personal, too local, and ultimately too obfuscating of the authorial construction that went into such texts. For instance, it was seen as short-sighted to put the "native's voice" in one's text when selection, editing, and layout are still under authorial control and authorship remains as an effect of textuality. Shades of liberal voluntarist conceptions of the subject were lurking in these ethnographic projects, as well as in their elevation of voices and knowledges that supposedly "spoke for themselves." Nevertheless, reflexive ethnographies brought attention to the objectivist myths underpinning much anthropological scholarship. At the same time, in being labeled "postmodern" from other quarters of the discipline, such ethnographies generated familiar criticisms of self-reflective social scientific work captured best by the old joke: "What did the native say to the postmodern ethnographer? 'Can we talk about ME for a while?'" These ethnographies were often deemed non-empirical, as if the presence of tabular data, diagrams, and maps made an ethnography more empirical than the presence of the ethnographer's experience in the text. What these ethnographies were *not* was positivist, in that they did not – at least explicitly – try to create formal or general laws but rather questioned the metanarratives or foundational truth-claims of scientific discourse.

The critique of authorial authority generated another move in anthropological thinking and writing which was overshadowed by reflexive texts. This was a move to introduce modernist and postmodernist aesthetic sensibilities into ethnography and to produce experimental textual forms that broke conventions of authorship, intention, science, and objectivism. Anthropologists also noted these same sensibilities in the "texts" of culture they had been studying all along, and, influenced by Mikhail **Bakhtin** (1895–1975), emphasized **heteroglossia**, polyvocality, and transgression. Resistance was a privileged category for a time, as anthropologists found in it a means to

challenge representations of culture as stable, consistent, and harmonious and stressed political struggle in the ongoing practices of culture. The work of Michel **Foucault** (1926–84) served to reorient this emphasis on resistance toward a greater understanding of the embeddedness of resistance in **power** and a greater appreciation of the liberal conceptions of the resisting, speaking subject undergirding much of this work.

Feminists within the discipline criticized the *Writing Culture* project for several reasons. Some argued that feminist anthropologists had been doing experimental work all along and that such work had never been recognized in the field. Others argued that the critique of the textual form, and the metaphor of culture as text open to interpretation, left feminism with no "real" from which to launch critique. Finally, still others pointed out that, given contemporary academic politics and conventions of scholarship (such as the authored text itself), experimental texts never really displace authorial authority anyway. Feminism in the 1980s and 1990s lent its emphases on situatedness and positionality to the critique of ethnography and made the reformulation of anthropological theory considerably more complex by highlighting fragmented and multiple identities and the politics of culture.

Critiques of anthropology as a form of colonial discourse and as a handmaiden in colonial projects also challenged and complicated the post-*Writing Culture* moment by bringing anthropology as a discipline under scrutiny, in the Foucauldean sense, as a mode of power-knowledge whose original mission was to catalog and order the peoples of the colonial world for Western powers. Attention to colonialism also made anthropology significantly more historical, and the influence of Foucault found expression in works on colonial discourse, on constructions of colonial subjects and "natives" in places studied by anthropologists, and on the power-effects of bureaucratic forms of modernity itself.

By the 1990s, anthropologists influenced by broader trends in social and literary theory who had taken to heart the critique of ethnographic representation found themselves working in the tracks of Foucault, Bourdieu, and, through the influence of British cultural studies, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). The core concepts of the discipline, its own meta-narrativess and truth-claims founded in the experience of fieldwork, came under the anthropological gaze. Anthropology's hallmark concept of "culture" was now recognized as linked to colonialism and territorial nationalism. The liberal conception of culture as property came under scrutiny as well, as anthropologists asked questions about the practices and processes through which people come to objectify and construct culture as both property and identity under specific conditions of struggle.

Culture, too, was no longer connected as a matter of course to space. Anthropologists criticized the discipline's traditional equation of culture with territory (an equation that was as much a product of the Westphalian order of European territorial nationalism as an analytic construct), taking insights from critical **geography**. The disintegration of the culture concept also allowed for new views of the spatiality of culture: when space is seen as a problem, not as a given, other forms of spatiality, like contemporary diasporas, transnational processes, and **globalization**, come into greater focus. Anthropologists began to study the overlapping and contingent spaces of ethnicity, identity, mass media, and capitalism by opening up the boundedness of the culture concept and recognizing the contingent politics of cultural processes rather than maintaining the cultural holism that had been characteristic of the discipline previously.

The culture concept also rested on a notion of time, borrowed from nineteenth-century evolutionism and its translation into twentieth-century modernization narratives. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Franz Boas (1858–1942), the founding father of American anthropology, saw his task as a mission of "salvaging" for (Western) posterity the lifeways of non-Western native peoples. With the modernization projects of the postwar era, the "disappearance" of traditional subjects of anthropological inquiry had been seen as a harbinger of global cultural homogenization. But the critique of the temporal logic of the notion of culture highlighted the teleology of such arguments and focused attention on modernization narratives themselves. Not only were the "primitives" contemporaneous with the "civilized," and

not existing in some modern Stone Age, but their encounter with "modernity" was never a case of total assimilation or erasure but one shot through with ruptures, disarticulations, and hybrid reformulations.

When the culture concept is seen as part and parcel of modern apparatuses of power, then modernity itself demands an anthropology. Anthropology has found resonances with **cultural studies**, **postcolonial** criticism, science studies, **queer theory**, certain varieties of neo-Marxism, and psychoanalysis as it interrogates the forms of modernity that were part and parcel of its origin (the map, the state, gender, sexuality, race, the timetable, the liberal subject, biomedicine, law, science, and the ethnographic text itself). But anthropology still lives in a social science world, where anything not "empirical" – based on the evidence of experience verifiable across a number of unspecified and supposedly unsituated observers – is dismissed as "postmodern." Within the discipline, *any* explicit theorizing or reflection on the limits of positivist empiricism is often considered "postmodern" or "theoretical" or "interpretivist" (as if these were equivalent). Neo-Marxist forms of political economy have suffered less under these charges, perhaps because of their truth-claims and purported groundedness in the real. Yet exciting work in anthropology, influenced by postmodern theories and attending to the postmodern condition, successfully integrates interpretivist and political economic approaches and is richly empirical, even as it destabilizes the claims of empiricism and in so doing challenges the ground of the discipline itself.

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WILLIAM MAURER

aporia

Aporia is a Greek term that refers to a puzzle or **paradox**, specifically an unpassable path or an impassable passage. Aristotle uses *aporia* in a general way when he discusses problems or difficulties that his philosophy must resolve. In the *Physics* (217b–220a 25), Aristotle discusses the *aporia* of time, whereby two simultaneous points of time cannot occupy the same space. In an essay originally written in 1968 called "Ousia and Gramme," Jacques **Derrida** discusses the aporetic formulation regarding time in Aristotle, and suggests that in fact it is irresolvable at the level of logical thought, because a moment of time must exist insofar as time exists, and yet it must not be or become nonexistent in order for there to be a passage of time. Derrida's work has consistently emphasized aporias at the level of philosophical thinking.

