POSTMODERNISM

A Reader

edited and introduced by

THOMAS DOCHERTY

ROUTLEDGE

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This one's for the Wee Barra'
and *in memoriam* J.J.D.

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Preface

Recent announcements regarding the end of history have been much exaggerated. History is not only continuing, it is also proliferating: the recovery of histories and of local traditions is proceeding in such a way and to such an extent that a disconcerting range of possible futures – some comforting, others distressing – is becoming apparent. The debates over which direction to follow, over which roads to take in these generative narratives, take their place within an extensive set of arguments over what constitutes 'the contemporary'. Another name for the focus of these debates is 'the postmodern question'. We are not at the end of history; we are rather at the beginning of a rethinking of modernity, a rethinking of the world under the sign of postmodernism.

Yet although the term 'postmodern' has become one of the most insistently used terms in the cultural debates of recent years, it is a term which has often been used with a great deal of imprecision. For some, postmodern equates with 'nihilistic' or 'anarchic'; for others, it refers to a culture dominated by the banality of televisual representations and Las Vegas-style neon-signs whose presence everywhere reminds us of the McDonaldisation of an otherwise vegetarian world; yet others think of that explosion of poststructuralist theory which arose in the 1960s and 1970s as a postmodern manner of thinking. The prevalence of such populist, rather superficial and essentially misleading characterisations of the postmodern is troubling for anyone who would take the issues of contemporary culture seriously.

The central rationale for this anthology is to indicate the enormous and eclectic body of interests upon which the postmodern debate has made a significant mark. The gathering of pieces will also reveal how philosophically serious and difficult much of the argument is – and therefore, how necessary is the production of the present *Reader*.

It is thus a good moment to gather together in one volume a diverse and extensive body of writings on the subject which have shaped the varied debates. Critics who are profoundly aware of the arguments within architecture, for instance, will find here that there is some overlap between papers they may already know and papers taken from the field of politics or feminism; readers well versed in literary history will find the possibility of cross-referencing their knowledge in this area with the area of photography or dance or philosophy; people interested in Subaltern studies will discover the ways in which that area enables a possible interface with the avant-garde; and so on.

I have constructed this anthology of pieces with several aims in mind. First, the

specific articles collected together constitute a combination of the most influential and the most substantial essays which have shaped the postmodern question. Secondly, I have included articles which are antipathetic to postmodernism as well as some which are more favourably disposed; but the reader will realise fairly quickly that most of the pieces here make a genuine engagement with key cultural issues rather than a simple polemical attack on or defence of a simple position.

Most important is my third aim. I have organised these pieces into eight categories to allow a reader to orientate herself or himself to the book as a whole and to plot her or his own trajectory through it. Each section has its own internal logic and can be – though it need not be – read separately. The whole might be thought of as a 'map of postmodernism', in which each section determines its own 'order of things' internally, while yet retaining the possibility and eventually the necessity of referring to other, different 'orders' to substantiate its significance. The sequential arrangement of these sections hints at my own orientation to the questions, starting from philosophy, moving into cultural questions, and on into overtly political issues. My section introductions, however, are meant to alert the reader more or less covertly to possible lines which will enable a reading 'between' or across the demarcated section boundaries: the reader of this *Reader* will find it possible in time to be transgressive, and will eventually start to draw her or his own different lines across the terrain. Such a redrawing of boundaries, with the concomitant reorganisation of my chronological or temporal sequencing of the articles, is of the essence of a postmodern history whose abiding questions address the rethinking of the temporal and spatial categories within which social and political being is possible.

Many people – apart from the people who actually wrote it – have contributed to the shaping of this book. My colleagues and students in University College Dublin and, more recently, in Trinity College Dublin, gave me the time and energy to undertake the project. It would not have been possible without the extensive and much-appreciated help of the library staff in UCD and in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. As always, Bridie May Sullivan sustained me while the project was in progress, enabling it in the most fundamental ways. Geraldine Mangan gave much-needed secretarial and administrative help at a crucial stage. The project was initially suggested to me by Jackie Jones of Harvester Wheatsheaf, who has shepherded the volume through its entire production, and without whose expert assistance the book simply would not have been made. It would not have been possible to have had a more careful – and caring – editor, whose vision and encouragement have been more than I could have asked for, and more than I deserved. My thanks to all these people does not implicate them in any infelicities in the arrangement of materials here, which remain my fault.

Postmodernism: An Introduction

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism.
MARX, *Communist Manifesto*, 1848

'A spectre is roaming through Europe: the Postmodern.'
PORTOGHESI, citing *Le Monde*, 1983

Un spectre hante la pensée contemporaine: le spectre du sujet.
FERRY, 1990

There is hardly a single field of intellectual endeavour which has not been touched by the spectre of 'the postmodern'. It leaves its traces in every cultural discipline from architecture to zoology, taking in on the way biology, forestry, geography, history, law, literature and the arts in general, medicine, politics, philosophy, sexuality, and so on.[1] Yet this amorphous thing remains ghostly – and for some, ghastly – for the simple reason that the debate around the postmodern has never properly been engaged. The term itself hovers uncertainly in most current writings between – on the one hand – extremely complex and difficult philosophical senses, and – on the other – an extremely simplistic mediation as a nihilistic, cynical tendency in contemporary culture.

What is at issue in the postmodern? It would be a futile and pointless exercise to offer any simple definition of the term itself; indeed, much argument arises over the question of precisely how the postmodern should be defined. The term was probably first used by Arnold Toynbee in 1939, and prefigured by him in 1934. In his massive *A Study of History*, Toynbee proposed in a footnote on the first page of the first volume that the period referred to by historians as the 'modern' period ends more or less in the third quarter of the nineteenth century – that is, sometime between 1850 and 1875. This suggests that there is from that moment a kind of break into a period 'after modernism', a postmodernity located not in the twentieth century but rather in the nineteenth. As Toynbee proceeded with his work, he consolidated this notion of an end of the modern period, and in Volume 5 of the study, published in 1939, he used the term 'post-modern', complete with scare quotes, for the first

time. At this point he had shifted the chronology slightly, suggesting that the modern now comes to an end during the First World War, 1914–18, and that the postmodern begins to articulate and shape itself in the years between the two wars, between 1918 and 1939.[2]

Toynbee was a product of the late-nineteenth-century desire to found a synoptic and universal history, believing in the possibility of a totalised human history. This demand was answered in Toynbee's work by the fact that his own historiography is, in fact, a Christian theodicy. His task was, in a sense, to write a history which would redeem humanity, by discovering the trajectory of universal history to be a movement of divergence from an original theocentric moment – a sundering from God – driven subsequently by the impulse of return to that same origin: a narrative, like the *Odyssey*, of adventure and return, in which secularity itself is seen as an enormous digression in what is fundamentally a circular narrative structure. The facts of history would make sense, according to Toynbee, in relation to a presiding, governing narrative structure which, if not necessarily always explicit, would none the less be given and legitimated in advance.