In *Aporias* (1993), Derrida explicitly meditates on the term *aporia* and the ideas surrounding it. The paradigmatic case of *aporia* is death, which is literally an impassable passage. Derrida critiques Martin **Heidegger**'s (1889–1976) understanding of "being-towards-death" as a state of authentic existence, arguing that actually death represents what is most inauthentic about human **subjectivity**, but this makes it no less important or significant. Human subjectivity is ruptured by its relations with others, particularly the death of others, which is at the same time an aspect of one's

own dying (see **self/other**). Derrida calls into question the absolute **opposition** of authentic and inauthentic existence, as well as the opposition of life and death. Rather than an immovable limit at the end of life, death as exemplary *aporia* is distributed throughout life, so that "the ultimate *aporia* is the impossibility of *aporia* as such" (Derrida 1993: 78). An *aporia* or problem is never an absolute or total problem, in the sense that it prevents any discussion, understanding or making of sense (see also **Nancy**, Jean-Luc). At the same time, however, every *aporia* (and for Derrida nearly every term is ultimately an *aporia*), admits of no settled solution or clear resolution.

See also: deconstruction; grammatology; Levinas, Emmanuel; opposition; paradox

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CLAYTON CROCKETT

arche-writing

Arche-writing is Jacques **Derrida**'s term for the constitutive negativity that makes signification possible, an original linguistic spacing that cannot be recovered by any signifying act. Receiving its most extensive elaboration in *Of Grammatology*, arche-writing is used by Derrida to foreground the instability of the idea of an "originary writing." "Arche" translates as "origin," and insofar as something is an "original" it is identical to itself and not like anything else (speech, Derrida argues, is a paradigmatic example of a thing that a dominant tradition in Western philosophy has understood as an "origin" that is self-present and self-identical). However, insofar as that "origin" is written, it is a representation of that origin, and therefore no longer the original itself. Furthermore, in being "writing" its value, like that of all other signifiers, is produced by negativity, because of its difference from other written signifiers. Not a difference between but a difference within signifiers, arche-writing is a term that sharply interrogates the whole notion of identity, and in doing so, is a key term in the wider deconstructive project of foregrounding the political character of all identitarian claims.

See also: deconstruction; *mise en abyme*; phallocentrism

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STEVEN HAYWARD

Arendt, Hannah

b. 14 October 1906, Hanover, Germany

Political thinker

Hannah Arendt's relevance to postmodern thought lies in the direction she takes the critique of Western metaphysics she shares, in particular, with Martin Heidegger. Arendt advances this critique not through an interrogation of representational thinking but by implicating Western metaphysics in the hierarchical ordering of the various human capacities in the modern age. Arendt contends that the modern age is characterized by the privileging of, first, "work" (*homo faber*), and, then, "labor" (*animal laborans*) over action. Action follows from the basic human condition of "natality," and involves the capacity to start something new and unaccounted for by existing social arrangements and norms. Acting in common, in the public "space of appearances," is the basis of Arendt's theory of politics. She argues that politics in this sense has been suppressed by the "rise of the social" in the modern age, aside from exceptional moments such as those found in the modern revolutions when people have founded new political forms, such as the councils or soviets.

The privileging of "work," which reduces human activity to means–ends calculation, and

then "labor," which reduces all human activity to life processes, are, for Arendt, at the root of the most consequential and destructive modern assumption: that "man" produces himself. Arendt associates this notion with the extreme forms of dispossession and world-alienation central to modernity. Thus, this assumption is ultimately implicated in totalitarianism, for Arendt the central experience and foremost potentiality of our time, which rests upon the further assumption that "everything is possible."

Humanist metaphysics, for Arendt, is predicated upon the reduction of politics to the forms of practice specific to *homo faber*. She traces the violent consequences of this reduction in two crucial ways. First, metaphysics presupposes the denial of human plurality, for Arendt the "law of the world." For *homo faber*, the unitary subject stands over against the world as so much "raw material" to be transformed into a finished object. Similarly, metaphysics denies the plurality of opinions in the public world by despotically privileging "truth" and degrading public disputation to "mere opinion." Second, metaphysics, despite its roots in "thinking," as a non-utilitarian activity, reduces thinking to the acquisition of scientific knowledge, which negates thinking as a corrosive and critical activity.

Arendt concludes that modernity has been characterized by the suppression of "judgment," the indispensable political faculty whereby we judge particulars without subsuming them under a universal rule. Arendt theorized judgment as "representative thinking": a mode of reasoning which clarifies opinion by thinking from the standpoint of others. Judging involves not "empathy," but a form of disinterested thinking which takes into account the possible understandings of others, given their distinctive place in the world. Arendt's relation to postmodern thinkers – like Lyotard – who have sought to revive the category of judgment is thus in the nature of a differend. While prevailing modes of postmodernism locate judgment in an aporetic, undecidable space (ultimately, for Arendt, the space of thinking, which prepares one for judgment but cannot be a substitute for it), for Arendt judgment is situated in the defense of plurality, the common world, and the possibility of concerted political action.

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ADAM KATZ

art history and criticism

Postmodernism's effect on art history and criticism has been the abandonment of the traditional tasks of establishing developmental chronologies or stylistic and iconographic comparisons. Instead, contemporary art history and criticism is intent on answering questions regarding how we might understand or interpret the art of the past and its relationship to that of our own time as well as addressing the more vital and complex issues of the role art and culture plays in the formation of our **subjectivity**. As a result, art historians and critics have been lead to question their own practices, not only because modernism had made self-criticality a priority, or the nature of art's project had changed from aesthetic to conceptual, but because Marxist theory, which had constituted a permanent opposition to positivism had failed to supply a concrete analysis of the changing nature of capitalism during the 1960s. The adaptation of **structuralism** in the 1970s made art historians and critics aware of art's dual identities as a system (discourse network) and as a form of signification (objectification) rather than an historically derived category of objects. Consequently, structuralism and its dependence on culturally determined norms was displaced by the poststructuralist critique of the Enlightenment taxonomies which order **modernism** specifically and Western thought in general.

Art history and its criteria have been vulnerable to charges of determinism, subjectivism, idealism, and ideological bias since their modern origins in Johann Winckelmann's (1717–68) attempt in the 1730s to systematically establish the superiority and universality of the classic Greco-Roman tradition. Modern art history emerged when art historians such as Alois Riegl (1858–1905), Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965), Heinrich Wolfflin (1864–1945), and Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) set about to liberate art history and its contents from its adherence to abstract and immutable classical standards. They contributed to an art history which was less a chronicle of art objects and styles than a record of the principles by which art's qualities might be interpreted and validated. With the advent of expressionism and abstract art at the beginning of the twentieth century, historians and critics found it necessary to discard those methods which were limited to issues of mimesis while maintaining a semblance of continuity within the Renaissance tradition. The resulting history, premised on a mixture of positivism and idealism, sought to establish art's essential nature. By the late 1950s, art history had reified into a narrative that represented art works as historically determined objects of sensory data, self-reflection, and critical judgment.

Ironically, modernism achieved its goal of determining art's essential nature by establishing that it had no intrinsic qualities and that its critical criteria were ideologically rather than historically determined. This ungrounding of art reflects the broader crisis of the "Subject," which stems from the theoretical conflict between the synchronistic (ahistorical) account of human existence provided by existentialism (and structuralism) and the diachronic (historic) view central to Marxism. The problematic nature of the historically constituted Subject was made conspicuously evident when Louis **Althusser** (1918–90) sought to reconcile Marxism and structuralism. In conflict with classic Marxist theory, he concluded that history is a process without a Subject and proposed that different aspects of social reality are relatively autonomous and subsequently the economic base is determinant "only in the last Instance."

In place of modernism's narratives of historical continuity and progressive development, poststructuralism establishes a framework in which identification and transference are established intersubjectively. In this context, the art historian Rosalind Krauss (who had previously been associated with Clement Greenberg's formalist position), and such younger critics as Craig Owens and Hal Foster began to proffer poststructuralist and interdisciplinary rationales that could account for art's unintended symbolic and institutional content. Since the late 1980s, Krauss's project has come to be increasingly characterized by the adaptation of the interpretive tools of Georges **Bataille** (1897–1962), Jacques **Lacan** (1901–81), and Gilles **Deleuze** (1925–95).