This notion of history is one indebted to a certain conflict in the Enlightenment. As Hayden White points out, the Enlightenment broadly agreed with Leibniz's monadology in the sense that the philosophers of the Enlightenment subscribed to the view that there was an underlying unity or direction to human history. But the difference between Leibniz and the Enlightenment is that Leibniz thinks that this essential unity of the human race is simply immanent, whereas the philosophers of Enlightenment view it as an ideal which lies in the future, an ideal which is:

> *yet to be realized* in historical time. They could not take it as a *presupposition* of their historical writing, not merely because the data did not bear it out, but because it did not accord with their own experience of their own social worlds. For them the unity of humanity was an *ideal* which they could *project* into the future ...[3]

Toynbee's invocation of a postmodern moment can thus be seen to be consonant with the idealist drive of Leibniz, but one which acknowledges this necessarily futurist orientation of history itself. Like the critic Erich Auerbach, who also wanted to validate the idea of a shared humanity in which 'below the surface conflicts', 'the elementary things which our lives have in common come to light',[4] Toynbee sees that the 'modern' moment is not one of such universal harmony: both writers were writing under the sign of the Second World War. But Toynbee's answer is to hypothesise a moment in the future, a postmodern moment, when history and humanity can be redeemed.

The word 'postmodern' is thus, characterised, from its very inception, by an ambiguity. On the one hand it is seen as a historical period; on the other it is simply a desire, a mood which looks to the future to redeem the present. The word, with this ambivalence, then hovers around the edges of sociological arguments and the 'end of ideology' debates in the 1950s. But it is in the theories of architecture and in the discourses of literary criticism that the peculiar tension in the term begins to

articulate itself more pointedly. In both, there is a tension between, on the one hand, thinking of the postmodern as a chiliastic historical period which, 'after modernity', we either have entered or are about to enter, while on the other realising that we are condemned to live in a present, and adopting a specific – some have said 'schizophrenic' – mood as a result of acknowledging that this present is characterised by struggle or contradiction and incoherence.[5] In this latter case, the mood in question is in the first instance seemingly determined by a quasi-Nietzschean 'active forgetting' of the past-historical conditioning of the present, in the drive to a futurity.[6]

This tension is one which also lays bare the underlying tension between an attitude to postmodernism as an aesthetic style and postmodernity as a political and cultural reality; that is, it opens a question which had been debated before, on the proper relation between aesthetics and politics. The particular intimacy of the relation between the aesthetic and the political under the rubric of the postmodern is apparent even from the earliest engagements. Fiedler, for instance, characterises the emergence of a new artistic priority in the novels of the mid-1960s as a 'critical point' in which we are peculiarly aware 'of the sense in which literature if not invents, at least collaborates in the invention of time'. He goes on:

> At any rate, we have long been aware (in the last decades uncomfortably aware) that a chief function of literature is to express and in part to create not only theories of time but also attitudes toward time. Such attitudes constitute, however, a politics as well as an esthetics ...[7]

Such reconsiderations of culture in terms of the relation between the aesthetic and the political come to their fullest development in the more recent work of Jameson and Lyotard. But it should immediately be noted that a deep formative influence lying behind much of the contemporary debate is the legacy of the Frankfurt School, perhaps most especially the work of Adorno, to which I shall return in more detail below. For present purposes, the salient fact is that aesthetic postmodernism is always intimately imbricated with the issue of a political postmodernity.

As a result of this legacy inherited from Frankfurt, the issue of the postmodern is also – tangentially, at least – an issue of Marxism. Marxism, in placing the labouring body at the interface between consciousness and material history, is the necessary explanatory and critical correlative of a modern culture whose technology (in the form of an industrial revolution) divides human knowledge or consciousness from human power or material history. But the continuing revolutionary shifts within capitalism itself have necessitated in recent years a marked and vigorous self-reflection on the part of Marxism. In Habermas, for instance, Marxism has taken 'the linguistic turn', in arguments for a continuation of the emancipatory goals of Marxist theory and practice under a slightly revised rubric of 'communicative action'.[8] Habermas's faith in the continuing viability of a vigorously self-revising Marxism is shared by a thinker such as Jameson, who models his version of 'Late Marxism' to correspond to Mandel's descriptions of 'Late Capitalism'.[9]

A key date here is, of course, 1968. The seeming availability of a revolution which brought workers and intellectuals together all across Europe represented a high point for a specific kind of Marxist theoretical practice. But when these revolutions failed, many began, at precisely that moment, to rethink their commitment to the fundamental premisses of Marxist theory. Rudolph Bahro and André Gorz began, from an economistic perspective, to rethink issues of growth and sustainable development. Their emergent ecologism coincided nicely with the 'imaginative' aspects of 1968, and Cohn-Bendit began his own movement from red to green. These all joined neatly with the growing awareness of questions of colonialism and imperialism; and the developed countries began to question not only the desire of the underdeveloped countries for the same levels of consumerist technology as those enjoyed by the First World, but also the reliance of that First World upon exhaustible planetary resources. For many, Marxism now began to appear as part of the problem, especially in its assumption of the desirability of human mastery over nature. The emerging Green movement in this period moved closely towards a 'post-Marxism' of sorts, sharing the emancipatory ideals and the desire for the fullest possible enjoyment of human capacities, but tempering that with the idea of a necessary cohabitation between humanity and the rest of nature.[10] Gramsci began to assume a prominent position in this kind of thinking, and his ideas on 'hegemony' began to replace questions of class in importance for some political theorists. Laclau and Mouffe can thus propose a socialist strategy which is, strictly speaking, not Marxist but 'post-Marxist'.[11]