Poststructuralism's critique of the Subject, in part, is a product of a line of thought that extends from G.W.F. **Hegel** (1770–1831) and passes through Karl Marx and Friedrich **Nietzsche** (1844–1900) to such modern thinkers as Martin **Heidegger** (1889–1976) and Alexandre Kojève (1902–68.) This discourse also supplies the grounding for poststructuralism's investigation into the relationship between an object (the signified) and its representations (the signifier) and how these signs, symbolically and ideologically, order our reality. Heidegger's contribution to this discourse of the Subject resides in his view that reality has no foundation outside of language. Consequently, everything we believe to be part of the world is something we have put there in our striving to master existence. Our dilemma is that we routinely fail to recognize this. Influenced by Heidegger, Kojève sought to reconcile the conflict between Marxism's account of human consciousness, the role history plays in its formation, and the promise of self-determination that marks the end of history.

In the 1970s, when art historians and critics in the United States such as Krauss and Jack Burnham adopted the critical tools of structuralism, they focused their critique on Clement Greenberg's (1909–94) formalist interpretation of modernism, which since the 1950s had dominated art criticism. For Greenberg, art's primary function was to give expression to its being in accord with the material qualities of its forms. Literary content was inconsequential and art's appropriation by social and political discourse was to be resisted. By critiquing this vision of art and its autonomy, art historians and critics sought a viable alternative for

the interpretation of art's content, its historical development, and its contemporary state.

Greenberg had originally formulated these views in the essay "Avant Garde and Kitsch" (1939) in which he argued that art's continuity and internal logic are circumscribed by its history. Accordingly, due to the advent of mass culture's challenge to high culture, the task of the avant-garde had become that of recuperating and sustaining the modernist aesthetic project of defining art's self-representation and self-referentiality. Anything less meant the loss of art. This view is built on the greatest fear of Greenberg's generation: that technology (and the culture industry sustained by it) would destroy humanist culture and its commitment to the Enlightenment project of self-conscious emancipation (self-determination).

The term postmodernism came to be applied popularly in the early 1980s to those practices that exemplified the cultural effects of those systems of production, replication, and consumption whose logic necessitate that all experience be mediated, stored, fetishized, and commodified in accord with ideological and economic goals. In this context, hierarchy, linearity, interiority, and continuity have no value because "things" are ordered in accord with their allure or potential desirability. Modernity (the process of constructing the present) under these conditions is also displaced due to technology's ability to stimulate a sense that every event is potentially momentous. Subsequently, the packaging and the repackaging of events erodes the authority of history. Umberto Eco (1932–) describes this situation as the material, ideological, philosophical, and cultural basis of postmodernism.

Since mass culture and media has undermined the sensuous conditions of our material existence, the ideal of a substantive aesthetic discourse as art's Subject was further eroded in the 1960s by Pop and Minimal Art's adaptation of an industrial aesthetic. The status of traditional modes of expression were diminished by this approach to such a degree as to confirm that art was nothing more than an assemblage of diverse and often conflicting concepts, practices and institutional frames. These changes required new critical standards and accounts by which to insure the value of the new art. Consequently, in the early 1960s and 1970s there emerged artist-critics such as Alan Kaprow, Donald Judd, Sidney Tillim, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Joseph Kosuth, and Victor Burgin who, using their readings in symbolic logic, **philosophy**, **linguistics**, **sociology**, and cultural **anthropology**, wrote extensively on art's theoretical, social, and historical premises. These artist-writers greatly transformed the traditional relationship between artistic and critical practices.

Art historians and critics who sought to establish the capacity of their discipline formed a self-critical relation to their own methodologies by seeking to establish the competency of each. This necessitated that they critique modernism's process of negation, as well as its assumptions of essentialism and universality. The result was that they exposed modernism's ideological and exclusionary (Eurocentric and masculine) underpinnings. Further erosion of the lines of demarcation that once categorically defined art history's respective criteria also occurred. This made it self-apparent that art history was nothing more than an institutional construct intent on illusively creating its Subject. With this, the view that art lacked any inherent formal or aesthetic value gained currency.

Given that traditional art history could no longer supply as a substantive narrative of art's Subject, a "new art history" emerged in the 1970s exemplified by the work of T.J. Clark (1943–), Griselda Pollack, Margret Inverson, and Charles Harrison that sought to establish for art a social context rather than a new subject. Viewing their efforts as a form of intervention, they probe the social and political terms and context by which works of art come to have meaning. This movement away from the traditionally defined tasks of establishing developmental chronologies or stylistic and iconographic comparisons manifested itself as self-conscious critiques of previous historical accounts and trans-historical comparisons.

This reorientation of art history and criticism had been stimulated and informed by the demands in the 1950s and 1960s for access to the means of cultural representation by various segments of society that had previously been excluded. Among the first of these critiques was that of feminism (see **feminism and postmodernism**). The intent of the feminist reading of historians and critics such as

Linda Nochlin, Carol Duncan, Patricia Mainardi, and Lucy Lippard was to reveal the role that art history and criticism played in normalizing masculine domination of the cultural sphere. This critique of sexism was quickly joined by those of racism and ethnocentrism. These critiques have come to be academically organized under various ethnic headings as well as women's studies, **queer theory**, **postcolonial** discourse, or the broader categories of visual and cultural studies.

While interdisciplinary practices of textual and contextual readings of the work of "art" have their contemporary roots in Roland **Barthes**'s (1915–80) **semiotics**, Michel **Foucault**'s (1926–84) genealogies, and Fredric **Jameson**'s (1934–) ideological critique, they also reflect the renewed interest in the 1960s in the **Frankfurt School** and the critical theory of such figures as Theodor **Adorno** (1900–69) and Walter **Benjamin** (1892–1940). While Adorno is one of the last significant modernist thinkers, Benjamin supplies a prescient description of the ways and means by which art, philosophy, science, politics, and identity are affected by the discourses of power and technology. He was influenced by Riegl's view that art records humanity's changing consciousness and its history is a chronicle of its changing metaphorical, psychological, and sociological texts. He used this view to counter Panofsky and Wolfflin's approach to art history, because these tended to produce a generalized rational and fixed standards by which to judge artistic production. In principle, what Benjamin was dissenting from was that in order to construct their narratives of art, these art historians had premised their work on such dichotomies as continuity versus rupture, the aesthetic versus the social, progress versus decay. This tendency to produce a consummate subjects for art is likewise found in the work of such historians as Arnold Hauser (1892–1968), whose work focuses on how (high) art functions as a social trope of the ruling elite, and Ernst Gombrich (1909–), who sought to construct a cultural history of art based on the principles of **psychology** and phenomenology.

Such dominant positions premised on linearity and progressivism (as well as negativity and reductivism) did not succumb to its own critique of metaphysics and romantic idealism until the 1980s. In their place a number of overlapping positions have emerged. In 1983 for instance, the art historian Hans Belting questioned art history's Hegelian grounding. His conclusion was that art could not have a coherent history because it had neither a unitary essence or logic. Therefore, all that is possible are discrete inquiries into art's past. Comparably, in 1984 Arthur **Danto**, based on a Hegelian view of **history**, announced that art no longer had a philosophic compunction to produce a record of necessity and therefore had achieved its post-historical state of self-determination. In its place, Danto proposes a revision of our conception and relation to art's general criteria and future development in which questions of taste and historical necessity are no longer issues.