Perhaps the most extreme rethinking of Marx began with the so-called 'philosophy of desire' in texts such as Lyotard's *Economie libidinale*, or in the work of Deleuze and Guattari in the two volumes of their *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. This work led Lyotard and Deleuze to the position where they seem to favour the supervention of a micropolitics which will attend to the local and the specific without recourse to some grand programme or macropolitical theory such as Marxism, or psychoanalysis, or evolutionary progress. The most explicit attack on the fundamental Marxist category of production is fully developed in Baudrillard's *Le Miroir de la production*. This work set Baudrillard firmly on a trajectory away from any form of classical Marxism. His work since that time has increasingly sustained a case against the oppositional impetus inscribed in Marxist theory. For Baudrillard, opposition is itself always accounted for in any governing ideological formation. Marxism acts as a kind of inoculation, inserted within the body of capitalism the better to sustain it: 'critical' or 'oppositional' thinking is, so to speak, the last refuge of the bourgeois.[12]

Theory – by which I here mean any critical practice which makes a philosophically foundational claim – now enters into crisis itself. Not only has knowledge become uncertain, but more importantly the whole question of how to legitimise certain forms of knowledge and certain contents of knowledge is firmly on the agenda: no single satisfactory mode of epistemological legitimation is available. Even if one were, the very Subject of consciousness has, as a result of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, also been thrown into doubt, provoking Badiou

into the proposition of an entirely new and post-Lacanian theory of the Subject. In the postmodern, it has become difficult to make the proposition 'I know the meaning of postmodernism' – not only because the postmodern is a fraught topic, but also because the 'I' who supposedly knows is itself the site of a postmodern problematic.[13]

I propose to introduce the nature of the debate under three main headings. First, I shall address the issue of the Enlightenment and its legacy. This leads into a necessary reconsideration of the conceptions and constructions of the Kantian categories of time and space. Thirdly, I shall raise directly the question of politics, specifically under the rubric of a theory of justice.

I Enlightenment's Legacies

A major source for the contemporary debates around the postmodern is to be found in the work of the Frankfurt School, most specifically in the text proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a work 'written when the end of the Nazi terror was within sight'. This work prefigures some of Lyotard's later questioning of Enlightenment, and seriously engages the issue of mass culture in a way which influences Gorz's thoughts on the 'leisure merchants' of contemporary capitalist societies. It is worth indicating in passing that it is Adorno and Horkheimer, not Lyotard, who propose that 'Enlightenment is totalitarian'.[14] The vulgar characterisation of the German philosophical tradition as pro-Enlightenment and the French as anti-Enlightenment is simplistic and false.

The Enlightenment aimed at human emancipation from myth, superstition and enthralled enchantment to mysterious powers and forces of nature through the progressive operations of a critical reason. According to Gay, 'The Enlightenment may be summed up in two words: criticism and power': criticism would become creative precisely by its capacity for empowering the individual and enabling her or his freedom.[15] Why do Adorno and Horkheimer set themselves in opposition to this ostensibly admirable programme? Why do they argue that 'The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant'?[16]

The problem lies not so much in the theoretical principle of Enlightenment as in its practice. In the desire to contest any form of animistic enchantment by nature, Enlightenment set out to think the natural world in an abstract form. As a result, the material content of the world becomes a merely formal conceptual set of categories. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it:

> From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities. For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.[17]

In a word, reason has been reduced to *mathesis*: that is, it has been reduced to a specific *form* of reason. More importantly, this specific inflection of reason is also

now presented as if it were reason-as-such, as if it were the only valid or legitimate form of rational thinking. But Adorno and Horkheimer share a fear that, in this procedure, reason has itself simply become a formal category, which reduces or translates the specific contents of material realities into rational concepts, or into a form amenable to mathematisation. Reason becomes no more than a discourse, a language of reason (mathematics), which deals with the 'foreign' matter of reality by translating it into reason's own terms; and something – non-conceptual reality itself – gets lost in the translation. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: 'The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter.'[18] A mathematical consciousness thus produces the world, not surprisingly, as mathematics. So a desired knowledge of the world is reduced to the merest *anamnesis*, in which the consciousness never cognises the world as it is, but rather *recognises* the world as its own proper image and correlate.[19]

Enlightenment's 'emancipatory' knowledge turns out to involve itself with a question of power, which complicates and perhaps even restricts its emancipatory quality. Knowledge, conceived as abstract and utilitarian, as a mastery over recalcitrant nature, becomes characterised by power; as a result, 'Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward man. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them.'[20] Knowledge is reduced to technology, a technology which enables the *illusion* of power and of domination over nature. It is important to stress that this is an illusion. This kind of knowledge does not give actual power over nature, for that in nature which is unamenable to its formal or conceptual categories simply escapes consciousness entirely. What it does give in the way of power is, of course, a power over the consciousness of others who may be less fluent in the language of reason. Knowledge thus becomes caught up in a dialectic of mastery and slavery in which the mastered or overcome is not nature but rather other human individuals; it is therefore not purely characterised by disenchantment and emancipation. From now on, to know is to be in a position to enslave.

The very myths from which Enlightenment claims the capacity to disenchant humanity are themselves the products of Enlightenment, constructed and produced in order to be unmasked by Enlightenment, and hence to legitimise the utilitarian activity of an Enlightenment epistemology. But we can no longer claim that Enlightenment simply produces a knowledge of the contents of the material world; rather, it produces a formally empowered Subject of consciousness. As Lyotard would later put it: 'what was and is at issue is the introduction of the will into reason'.[21]

Another way of putting this would be to suggest that what is at issue is a confusion between the operations of a pure reason on the one hand and a practical reason on the other. That is, the confusion is between theory and practice, or – as that opposition has most often articulated itself – between *gnosis* and *praxis*. This is an old Aristotelian distinction known for modern times to literary theory via Philip Sidney's mediation of Aristotle and Horace in the Renaissance. Sidney considers a quarrel between the faculties of poetry and philosophy, regarding their respective

claims to legislative priority. Poetry, he claims, is 'philophilosophical', philosophy raised to the second power, because it combines epistemology with emotion – combines the *utile* with the *dulce*:

> And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is wellnigh the cause and the effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught, and what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not Gnosis but Praxis must be the fruit. And how Praxis cannot be, without being moved to practise, it is no hard matter to consider.[22]

This prefigures many controversial and pertinent twentieth-century issues, from J. L. Austin's performative linguistics, through Kenneth Burke's advocacy of 'language as symbolic action', to the resurgence of the 'New Pragmatism' in Fish, Rorty and others, all of which might properly by characterised as attempts to bring together the epistemological function of language with the ontological.[23] The idea is most widely known through the practices of Stanley Fish, who once argued that criticism should be attending not to what a text 'means' but to what it 'does'; and, more precisely, that the meaning of a text is, in fact, what it does to its reader. Meaning is located here in an activity of reading; it becomes a practice rather than a merely epistemological listing of verbal senses.