Subsequently, Norman Bryson contends that art history can continue to have significance if it grounds its practices in **semiotics**. This position forms the foundation for the interdisciplinary study known as Visual and Cultural Studies which holds that the only relevant analysis of art resides in its function as a sign system and all other determinations of historical, stylistic, or aesthetic worth constitute nothing more than issues of taste and judgment. Within this context, the **alterity** of high and mass culture is dissolved and art becomes merely one form of cultural expression among others. Comparably, Svetlana Alpers and Mieke Bal, respectively, focus on questions of how works of art participate in the varied networks that make up the discourses of representation, perception, and **subjectivity** (identity). Another important aspect of this undertaking of re-integrating art into a more general intellectual and critical discourse has been articulated by Donald Preziosi, whose writings focus on the ideological content of art history and how it partakes of discourses of power and normalization. He has demonstrated how art's division into categories such as high, low, folk, and ethnic seemingly do not exist outside of their institutionalization.

Within this context, Stephen Melville proposes that art history and criticism form a discourse network consisting of art practices which are Kantian in content and whose interpretation is hermeneutic (Heideggarian), while its history is Hegelian (cumulative) rather than reductive. Melville's analysis explains that the continued viability of art, its history, and criticism is premised on the

impossibility of any of these supplying a credible account of art's respective states of being. Consequently, rather than describing how art history establishes the terms of our consciousness, the historian and critic's task involves making apparent the role contemporary consciousness and its conditions play in the formulation of our understanding of art's history.

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SAUL OSTROW

Artaud, Antonin

b. 4 September 1896, Marseilles, France

Novelist and playwright

Antonin Artaud is best known for his often autobiographical depictions of what came to be known as the theater of cruelty, which featured various scenes of the body being pushed to its physical and emotional limits. Artaud, during his many years of mental illness, had been administered electroshock therapy, lost extreme amounts of weight, and somehow recovered in time to undertake a prodigious amount of writing during the last two years of his life.

L'omblic des limbes (1925) introduced Artaud to both the world and the Surrealists, whom he joined in late 1924. It features an assortment of beetles, scorpions, frogs, and human body parts that have sprung forth in the aftermath of the collision of stars; its human characters experience the pregnancy of a nurse whose belly swells until it ushers forth new life for dozens of scorpions. But the Surrealists saw not Artaud but Louis Aragon as a young spokesman for their rising prominence. Artaud was ousted from the Surrealist establishment ranks in 1927 because his gnostic views and preference for the imagination had no place in a group committed to eschewing the hyperrealist ideals of communism.

Artaud moved onward to explorations of suicide as he took up studies of Maurice Blanchot's work; he fashions Blanchot's idea of suicide as action into suicide as revolution against God. It is not suicide itself that drives Artaud's creative vision throughout the rest of his life; rather, it is the explorations for and around the point of destruction.

But it is the transformation from suicide themes to those surrounding the alien protagonist that propelled Artaud into his most prolific period. In 1932, he began a venture that he called the Theatre of Cruelty. Within this realm, Artaud created a number of works in which, while his characters' bodies seemed to die, their spirits stood by as detached spectators. In essence, suicide had not left at all but had merely shifted to another representation, one which would allow the "dying" figure to fully experience the moment with none of the diminishing of feeling that would be evident in real-life movement toward death.

Artaud's works represent a rehearsal of what is to come during and after actual death: an idea about suffering in life that is prominent in both the Gnostic and Cabbalistic traditions. The subject moves in such dramas from the Occidental world to the Orient, which he or she sees as a paradise in which the capabilities of the mind and the spirit can be fully realized. Pre-colonial Mexico became such a place for Artaud when he wrote "La Conquete

du Mexique," which depicted the violent confrontations between natives and the Spanish conquistadors. Again, we see body parts, symbolic because those of the Spaniards intermingle with those of the natives.

Ireland was the scene for Artaud's next project: he wished to return the cane of St Patrick to its rightful place. He wrote letters from Dublin, Galway, and Kilronan in which he outlines his theory that nature and its gods were forced to step aside in favor of God and his son who was to oversee destruction of all living beings. The theory superimposes Christianity, Gnosticism, and Hinduism onto each other. Artaud desired control over his project to such a degree that he staged a disturbance in Dublin, was arrested by police, and held in custody for several days before being deported to France. He was transported by French authorities to an asylum, which began nine years of confinement in several hospitals.

While at Rodez, from which he wrote many letters and creative works, he maintained that his hospital stays were merely a sequel to the return of St Patrick's staff to Ireland. Interestingly enough, one of his reconstructed stories has him in Dublin in September 1937, reaffirming his faith in the Catholic Church and renouncing earlier works. His doctor, Gaston Ferdiere, prescribed reading and writing, which were meant to cure Artaud but actually fed on his previous desires to write from the perspective of cruelty. He uses hospitals, especially Rodez, as settings for Christianity-based works, in which the forces of good collide with those of evil. Translation functioned as a way to reproduce – faithfully to *someone else's* words and ideas – madness. In the *Cahiers de Rodez*, begun in 1945, battles involved words rather than bodies and with these new characters, Artaud was able to achieve the same goals he had previously but without the obvious gore that would have disturbed his doctors.

Artaud was released from Rodez in May 1946 and set to work on *Le Reteur d'Artaud le Momo*, as well as several drawings. In February 1947, he visited an exhibition of Van Gogh's paintings, after which he wrote an essay comparing his madness to Van Gogh's and suggesting that insanity is an honorable condition. In April 1948, Artaud was found dead by a gardener who had brought him his breakfast. He had been taking unregulated amounts of chloral hydrate and had been ill, so while suicide could not be established as a cause of death, he nevertheless did not get a Catholic funeral and burial.

Years later, influential French theorists and philosophers such as Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida examined his life and works. They found him an attractive subject because of the nebulous nature mental illness takes on when studied independently of either the patient or his doctors. Madness, in effect, both shaped and distorted his work. Artaud is important to the study of postmodernism not only because of these critics and scholars who are firmly entrenched in the postmodern tradition, but also in his own right because he explored the idea of disintegration long before the postmodern movement actually began.

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TRACY CLARK

Aufklärung

Aufklärung is philosophical enlightenment through the power of human reason. It emphasizes the human person's independence from nature and culture through reason. In an effort to understand German culture and society after the Second

World War, Theodor W. **Adorno** and Max **Horkheimer** as well as other philosophers and social theorists of the **Frankfurt School** developed a critical understanding of *Aufklärung* that demonstrated a connection between the autonomous individual and totalitarian social formations. *Aufklärung*, with its emphasis on human autonomy through the power of rationality, historically has been an essential component in forming the basis of modern society.

See also: Benjamin, Walter; Habermas, Jürgen

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VICTOR E. TAYLOR

authority

Authority is the legitimate capacity to implement and enforce rules governing political institutions. Because authority is considered necessary to the preservation of political society, analyses of authority often have assumed a central role in moral, political, and legal theories (see also **critical legal studies**). Attempts to describe and assess the phenomenon of authority may be categorized as premodern, modern, and postmodern.

Premodern views

The premodern engagement with authority is distinguished by the dominance of religion. According to Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), while the state is derived from the nature of humans as social and political animals, it is subordinate to the Church insofar as spiritual nature is supreme. The relationship between the authority of the state and that of the Church is mediated through eternal, natural, human and divine law. Natural law is that aspect of eternal law (the divine order of things) which pertains to human beings through the faculty of rationality. Human laws are the specific rules of government devised by reason from the general precepts of natural law. Because of the fallibility of human reason, however, divine law provides directions for human conduct through Scriptural revelation. Consequently, all positive human law and political authority is regarded as legitimate insofar as it is derived from God's eternal law, the ultimate source of all authority.

Modern views

The modern account of authority is grounded in reason alone. Arising from the cultural transformations of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, **modernism** emphasizes rationality as the basis of political authority. The social contract theories found in Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), for example, portray the state as an artificial construct whose authority derives from the consent of rational individuals, and is constrained by the natural rights of individuals to life, liberty, and property. While Hobbes and Locke grant different degrees of authority to the state, both seek to justify the state's authority from the perspective of a rational individual initially situated in a pre-political state of nature. Similarly, Immanuel **Kant** (1724–1804) grounds morality in universal rules prescribed by reason alone, which condition the actions of autonomous human beings. Freedom becomes possible when humans subject themselves to the authority of the moral law derived from reason. Rational individual choice thus serves as the cornerstone of modernism's moral justification of political authority.

Postmodern views

The postmodern approach is characterized by the questioning of all attempts to ground authority on any absolute foundation, whether that of religion or reason. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François **Lyotard** (1924–98) described postmodernism as an "incredulity" toward metanarratives, an inability to accept modernism's encompassing accounts of truth, progress, and freedom based on the autonomy of human reason.

One consequence of postmodern incredulity is what Jürgen **Habermas** (1929–) termed "legitimation crisis." For modernism, the rational justification of authority provides the legitimate

condition from which arises the obligation to obey authority. Yet the modernist **discourse** of legitimacy assumes a generic and uniform set of cognitivist norms in order to prescribe the process of legitimation itself. The postmodern crisis of authority's delegitimation stems from the loss of certitude these norms have suffered throughout the course of the twentieth century, plagued by authoritarianism, genocide, and technological destruction of the environment.

Michel **Foucault** (1926–84) portrays the critique of legitimation as not merely skepticism about Enlightenment ideals but as recognition that reason and **power** are not inherently distinct. A significant facet of postmodernism is its exposure of the controversial modernist assumption that legitimate authority is necessarily opposed to domination and repression. Yet Foucault is careful to note that this does not mean there is no distinction between authority and domination. Instead, what must be realized is that there are distinct and heterogeneous modalities of exercising power characteristic of authority as well as of freedom and domination. Consequently, authority cannot be regarded either as a form of action opposed to power or as an institution that merely wields power, but as a mechanism of political management that is composed by the fluid exercise of power throughout society. There is no justification for authority that completely transcends power, and no guarantee that the exercise of authority will be constrained by the demands of a universal rationality.

The general thrust of postmodernism, then, is not the elimination of authority, since that would presume the elimination of power. Rather it is the recognition that authority is constituted through the shifting and contextual uses of power, such that its legitimacy does not transparently derive from either natural right or rational consent.

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J. PATRICK HAYDEN

B

Bakhtin, Mikhail

b. 16 November 1895, Orel, Russia; d. 7 March 1975, Moscow, Russia

Philosopher of language and literary theorist

Although the works of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin span a greater part of the twentieth century, his opus went largely unappreciated during Stalin's regime, and until recently was not widely disseminated in the West. When several American critics, including Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, began to translate and disseminate his texts in the 1980s, these rapidly gained enormous popularity in literary fields; many of his ideas resonated with postmodern concerns, since they involved both a type of social criticism adopted by cultural studies, and a linguistic orientation characteristic of deconstruction, a conjunction that has often allowed for written "dialogue" between the two groups over Bakhtin's textual corpse.

This debate is partially occasioned by the elusive nature of Bakhtin's terminology, whose prismatic significations enable multiple interpretations of his principal ideas. One of the most important, dialogism, appears in various incarnations, initially manifesting itself in the guise of "polyphony" in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929), then appearing alternately as "polyglossia" and "heteroglossia" in the essay "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," and finally as "dialogism" itself in the central piece "Discourse and the Novel." In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* Bakhtin elaborates a conception of the "unfinalized" which extends dialogism *ad infinitum*, and which could be seen as prefiguring certain versions of reader response criticism that view the recipient of a text as engaged in its partial completion. Here both dialogism and *unfinalizability* invoke ever-expanding contexts, from the nature of the single word, to the relation between character and author, or character and text, to the interplay between a text and the language(s) in which it is composed. Bakhtin's writings, especially *Rabelais and His World*, additionally employ the politically liberatory concept of the *carnivalesque.* Some have attributed the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev to him as well.

Those who study the novel have also found a resource in Bakhtin. The writings collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*, among others, consider the novel's particular stylistic poetics, its historical genesis, and the social conditions enabling its emergence, ultimately, in fact, placing priority on it as a genre. In "Discourse and the Novel," Bakhtin even claims that lyric poetry – since it appears to create a totalized and self-contained universe – and drama – because it allegedly places the fate of one hero at its uncontested center – lack the novel's dialogic quality, an assertion that has subsequently been contested even by those who espouse Bakhtin's understanding of dialogism.

While enthusiasm for Bakhtin may have waned in recent years, his earliest writings appeared in translation as critical focus shifted from language to ethics during the past decade. Including *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and the essays in *Art and Answerability,* these fragmentary texts attempt to develop an ethics that would deviate from and

enhance Kant's in its emphasis on the involvement of the particular individual and the phenomenology of his or her acts. Like **Derrida**'s recent work on ethics, Bakhtin's writings insist on the purposive role of the singular person rather than a purely universal categorical imperative.

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BERNADETTE MEYLER

Barthes, Roland

b. 12 November 1915, Cherbourg, France; d. 26 March 1980, Paris, France

Literary theorist and cultural critic

The texts that make up Roland Barthes's oeuvre resist any summarizing gesture. Continually shifting between methodologies, theoretical vocabularies, and writing styles, Barthes's texts are themselves vehicles for elaborating and testing the connections between his chief preoccupations: **history**, **textuality**, and pleasure.

Barthes's first major work, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), is a defense of linguistic and stylistic experimentation. A response to Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1947), in which Sartre suggests that in order to write politically one should use a plain style and language, *Writing Degree Zero* details a theoretical framework which combines avant-garde aesthetics with revolutionary politics: experimentation itself is recognized as political. Barthes makes a distinction between "language," the set of combinatory possibilities shared by the speakers of a language; "style," a subject's private vocabulary having as its frame of reference the "biological or biographical"; and a third term, "*écriture*," which denotes the dialectical process of negotiating between these extremes of interiority and exteriority to ultimately produce "form considered as human intention." Sometimes translated into English as "writing," the influential concept of *écriture* suggests a choice the writer makes in writing, a choice at once conditioned by history (involving a language that is always already inhabited by other voices) and a certain distance from history, that creates the possibility of the writer becoming an actor in that history. Similar

issues are constellated in *Michelet* (1954), *On Racine* (1963), and in the powerful essays on Brecht and Robbe-Grillet collected in *Critical Essays* (1964).

Another series of Barthes's texts – including *Elements of Semiology* (1964), *The Fashion System* (1967), and the popular *Mythologies* (1957) – employ the methodological strategies of **structuralism** as a means to approach social "mythologies." For Barthes, a "myth" is history transformed into nature. Barthes uses this word in a particular way to describe the ways a cultural artifact is structured and produced by cultural "codes" that ideologically support the hegemony of bourgeois culture (some of Barthes's examples include the world of fashion, the spectacle of wrestling, and the face of Garbo). Approaching the study of culture through a structuralist methodology, Barthes produces a social **semiotics** sensitive to the manipulations of **power** as well as a cultural critique that underlines the ways in which meaning itself is commodified, producing its consumers as it reproduces the ideological and economic contexts of which it is a part.