All of this is striving to deal with the same fundamental problem: the relation between the realm of language and the realm of Being. More precisely, it is an attempt to deal with the perceived rupture between these two different orders – a rupture articulated most influentially for our times by Saussurean linguistics, which proposed the arbitrariness of the relation between the linguistic signifier and the conceptual signified. By inserting the cognitive activity of a real historical reader between the text and its epistemological content, critics such as Fish tried to circumvent the threatened split between, on the one hand, the structure of consciousness (i.e. the conceptual forms in which a consciousness appropriates the world for meaning) and, on the other, history (the material content of a text which may – indeed, in Fish's arguments, *must* – disturb such formal or aesthetic structures).[24]

Twentieth-century European criticism has been profoundly aware of the problem here, which can also be formulated in terms of a political question. What is at stake is an old Kantian question regarding the proper 'fit' between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Kant was aware that the world outside of consciousness does not necessarily match precisely our perceptual cognitions of that world; and in the *Critique of Pure Reason* he argued that it was an error to confuse the two. The two elements of signification being confused were distinguished by Frege as 'sense' and 'reference'; and it is a distinction similar to this which is maintained by Paul de Man, who argued that such a confusion is precisely what we know as 'ideology': 'What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism.'[25]

De Man's concern was to try to ensure that literary criticism made no premature assumptions of the absolute validity of reference; in this he simply followed the deconstructive practice of maintaining a vigilant scepticism about the legitimacy or truth-contents of any linguistic proposition made about those aspects of the real world that could properly be called 'non-linguistic'. He was aware that the premature assumption that the real was amenable to precise, 'accurate' or truthful linguistic formulation was itself an assumption not only grounded in but precisely demonstrative of ideology. But this, of course, is a reiteration of Adorno and Horkheimer in their complaint about the assumption made by (mathematical) reason that the world is available for a rational comprehension. If we subscribe to de Man's warning, a warning which rehearses the arguments of Adorno and Horkheimer, we can see that the fundamental burden of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that Enlightenment itself is not the great demystifying force which will reveal and unmask ideology; rather, it is precisely the locus of ideology, thoroughly contaminated internally by the ideological assumption that the world can match – indeed, can be encompassed by – our reasoning about it, or that the human is not alienated by the very processes of consciousness itself from the material world of which it desires knowledge in the first place. Enlightenment, postulated upon reason, is – potentially, at least – undone by the form that such reason takes.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, this argument assumed a specific shape recognisable as an abiding question in German philosophy from Kant to Heidegger. What worried Adorno and Horkheimer was that under the sign of Enlightenment, the Subject was capable of an engagement with the world in a manner which would be 'rational' only in the most purely formal sense of the word. That is, they were anxious that what should be a properly political engagement which involves the Subject in a process called intellection or thinking could be reduced to a ritual of thinking, to a merely formal appearance of thinking which would manifest itself as a legitimation not of a perception of the world but of the analytical modes of mathematical reason itself. The political disturbance of the Subject proposed by an engagement with a materially different Other would be reduced to a confirmation of the aesthetic beauty and validity of the process of mathematical reason itself, a reason whose object would thus be not the world in all its alterity but rather the process of reason which confirms the identity of the Subject, an identity untrammelled by the disturbance of politics. In short, the Subject would be reduced to an engagement with and a confirmation of its own rational processes rather than being committed to an engagement with the material alterity of an objective world.

The 'aesthetic engagement' with the world might be characterised as follows: the structure of consciousness determines what can be perceived, and processes it in accordance with its own internal logic, its own internal, formal or ritualistic operations of reason. There is thus a ritual or appearance of engagement with the material world only. 'Political engagement' would be characterised by the rupture of such ritual, the eruption of history into the consciousness in such a way that the aesthetic or formal structures of consciousness must be disturbed. Enlightenment's commitment to abstraction is seen as a mode of disengagement of the ideological,

opinionated self: abstraction is itself meant to address precisely this problem. But it leads, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, not to a practice of thinking but rather to the ritualistic form of thought: it offers a form without content. Adorno and Horkheimer's fear is that Enlightenment evades the political precisely when it addresses the political.

One twentieth-century legacy of the Enlightenment is the so-called 'Copernican revolution' proposed initially by structuralism and semiotics. In the wake of Barthes, the world became an extremely 'noisy' place: signs everywhere announced their presence and demanded to be decoded. Such decoding was often done under the aegis of a presiding formal structure, such as myth in anthropology, desire in psychoanalysis, or grammar in literature. In semiotics, it is always important to be able to discover a kind of equivalence between ostensibly different signs: this is, in fact, the principle of decoding or translation itself. But as Adorno and Horkheimer indicate: 'Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract qualities.'[26] Such abstraction must wilfully disregard the specificity of the material objects under its consideration: 'Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them.'[27] The semiotic revolution – a revolution which frequently masqueraded as a political, emancipatory heir of Enlightenment – is, like Enlightenment, irredeemably bourgeois, irredeemably caught up in a philosophy of Identity which negates material and historical reality, in the interests of constructing a recognisable Subject of consciousness as a self-identical entity.

The *Dialectic* was written in a profound awareness of the material and historical realities of fascism and the Nazi atrocities. It is a text which inserts itself into a specific tradition of philosophical and ethical tracts which ask for an explanation of the presence of evil in the world. In the eighteenth century, this tradition was properly inaugurated by the debates around Leibniz and Optimism. Optimism is based upon the idea that nature is a Leibnizian monad – that there is a great unifying chain in nature which links together, in a necessary conjunction, all the ostensibly random and diverse elements of a seemingly heterogeneous and pluralistic world. More importantly, Optimism is based upon a specific idea of progressive time which changes the meaning of events. It argues that what appears 'now' to be a local evil will be revealed 'in the fullness of time' to serve the realisation of a greater good. As Voltaire's Pangloss has it in *Candide*, 'all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds'.[28] History would reveal the immanent goodness in the most apparently evil acts; under the sign of a homogeneous and monadic eternity, the heterogeneous and secular would be redeemed.

In a sense, this philosophy is a precursor of some contemporary theoretical principles. According to Optimistic philosophy, the meaning of an event is not immediately apparent, as if it were never present-to-itself: its final sense – to be revealed as the necessity of goodness – is always deferred (to be revealed under the sign of eternity) and thus always different (or not what it may appear to the local eye caught up in the event itself). The major difference between deconstruction and

Optimism is that Optimism believes that the final sense lies *immanently* within an event, whereas deconstruction consistently warns against such metaphysical notions.