Eventually moving away from structuralism, Barthes turns to the question of textuality in *S/Z* (1970), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), and the oft-cited essays included in the English collection *Image Music Text* (1977). He argues for the "death of the author" and for a reconceptualization of the text (as opposed to the "book" or the "work") in Derridian terms, as a signifier resisting any final determination of meaning. Differentiating between the "readerly text," of which the reader is the passive receiver of a predetermined meaning, and the "writerly text," of which the reader is the active producer of a perpetually shifting series of significations, Barthes elaborates the relation between textuality and pleasure. As in his previous works, Barthes details both the transgressive pleasures of reading and writing, and the way these same textual activities can be deployed by a culture as disciplinary apparatuses.

Barthes's last text before his sudden death in 1980 – the autobiographical *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), the fragmentary and poetic *A Lover's Discouse* (1977), his discussion of photography in *Camera Lucinda* (1980), and the frank avowal of homosexual desire in the posthumously published *Incidents* (1987) – are carefully crafted, reflexive texts that exemplify and elaborate many of the preoccupations of his more explicitly theoretical writings. These texts demonstrate the transgressive suggestivity of textuality and its ability to evoke the boundaries of a heteronormative, disciplinary discourse at the same time as it maneuvers within and subverts it.

In outlining the possibilities for writing the text of bliss without writing about bliss, in designating the economies of linguistic transgressivity as distinct from the language of transgression, and in demonstrating the politics of a homosexual writing that resists writing the word homosexual, the texts produced by Roland Barthes remain resonant.

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STEVEN HAYWARD

Bataille, Georges

b. 10 September 1897, Billom (Puy-de-Dôme), France; d. 8 July 1962, Paris

Novelist and theorist

Bataille's writing blurs the boundaries between fiction, theory, commentary, and confession. Marked by excess and horror, Bataille's work traces a pilgrimage to the "extreme of the possible"

(Bataille 1973 [1943]: 11), the limit regions of human experience. Bataille's challenge to conventional models of subjectivity, his theories of useless expenditure, and his reflections on the nature of writing have influenced such thinkers as Blanchot, Derrida, Foucault, and Nancy.

Bataille's *oeuvre* is closely linked to the purported events of his life, events his writing frequently interrogates (and possibly invents). According to Bataille's accounts, his syphilitic father was blind and partially paralyzed. Blindness and the scatological images associated with his father's affliction erupted as obsessive themes in Bataille's first novel, *Story of the Eye* (1930).

In the mid-1930s, Bataille linked sexual transgression and political liberation in important articles for the dissident leftist journal *La Critique sociale*. "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933) laid the groundwork for Bataille's theory of the "general economy," which describes human society as organized not for production and accumulation, but for unproductive squandering. "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" (1934) traced fascism's power to its harnessing of sacred or "heterogeneous" social forces linked to passion and non-utilitarian expenditure (Bataille 1970 [1934]: 339–71).

Bataille contested the closure implied in the Hegelian system, but remained haunted by Hegel's grandiose vision, and by the philosophical and political specter of the "End of History." Increasingly disenchanted with politics in the late 1930s, Bataille hoped small "secret societies" or "elective communities" might nurture resistance to oppression outside of conventional political programs (Bataille 1979 [1937]).

The outbreak of the Second World War marked a shift in Bataille's authorship. While the war raged, Bataille turned his attention to the cultivation of mystical states, documenting his atheistic spiritual journey in: *Inner Experience* (1943); *Guilty* (1944); and *On Nietzsche* (1945). These fractured, heterogeneous texts – mixing feverish mystical confession, Nietzschean aphorisms, abstruse philosophical analysis, and quotidian banalities – reveal Bataille's writing as an "autosacrificial" staging of the disintegration of the subject (Heimonet 1990: 25).

In 1946 Bataille founded the journal *Critique*, which would publish early work by Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and Foucault. Bataille's own postwar writings exhibit an increasingly measured, theoretical character. The best known is *Erotism* (1957), in which Bataille discusses erotic behavior as transgression which confirms the very prohibitions it violates, in an anguished dialectic without resolution. Like sacrifice and mysticism, erotism aims to overcome the separation of isolated beings, restoring them to a deeper, undifferentiated "continuity" whose horizon is death (Bataille 1987 [1957]: 18–19).

Bataille's influence has grown steadily since his death in 1962. His name is indissolubly linked to postmodernity's explorations of violence, excess, and radical alterity. Though Bataille's career can be seen in terms of episodes, recent critics have stressed the persistence of his central preoccupations (Besnier 1995). Sacrifice, loss and waste, the convulsions of the erotic, mystical transports, writing as an "impossible" enterprise: Bataille tirelessly interrogated processes in which being exceeds itself in the direction of a fusional "communication" of subject and object, at once necessary and impossible (Bataille 1973 [1943]: 68).

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ALEXANDER IRWIN

Baudrillard, Jean

b. 1929, Reims

Social theorist

Though perhaps best-known for the glib apocalypticism of his proclamation that reality "no longer exists," it could be said that Jean Baudrillard's intellectual project has always been about trying to make real the more purely philosophical ruminations of his peers. A member of the poststructuralist generation of French intellectuals much affected by the student–worker uprisings in Paris in 1968, Baudrillard's work has continuously measured key concepts in Marxism and poststructuralism against tangible developments in the arts, mass communication, social organization, economics, and class relations. His brash, self-conscious irony and gleeful eagerness to cultivate coyly outrageous extremity made him the darling of American academics in art and literary criticism in the 1980s, even a kind of cult figure of the new theory. It is clearly in this spirit that Douglas Kellner calls Baudrillard "the Walt Disney of contemporary metaphysics" (1989: 179).

Critical convention divides Baudrillard's career into at least two distinct phases. Early work, following much from the lead of teacher Henri Lefebvre, struggled to reunderstand Marxism in a world in which foundationalist Marxist categories seemed to make increasingly less sense. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972) took particular exception to the Marxist theory of "use value," arguing for a neo-Marxist analysis of the political economy of signification itself, since the value of commodities could no longer be said to be determined by anything but exchange. But it was unclear exactly what this analysis would look like, as well as whether this "political economy of the sign" was finally to be critiqued or embraced. These uncertainties matured into a full-fledged rejection of Marxist theory in a series of books that included *The Mirror of Production* (1973) and *Forget Foucault* (1977), arguing that Marxism not only bases its observations on an epistemologically naive "mirror" of empirical reality, but that it inadvertently and ironically "mirrors" capitalism in spite of itself by internalizing and naturalizing the limits of capitalism's labor-centered notion of human productivity. Ultimately, these books charged (in a characteristic Baudrillardean inversion) that the contemporary radical left really only functions as a right-wing "alibi" for the final exhaustion of meaningful political alternatives, an unwitting vehicle for the illusion that political difference still matters. During this period, Georges Bataille's notion of liberatory "excess" and Marshall McLuhan's theory of the media became increasingly important to Baudrillard's understanding of social control and how it might be resisted.

Simulations (1982), which is frequently taken to mark the beginning of the second half of Baudrillard's career and is probably Baudrillard's most widely cited work, boldly proclaims the end of power, history, and "the real" in general. Here Baudrillard enlists a whole series of contemporary social phenomena as confirmations of the radical epistemological skepticism implied in much poststructuralist thought, focusing on subjects ranging from computers to DNA to New York's World Trade Center. All, he insists, is "simulation." This work led to the ironic exhuberance of *America* (1986), Baudrillard's almost Whitmanian homage to the grandeur of American "banality" – a kind of *de rigeur* coffee table book for poststructuralists – and the moodily "ecstatic" nihilism of *Cool Memories* (1987). Though this work achieved a much wider circulation and a greater level of popularity than his earlier reworkings of Marxism, especially with English-speaking audiences, Baudrillard's critical influence seems to have receded in its wake in the middle and late 1990s.