Optimism, as a means of explaining away the fact of evil, came under great pressure in the eighteenth century, and was explicitly attacked by Johnson and Voltaire, among others. But one specific event was so catastrophic that the philosophy became incredible. On the morning of Sunday 1 November 1755, an earthquake struck Lisbon and destroyed the city, killing between thirty thousand and forty thousand people. This single event was the final nail in the coffin of a moribund Optimistic philosophy in Europe. But now a different idea of progress in history arises. After 1755, progress is characterised as a gradual emancipation from the demands of the sign of eternity. The secularisation of consciousness becomes a necessary precondition for the possibility of an ethics: that is to say, the ethical is increasingly determined by the philosophically rational, or the good is determined by the true. Blumenberg is eloquent testimony to the inflection that this gives to philosophy and to truth. Traditionally, the pursuit of truth had been considered as pleasurable, eudaemonic; from now on, the absoluteness of truth, and correspondingly its ascetic harshness, becomes a measure of its validity: 'Lack of consideration for happiness becomes the stigma of truth itself, a homage to its absolutism.'[29]

Henceforth, there arises the possibility – and Kant would say the necessity – of separating the realm of facts from the realm of values. Optimism proceeded on the grounds that these were intimately conjoined; and it followed that the progressive movement from evil to good was seen as inevitable. But once epistemology is separated from ethics, the whole idea of historical progress is itself called into question. No longer do we know with any certainty the point towards which history is supposedly progressing. In the wake of this, humanity becomes enslaved not to the enchantments of myth, but rather to the necessities of narrative, for humanity has embarked upon a secular movement whose teleology is uncertain, whose plot is not inherently predetermined by values or by an ethical end.[30]

The critique of progress which becomes available once Kant makes the separation between pure and practical reason makes a resurgence in the twentieth century, specifically around the idea of the postmodern. In architecture, to take a paradigmatic example, there has grown a resistance to the 'modernist' idea that all building must be innovative in its aims and design; rather as Jencks and Portoghesi suggest, it is possible to relearn from the past, to develop a 'new classicism' or simply to engage with an abiding 'presence of the past'. The result is – in principle, if not in fact – a heterogeneous juxtaposing of different styles from different architectural epochs as a putative response to the homogenising tendency of the so-called 'International Style'. This argument leads to the possibility of an awareness in architecture and urban planning in general that the local traditions of a place should be respected in all their specificity, while at the same time those local traditions should be opened to a kind of criticism by their juxtaposition with styles from other localities, different traditions. This is a localism without parochial insularity, in principle.

Much the same arises in some contemporary philosophy. Lyotard has argued that it is becoming increasingly difficult to subscribe to the great – and therapeutically Optimistic – metanarratives which once organised our lives.[31] What he has in his sights are totalising metanarratives, great codes which in their abstraction necessarily deny the specificity of the local and traduce it in the interests of a global homogeneity, a universal history. Such master narratives would include the great narrative of emancipation proposed by Marx; the narrative of the possibility of psychoanalytic therapy and redemption proposed by Freud; or the story of constant development and adaptation proposed under the rubric of evolution by Darwin. Such narratives operate like Enlightenment reason: in order to accommodate widely diverging local histories and traditions, they abstract the meaning of those traditions in a 'translation' into the terms of a master code, a translation which leaves the specific traditions simply unrecognisable. As metanarratives, they also become coercive and normative: Lyotard argues that they effectively control and misshape the local under the sign of the universal. Such a drive to totality cannot respect the historical specificities of the genuinely heterogeneous. Lyotard's debt to the thinking of Critical Theory is obvious here.

Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimism with regard to the difficulty of explaining evil and its place in a supposedly progressive history was foreseen in another important source for the postmodern controversy. In his famous seventh thesis on the philosophy of history, Benjamin indicates the problems of historicism. Historicism is like a critical formalism: it actively forgets the historical effects and consequences flowing from the moment it wishes to investigate, the better to 'empathise' with the moment 'as in itself it really is', so to speak. It formally 'brackets off' its object from history to explore it in itself. The empathy in question is, of course, an empathy with the victors in the struggles inherent in any historical conjuncture; hence historicism benefits and is complicit with the ruling class at the moment of the historian's own writing. The victors in history thus proceed in triumphal procession, bearing with them the spoils of their victory, including those documents which record, legitimise and corroborate the necessity of their victory. Such documents the victors call 'culture'. The historical materialist, unlike the historicist, is profoundly aware of what is being trampled underfoot in this process: the historical materialist remembers what the historicist ignores. Hence historical materialism knows that – in the words of the famous passage – 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'[32]

'Modernity' is increasingly being considered as just such a 'document of civilization'. There is, certainly, an enormous amount of good, emancipatory thinking and practice associated with it, and the development of history over the last two hundred years has not been an inexorable progress towards evil. A better attitude to modernity than unmitigated adulation, however, might be one which was analogous to Marx's attitude to the bourgeoisie: on the one hand full of admiration for its civilising energies; on the other critical of its incipient barbarous tendencies.

In his consideration of the implications of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman proceeds on these Benjaminian lines. He cites research into the experiences of the victims of terrorism: people involved in hijacks, people taken hostage. Such people are often

apparently fundamentally 'changed' by their experience: their entire personality after the event is different from what it was before. But sociology has contested this notion of a personality change. The person after the event is, in fact, fundamentally the same as the person before; simply certain aspects of the personality which lay dormant in the life before appear now, because the historical conditions are more propitious for their foregrounding. A different aspect of the personality assumes the normative position, repressing certain aspects which were perceived to constitute the essence of the personality before the trauma. It is not the individual who has changed but the historical situation of the individual which demands the appearance of certain aspects of the personality that had always been immanently there.

Bauman then allegorises this, using it as a paradigm to explain the eruption of evil in the Holocaust in the midst of modernity:

> The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust ... is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from an otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for. We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, so familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body.[33]

So it is not that modernity leads inexorably to the Holocaust. Rather, the civilised face of modernity is attended constantly by a barbarism which is its other side. The historical situation of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s was inhospitable to the civilised priority of modernity, and provided a propitious breeding ground in which the dark and carceral barbarity of modernity could – and did – flourish.

The horror at the evil of the Holocaust is, for Bauman, actually a horror at the rationality of the Holocaust. The Enlightenment project, which was to some extent conditioned by humanity's desire to master nature in the process of disenchantment, enabled the development of an extremely rationally ordered and self-sustaining social process. Part of the legacy of this is the development of efficiency in industry, and the ongoing development – often a self-serving development – of technology. The truth of the matter, according to Bauman, is that:

> every 'ingredient' of the Holocaust ... was normal, 'normal' not in the sense of the familiar ... but in the sense of being fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilization, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world.[34]

Structurally, the gas chambers are driven by the same presiding principles that were taken for granted as the positive aspects of modernity: the principles of rational efficiency. The structure of thought which facilitates the possibility of the Holocaust is inscribed in the philosophical structure of Enlightenment itself, for the drive towards a rational society has been controverted into a drive towards rationalism

itself, a rationalism which can be used for fascist as well as emancipatory ends. For Bauman, it becomes difficult to disintricate the 'rationality of evil' from 'the evil of rationality'.[35] In the world of the death camps, everything was rationalised:

> Each step on the road to death was carefully shaped so as to be calculable in terms of gains and losses, rewards and punishments. Fresh air and music rewarded the long, unremitting suffocation in the cattle carriage. A bath, complete with cloakrooms and barbers, towel and soap, was a welcome liberation from lice, dirt, and the stench of human sweat and excrement.[36]

The SS also knew that in a perversion of Enlightenment, rationality was their best and most efficient single ally in ensuring that their victims would become complicit in the atrocities. In some situations in the death camps it was perfectly reasonable to betray one's fellow-victims, in the hope of prolonging one's own life:

> to found their order on fear alone, the SS would have needed more troops, arms and money. Rationality was more effective, easier to obtain, and cheaper. And thus to destroy them, the SS men carefully cultivated the rationality of their victims.[37]

Clearly, modernist reason is not inherently good: it can be used for foul purposes, and can be an ally of evil.

Deconstruction provides a philosophical ground for some of this. Derrida places certain strictures upon reason in his famous 'White mythology' essay. In that piece, Derrida characterises metaphysics not in terms of reason as such but rather in terms of a heavily circumscribed reason. He considers metaphysics as:

> the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of what he must still wish to call Reason. Which does not go uncontested.[38]

The Subject of reason, the 'he' who identifies himself here as reasonable, is called into question as a specific historical, cultural and – in a corroboration of Bauman's argument – even racial Subject. To just the same extent (no more, no less) that Enlightenment is totalitarian, Reason is racist and imperialist, taking a specific inflection of consciousness for a universal and necessary form of consciousness. Here Derrida exposes the West's tendency to legitimise itself: the West is reasonable because it says so, and, since it is the definer and bearer of reason, it must be universally reasonable to accede to this proposition. This, as Derrida argues, is clearly a false and troubling logic.

Reason, which was supposed to legitimise the neo-pagan and emancipatory activities of Enlightenment, is now itself in need of legitimation.[39] It can no longer assume the capacity for self-legitimation without assuming an exclusivity; and henceforth its claims upon universality are sullied by its inherent tendency to fall into rationalism. It produces an administered society, not a rational society: reason

is replaced by efficiency and by the aesthetic and formal vacuities of rationalism. In *Folie et déraison* Foucault points out that the production of reason is itself dependent upon a primary act of exclusion and incarceration: what reason identifies as its Other – madness – has to be identified and imprisoned in order to enable reason to legitimise itself. Enlightenment reason is in fact a potent weapon in the production of social normativity, driving people towards a conformity with a dominant and centred 'norm' of behaviour. Reason, in short, has to produce the 'scandal' of its Other to keep itself going.[40] Baudrillard has argued that in the present century, this has an extremely important corollary effect. In our time, it is not so much reason itself which requires legitimation as the very principle of reality (which, it is assumed, is founded upon reasonable, rational principles). Society thus produces the Other of the real – fantasy – to legitimise the normativity of its own practices. As Baudrillard puts it in 'The precession of simulacra':

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which *is* Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral).[41]

The emancipation proposed by Enlightenment brings with it its own incarcerating impetus: its 'freedom' turns out to be simply the form of a freedom, an aesthetics rather than a politics of freedom. The name for this aestheticisation of the political is *representation*. In the postmodern, representation, as both a political and an aesthetic category, has come under increasing pressure; and it is to this that we can now turn.

2 The Time is out of Joint

When Deleuze summarises Kantian philosophy, he does so in four 'poetic formulas', the first of which is Hamlet's great proposition that 'The time is out of joint'. Time comes 'unhinged' in Kant, says Deleuze, with the effect of a revolution in the relation between time and space, and time and movement:

> Time is no longer defined by succession because succession concerns only things and movements which are in time. If time itself were succession, it would need to succeed in another time, and on to infinity. Things succeed each other in various times, but they are also simultaneous in the same time, and they remain in an indefinite time. It is no longer a question of defining time by succession, nor space by simultaneity, nor permanence by eternity.[42]

The reconsiderations of time and space in relation to aesthetics were on the German philosophical agenda even before Kant's major *Critiques*, for G. E. Lessing, in *Laokoön* (1766) provoked a debate on the relative priorities of time and space in the different fields of the poetic and the plastic arts.[43]

That the present time is also out of joint is part of my contention in these pages. It is increasingly apparent that many of the debates around the issue of the postmodern not only have their sources in eighteenth-century controversies, but also recapitulate those earlier debates and reconsider them: the late twentieth century is contaminated by the late eighteenth. As Lyotard has recently put it, the whole idea of 'postmodernism' is perhaps better rethought under the rubric of 'rewriting modernity'.[44] But the present day's 'unhinged' time is measured structurally as well in its aesthetic production: the twentieth century is the great moment of an aesthetic which proclaims itself explicitly as 'untimely', the moment of the avant-garde. This avant-garde has put the issue of taste and contemporaneity back on the critical agenda just as firmly as Baumgarten and Kant problematised it in the eighteenth century.[45]

The question of taste is intimately linked to the questions of time and knowledge. Bourdieu indicates that the soi-disant 'aristocracy of culture' disparages 'knowledge' about art, favouring instead an intuitive sense of refinement in the 'connoisseur'. Good taste, which develops for this 'aristocracy' through an aesthetic experience of art at first hand and thus necessarily develops in the time which such a class can afford to devote to aesthetic experience, despises 'education' in questions of taste, which it stigmatises as a time-saving short cut, as superficial, and as a form of *askesis* rather than *aesthesis*.[46] For Kant, such aesthetic experience had always to be formal if it were to have any serious claims to validity in the matter of taste. Unlike Sidney, Kant disparaged as 'barbaric' that kind of taste 'which needs a mixture of *charms* and *emotions* in order that there may be satisfaction'.[47]