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MICHAEL MURPHY

Bauman, Zygmunt

b. 19 November, 1925, Poznan, Poland

Sociologist and social/cultural theorist

A sociologist by training, Zygmunt Bauman has been a prolific and engaging critic of postmodern culture. His work has engaged **Foucault** (1926–84), the anti-**structuralism** of **Lévi-Strauss** (1829–1902), the modernism of **Freud** (1856–1939), **Adorno**'s (1903–69) cultural administration and the ethics of **Levinas** (1905–95), as well as the structuralists and the **Frankfurt School**. Yet Bauman's **sociology** is a self-reflexive activity; his allegiance is ultimately to understanding the structured process rather than to a particular structure or school itself. Comprehensive by nature, Bauman's scholarship aims to remove the critical distance between sociological understanding and social action, exploring the conservative/critical dualism of an examined life which is not easily separated from living.

Bauman's first major work, *Socjalizm Brytyjski* (British Socialism), which invokes the classical liberalism of Bentham (1748–1832) and Mill (1806–73) as a portal to British socialism, was published in 1956. Bauman's subsequent characterization as a socialist or Marxist humanist misunderstands his interest in process over doctrinal result. In *Socjalizm Brytyjski* as well as in later works, *Socialism: The Active Utopia* and *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Bauman argues that capitalism and socialism are "a family quarrel inside modernity" (Bauman 1992: 221), and that freedom and inequality must be addressed together. Bauman published in English beginning with *Culture and Society*, his first full-scale investigation of culture, which develops Simmel's (1858–1918) link between economic and spiritual alienation and Gramsci's (1891–1937) characterization of society as the petrified product of cultural creativity. With *Culture as Praxis*, Bauman solidified the theory of culture as a creative process, which merges with the themes of "Culture and Society" to form the "trilogy of modernity."

Bauman's controversial *Modernity and the Holocaust* addressed postmodern violence through the lens of the Jewish experience. "Antisemitism" obscures what Sandauer called "allosemitism," or the practice of setting Jews apart as an Other. Though noncommittal, this established otherness offends the sensibility of the ordered world, for which everything falls easily into categories. The "stubborn presence" of things or people who do not fit becomes "a fissure in the world-order through which . . . chaos is sighted" (Bauman 1995: 208). Bauman argues that xenophobia was not enough to target the Jews; Europe is full of strangers. Instead, the tradition of allophobia meant that Judaism came to embody ambivalence and incongruity, the great enemies of order; the Holocaust was but the most literal and extreme "expression of that tendency to burn ambivalence and uncertainty in effigy." (Baumann 1995: 220) Throughout *Life in Fragments*, Bauman argues further that the civilizing process is not about the elimination but rather the redistribution of violence, a process of separating force into legitimate (which upholds the social order) and violent (destructive or unpredictable) components. By decentralizing identity and developing the tools for action at a distance, modernity invented ways in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people. The mass genocides and rationalized cruelty of the current era are made possible by this *moral adiaphorization of action*.

Consumerism is the paradigm which sets contemporary society apart; market forces are echoed in culture and private life with the exchange of "symbolic goods." Bauman traces the movement of the producer/soldier, a citizen of modernity, to a postmodern counterpart of sensation-gatherer. Rather than channeling productive energy into an endless stream of creation or

destruction in keeping with the panoptical myths of industry and war, the contemporary person is pushed by consumerism into a constant search for peak experience. In *Freedom*, Bauman observes that the central role once played by profession has been replaced by consumer choice. This leads not only to the rise of consumptive disorders but to a new understanding of the underclass, who are no longer the under-producers but the under-consumers, those who by choice or circumstance cannot afford to buy. In *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Bauman explores this "flawed consumer," arguing that the rise of the American prison state, the collapse of welfare, and the criminalization of poverty are largely the effects of a market society which must, like all societies, punish those who do not conform.

With *Intimations of Postmodernity* and *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Baumann confronts the current era. Responding to Freud's portrait of modernity as a search for beauty, cleanliness and order, Bauman's postmodernism is characterized by the self-awareness of intellectuals: those who claim to have both the ability and the duty to act as the "collective conscience" of the nation. Bauman notes that this sudden consciousness may be seen either as a sign of maturation or surrender; in the vacuum created by social and economic restructuring, the intellectuals do not have exclusive rights. Since postmodernity is a time of visible plurality, the rational reaction is no longer active hegemony but the awareness and appreciation of difference.

Bauman is concerned that the postmodern discourse has been largely negative, which obscures our ability to analyze; the postmodern choice has become "tolerance as assimilation vs. tolerance as solidarity" (Baumann 1997). Dichotomies such as tourists (those who wander freely, to avoid being pinned down in a concrete identity) versus vagabonds (destitutes who make the tourists' lives possible) epitomize the divisions of postmodern society, where the most stratifying factor is freedom of choice. Bauman's criticism is harsh, but he is more optimistic than his contemporaries, ultimately suggesting that the self-involved dualism of the postmodern condition provides both great challenges and great opportunities to the astute citizen.

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MARYANTHE MALLIARIS

belatedness

Belatedness is the canon's "recognition" of an author, genre, nationality, or viewpoint long after the fact; also, the feeling that one has come upon the literary or cultural scene after his or her time, or after all "significant" contributions have been made. The term, when used in literary theory or criticism, often is associated with Harold Bloom and his book *The Western Canon* (1994). The book is populated mostly by "dead white males" from before 1950, though Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf are necessary exceptions. But although some scholars have criticized Bloom for what they have perceived to be his lack of true representation of the world's literature through the ages, Bloom himself states in his preface that it is impossible for him to focus upon everyone significant. He is resigned, in fact, to choosing the twenty-six greatest of the greats.

As Bloom states in his first chapter, "originally the Canon meant the choice of books in our teaching institutions, and despite the recent politics of multiculturalism, the Canon's true question remains: "What shall the individual who still

desires to read attempt to read, this late in history?" (1994: 15). He goes on to state, "We possess the Canon because we are mortal and also rather belated" (1994: 30). There simply is no room to list, much less read, all of the great works in literature and therefore, exclusion is not indicative of a lack of quality or importance.

Nevertheless, Bloom points out, the idea of belatedness is vital to late twentieth-century sensibilities because we live in a time in which nearly all of the world's literary traditions and genres are being resurrected from long ago, and showcased amid smaller canons parallel to the Canon if contemporary. He includes an appendix of significant twentieth-century works from a variety of nations and languages as testament to his belief.

Belatedness is also a cultural phenomenon that particularly lends itself to the Jewish diaspora; in fact, several studies of belatedness specifically mention Jewish writers and spirituality, and/or have been written by Jewish critics. Until the last fifty years or so, representation of Jewishness as a nationality has been alternately overlooked and denied. Those writers claiming Jewish origins were subsumed into the respective countries in which they resided. Since the formation of Israel in 1948, it is not only those Jewish writers living in Israel who are primarily identified and self-identifying as Jewish but also those living in the United States and other nations. Such affirmation represents belatedness for two reasons: restructuring of the canon(s) and questioning whether Jewish thought can be represented in a new way after the important contributions in the Old Testament in the Bible and the tenets of Kabbalism, a form of spirituality that parallels Judaism and which Bloom explores in his book *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975). As the Jews wandered the earth throughout much of history, Bloom contends, "meaning wanders" as well.

Belatedness is an important idea within postmodernism for two reasons. Firstly, it calls into question "the canon" and its constituency, an action that is considered part of the postmodern movement. Secondly, belatedness addresses the matter of genres and subject matter: what can those who inhabit the postmodern landscape write about when everything seems to have already been written about?

TRACY CLARK

benevolence

Benevolence is a category of bourgeois culture and morality rooted in modern humanist Enlightenment philosophy. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines benevolence as a natural disposition, its examples betray a word whose history in language is inscribed by class and gender differences: "The poor and dependent exercise our active benevolence"; "Let the man give unto the wife due benevolence" (1988: 803). Postmodern critiques of power and subject have approached benevolence in terms of the epistemological and moral–ideological production of an hegemonic humanist subject rather than a natural human disposition. For instance, turning punishment into a technology of reform is an apparently benevolent act, progress by humanism. However, delineating a connection between charity and confinement, Michel **Foucault**'s work on modern discipline, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, demonstrated that reformist benevolence has an eye to political and economic profit that it extracts from disciplined and productive bodies. Jacques **Derrida**'s **deconstruction** can also be read as a method of unmasking benevolent intention. Since deconstruction considers the subject as the effect of a textual network in the broadest sense, it offers to the subject the possibility of taking into account the structure of his/her own production and of reading his/her subjective investment in texts and narratives by drawing attention to their rhetorical nature and context (1976).

The most suggestive and persistent critique of benevolence in contemporary theoretical writing can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of neo-colonialism. For Spivak, Western humanist benevolence is an essential, constitutive part of the system and problematic of neo-colonial hegemony. Bringing together Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics, feminist critique of **phallocentrism** and Marxist critique of imperialism in works such as *In Other Worlds*, and

The Post-Colonial Critic, Spivak argues that the benevolent subject's desire to do good and to promote the happiness of others involves "welcoming those others into his own understanding of the world, so that they too can be liberated and begin to inhabit a world that is the best of all possible worlds" (Spivak 1990: 19). US President Truman's inaugural address in 1949 is a good example of what Spivak means by benevolent subjectivity. First describing the emergent decolonized Third World as "inadequate," "primitive," and "stagnant," Truman then suggests that "we make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life" (quoted in Escobar 1995: 3). However, in the performance of such good intention, the norm remains the benevolent rationalist.

This benevolent humanist does not always need to be a representative of Western power. In neo-colonialism, secular bourgeois Third World governments might inscribe the tribal ethnic societies within their national borders by a similar rhetoric of benevolence. Brazilian goverment defines Amazonian tribals as "our Indians," "condemned to poverty and misery" because of their lifestyle, and considers it its "duty to help them emancipate themselves from servitude . . . to raise themselves to the dignity of Brazilian citizens, in order to participate fully in the development of national society and enjoy its benefits" (quoted in Clastres 1994: 45). Thus an "integrationist" strategy, already implied in Foucault's criticism, can also be found in neo-colonial or governmental benevolence towards the subaltern populations in non-Western countries.

The postmodern critique of neo-colonialism reveals benevolence as a denial of difference and constitution of hegemonic subject. The production of Western sovereign self is disguised by other-ing the Third World disenfranchised as lacking appropriate agency. Thus, in benevolent discourse, difference is accepted and denied at the same time, that is to say, it is made into a natural hierarchy. This is why, for the postmodern critic of benevolent subjectivity, discourses on Third World poor or the tribal minorities are never far from being problematic. Such designations as "stagnant," "lacking" or "primitive" are not merely objective factual descriptions but often rhetorical displacements of global socio-economic determinations into cultural or geographical traits. Rather than representing or helping the subaltern, benevolent discourse performs the hegemony of the neo-colonial subject and constitutes his/her world as naturally superior. This blocks the possibility of talking with the subaltern.

Benevolent humanism is not simply a legitimating ideology in the service of economic interests inscribed elsewhere. The International Monetary Fund's and World Bank's aid and development programs are instances of benevolence as forms of extraction of economic value. As these are essential to the system of neo-colonial exploitation, the so-called benevolent subjectivity and morality are inevitably politico-economic inscriptions.

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MAHMUT MUTMAN

Benjamin, Walter

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Philosopher and cultural critic

Walter Benjamin's fascination with the avant-garde

invites comparison to the iconoclastic origins of postmodernism in 1960s' America. However, comparing Benjamin to the postmodernism emerging after the mid-1970s – essentially an uncritical culture of eclecticism – is more problematic.

At first glance, Benjamin appears to remain compatible with recent trends in postmodernism. "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility" appears to welcome a nascent "high tech" society and to prefigure postmodernism's rejection of the hierarchy of high versus pop culture. In "On the Concept of History," Benjamin sounds rather "postmodernist" by championing "peripheral" voices. Similarly, Benjamin's frequent use of quotations and *montage* resembles postmodernist practices of "intertextuality" and "paralogism." Such resemblances, however, are superficial. Recent postmodernists such as Lyotard privilege language games above the *métarécits* of "liberation" and "totality." Benjamin's messianism–Kantianism–Marxism, by contrast, pivots upon notions of truth, critique, totality, and redemption.

Benjamin and the Enlightenment project of "Liberation"

Unlike the postmodernists, Benjamin commits himself to Marxist ideas of oppression, class struggle, and revolution, and upholds the Kantian and Marxist traditions of "critique" and truth (see *Trauerspiel*, "Critique of Violence," "Task of the Translator," and *Goethes Wahlverwandschaften*). In the essay on "Technical Reproducibility," the critical act of "shattering…the aura" prevents the art object from casting a spell on the beholder, thereby allowing truth to emerge.

Benjamin endorses the Enlightenment values of truth and liberation, of which myth is the antithesis. For Benjamin, truth is pure, absolute, and unquestionable (*O* 30); unlike the postmodernists' focus on "contamination" and "impurity." Whereas postmodernists celebrate "undecidability," Benjamin stresses de-cision as a critical gesture that cuts through "ambiguity" and the "mythical web of fate." Postmodernists such as Baudrillard reduce truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, to an overarching "hyperreality" of simulacra – thus removing any sense of critical distance between rhetoric and reason, individual phenomena and truth. In Benjaminian terms, the postmodernists' transformation of truth into textual phenomena amounts to aestheticizing politics.

Benjamin and "Totality"

Benjamin also differs from the postmodernists in his view of "totality." For Benjamin, the singular is inseparable from the whole. Schlegel inspires him to see the fragment as an "intensive totality" "contain[ing] the kernel of the system" ("*Kunstkritik*," 47–248). Leibniz's monad offers him another means for articulating the way one idea figures a "world" (see *Trauerspiel* and "History"). Benjamin's favorite image for expressing the sudden illumination of truth in its entirety is "constellation."

Benjamin's commitment to a unifying relationship between fragments and "totality" argues against collapsing his writings into postmodern theories of "multiplicity" and "incompleteness." Even though postmodernists such as Lyotard and Baudrillard have been influenced by Benjamin, their refusal of his politicized vision of history as a redemptive whole and their celebration of "hybridity" *without limit* easily lapse into a hypostatization of textual "free play" and an aestheticization of politics.

Reading Benjamin alongside postmodernism helps recall the avant-garde spirit and critical edge of early postmodernism. This juxtaposition, in other words, may assist us to rethink and redefine a postmodernism of resistance.

Further reading

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