The avant-garde made formal experiments whose 'barbaric' effect was carefully contrived, and was often nearly guaranteed because the works proposed themselves as being inappropriate to their present moment, preferring the stance of prolepsis. But this has become problematic as a strategy in the twentieth century. The problem of the avant-garde is that its scurrilous practices themselves, in time, become normative. That is, when they first explode upon the scene, they propose an eruption which shocks thought out of the forms of thought and into the practices of thinking: they critique the 'aristocracy of culture'. There is a movement from gnosis to praxis, from aesthetics to politics – a movement that makes thought as material and real as 'the smell of thyme and the taste of potatoes'.[48] The avant-garde has traditionally served this function of attacking the idealist and formalist sensibility. But the troublesome word in this formulation is, of course, 'traditionally': the avant-garde has entered crisis because it has become a tradition.

Luc Ferry quotes Luciano Berio's scathing comment on the avant-garde: 'Anyone who calls himself avant-garde is an idiot ... the avant-garde is a vacuum.' And Ferry then models an interrogation of the avant-garde on Octavio Paz's astute comments:

> Modern art is beginning to lose its powers of negation. For some time now, its negations have been ritual repetitions: rebellion has become method, criticism has become rhetoric, transgression has become ceremony. Negation has ceased to be creative.[49]

By becoming pure criticism, the modernism of the avant-garde has – in a manner akin to the dialectic of Enlightenment – turned back against its own informing principle and subverted it. The search for novelty and innovation has degenerated into its opposite: simple repetition of the formal gestures of innovation for its own sake. As Ferry succinctly puts it, 'The break with tradition itself becomes tradition.'[50] The arising 'dialectic of the avant-garde' results in an enormous speculative and critical pressure upon the avant-garde to justify itself.

The avant-garde used to legitimise itself precisely by being untimely and incomprehensible: a challenge to history and to reason. The work of the avant-garde had to be proposed by one who was somehow in advance of her or his own historical moment. The work produced defies comprehension, in the sense that it defies the possibility of being assimilated into or under the governing philosophical rubric or ideology of its moment of production. It cannot be easily 'translated' into the terms and categories of the already known, and thus challenges the structure of *anamnesis*. The avant-garde necessarily implies that a merely 'conventional' art cannot offer a moment of cognition, but instead indulges in a superficial recognition; and the name for this is representation. For the avant-garde, conventional art was thus an art built entirely upon *anagnorisis*, upon the structure of recognition in which the Subject of consciousness finds the comfort of Identity and self-sameness: the world as it is represented as it is, *tel quel*.[51] Philosophically, therefore, the perceived 'conservatism' of conventional art is also akin to the structure of pragmatism, which is also concerned to engage in practice with the world as it is.[52]

By contrast, the avant-garde presents the world as it is not; more precisely, it has to present a world which is, strictly speaking, unrepresentable. The Subject of consciousness is here going to be refused what Lyotard calls 'the solace of good forms';[53] and, most importantly, what is refused is the solace of the form of Identity. The 'shock of the new' shocks its audience or spectator out of the forms of Identity and into the anxieties of alterity and heterogeneity, into the perception of a world and a Subject of consciousness which is always radically Other.[54] The rationale behind the project of the avant-garde, therefore, is the refusal of gnosis and its replacement with praxis – a shift from epistemology to ontology.

Such a 'practical art' involves the artist in what appears to be a temporal or chronological impossibility. She or he re-presents, in a work or an event, something which cannot yet ever have been present: re-presenting comes before presence in this state of affairs. For the *avant-gardiste*, it is no longer the case that art re-presents an already existing essential world; rather, this relation is reversed and the fact or practice of re-presentation itself produces a world. However, such a production proposes a world which is unrecognisable – or, perhaps more strictly, non-cognisable: a world is presented which is 'essentially' different from the world which we had 'consensually' known before the avant-garde production. Both consensus as such and the identity of the Subject who is implicated in this consensually agreed 'knowledge' are thereby challenged.

Structurally, in the avant-garde, aesthetics precedes politics. Yet it is also argued that the aesthetic precisely *is* politics in this, because of what McHale calls this

'change of dominant',[55] for as a result of the prioritisation of praxis over gnosis there is a corresponding attack upon the philosophy of Identity ('Know thyself') and its replacement with a philosophy of alterity ('Acknowledge the unknowability of the Other'). This proposes a political shift based upon the complication, for the Subject of consciousness, of locating itself always 'elsewhere'. Bakhtin would have thought of this in terms of a 'dialogical' construction of the world in language; Habermas thinks of it in terms of an intersubjective idea of communicative action; Lacanian psychoanalysis would underpin these and other inherently political attacks on the philosophy of Identity. Lacan argued that:

> The Other is ... the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken.[56]

Alterity such as this is fundamental to the avant-garde, which must always be in the time of the other. Ferry points out that the avant-garde project, at least since Kandinsky, is predicated upon – and that it necessarily (even if unwittingly) subscribes to – three central forces, all of them politically charged: elitism, historicism, individualism. The avant-garde is elitist because the artist is the hero who has seen the future in advance of everyone else, and whose task is to risk her or his own greater powers on behalf of the tardy common masses. The avant-garde is historicist because its artists are necessarily historically out of step with the masses around them; but also because this has to be acknowledged as a merely provisional state of affairs. The masses, once history progresses, will see that the artist was always-already right in any case; and, in acknowledging their own tardiness, the masses have to subscribe to a version of history as the site of an inevitable linear *progress*.

This relates back to Lukács's thinking on the avant-garde. Paradoxically, the genuinely avant-garde, for Lukács, was always profoundly realist: in order to qualify as avant-garde, it had to be not merely prophetic but accurately prophetic, anticipatory. This means that the avant-garde can never by identified as such until time has passed to allow for the verification of its propositions: one can only ever 'have been' avant-garde:

> Whether a writer really belongs to the ranks of the avant-garde is something that only history can reveal, for only after the passage of time will it become apparent whether he has perceived significant qualities, trends, and the social functions of individual types, and has given them effective and lasting form ... only the major realists are capable of forming a genuine avant-garde.[57]

It should be noted, in passing, that this is not very far removed from Lyotard's notions of the future anteriority of the postmodern.[58] The same temporal *décalage* is involved in both Lukács and Lyotard.

Finally, and most explicitly, for Ferry the ideology of the avant-garde has to be

individualist, for its whole practice is based on the 'expression du Moi':

> ou, pour reprendre la formule même de Kandinsky, 'expression pure de la vie intérieure' de celui qui, par son originalité, se trouve tout à la fois au sommet du triangle (élitisme) et en avance sur son temps (historicisme) et qui, par suite, constitue seul une véritable *individualité* ...[59]
>
> [or, to pick up the very formulation of Kandinsky, 'pure expression of the interior life' of she or he who, by virtue of originality, finds herself or himself all at once at the apex of the triangle (elitism) and in advance of her or his time (historicism) and who, in consequence, constitutes alone a true *individuality*.]

The 'expression du Moi' necessarily distinguishes the avant-garde Self from its Others, and in fact thereby produces its Other. Alternatively, one could say that it is precisely such an individuation of the avant-garde artist which produces all other individuals as a 'mass', a mass culture in the form of a despised culture industry. So the avant-garde constructs and attacks its own enemy. Structurally, this parallels the manner in which Enlightenment reduces reason to rationalism: in the case of the avant-garde, what we see is the reduction of political activity to the ritual form of such activity – or, in a phrase, the aestheticisation of politics. This is why both the avant-garde and the notion of a mass culture enter into crisis in the middle of the twentieth century.

The question of the avant-garde is therefore, fundamentally, a question of the intimate relations between speed and politics. In some ways, of course, this is also the question of Enlightenment. In political terms, Enlightenment proposed a demarcation between the 'advanced' and the 'underdeveloped'; and in this distinction the advanced feels itself to be legitimised in its activities of mastering, controlling, dominating and colonising what it stigmatises as the underdeveloped.[60] It is also important to Enlightenment and its legacy to maintain a structural sense of development (in accordance with the Whiggish idea of a historical linear progress). But what Enlightenment mistakes about this process is that there may be a number of historical lineages, a number of 'progressions' or directions in which history is flowing simultaneously: that history is not a singular line, but a network of forces which all proceed in their own directions, heterogeneously. That is, Enlightenment fails to see that instead of the rubric 'advanced/underdeveloped' (more recognisably characterised by the terms 'First World' and 'Third World'), it is better to think that the world is simply lived at different speeds, in different times, in different places. In short, there is not one world (nor even three), but rather many; all being lived at different rhythms, none of which need ever converge into harmony.[61]

There is thus a political dimension to the 'untimely meditation' of the avant-garde: a politics to speed. It is, of course, Paul Virilio who has considered this most fully. Virilio's work on urbanism and on the theory and strategy of war offers a different angle on the question of the Optimism of the avant-garde. The avant-garde is in conflict with what we might call the dominant aesthetic of its time: it is also,

however, in conflict with time itself, being out of its proper moment: it is always necessarily *anachronistic*. This collocation of time and conflict is of the essence of the political for Virilio.

Virilio returns to Clausewitz, who shared with Marx an interest in the dialectical process of history, and whose conception of the structure of war found echoes in Lenin. Yet there are certain fundamental differences between the Marxist–Leninist tradition and Clausewitz. Clausewitz thought of history as a dialectical process of struggles not between specific classes, but formally between the impulse to attack and the impulse to defend. The resulting dialectic of defence and attack would eventually lead to a state of pure war.[62] This dialectic – this war – is the foundation of the political for Virilio, because it is through war that there arises the need for and the maintenance of those geographical organisations that delimit the space of city or state. But the formation of these boundaries is neither simply nor primarily spatial; on the contrary, the city, the *polis* itself, is formed from a particular relation to time; and its boundaries are grounded in a specific internal historicity, a 'progress' which is relatively autonomous from the time 'outside'. So the city is not a stable point in space but rather a historical 'event': it is not punctual, but eventual.

This requires some explanation. How does a political space develop and consolidate itself as a recognisable entity? Virilio cites, for an explanatory instance, the development of the elevated observation post in the history of war struggles. Because it enables surveillance, such an elevated post gives a group of fighters or a community the time in which to decide among a number of possible military attitudes available to it in a specific given situation. It is in this time – that is, *in the production of time or of a temporal difference between two communities* – that a war mentality becomes genuinely possible, replacing the immediacy which is integral to more 'primitive' conditions of struggle. With this production of time:

> il ne suffira plus d'être rapidement informé sur son milieu, *il faudra aussi l'informer*, c'est-à-dire tenter de conserver *sur place* son *avance* sur l'ennemi, d'où la construction autour du tertre, d'enclaves protégées, d'enceintes, de palisades, destinées à *ralentir* l'aggresseur.[63]
>
> [it will no longer be enough to be informed about one's milieu, *one must also form it*, that's to say try to maintain *there and then* one's *advance* over the enemy, whence arises the construction, around the hillock, of protected enclaves, of surrounding walls, of stockades, whose purpose is to *slow down* the aggressor.]

This dialectic of speed and slowness, maintaining one's progress away from the enemy while also slowing that enemy's pursuit as much as possible, produces a difference in time between aggressor and victim. The result is the production of the origin of the city built upon the rampart. This space of the *polis* is thus conditional upon a logically prior temporal dialectic between the speed of the settler in claiming her or his ground and the slowness which she or he can impose upon the new, slightly more tardy, aggressor. Such a dialectic of speed and slowness is of the essence of war itself. The tension between the relative speeds of the 'First' world

(which establishes the rampart) and its tardy Others (whose political stabilities are less assured) is endemic to what we might call 'significant space', by which I mean any space to which we can assign a mark of identity, be it a name, a history or a culture: in short, a political entity. That which appears to be a stable point in space, the political city, is in fact an event in time, and an event whose very essence is that it is fraught with an internal historicity or mutability. It is therefore not a point, but an event.[64]

This politics is not devoid of aesthetics; on the contrary, questions specifically relating to the perception of beauty enter into the war mentality itself, long before Marinetti and the Futurists laid such questions bare in their adulation of the beauty of the machinery of war.[65] War strategy is profoundly 'aesthetic', in the strict sense of the term which relates it to perception; for war is about the control of appearance and disappearance, a control resting upon a logistics of perception. Virilio considers the paradigmatic example of the *maquisard*, who had to melt into the surrounding topography and even into the vacuous and immaterial atmosphere: 'he lives then under the cover of grass and trees, in atmospheric vibrations, darkness'.[66] War depends upon a mode of subterfuge in which, by making oneself less visible, one can bring the enemy into one's sight and then make her or him disappear in the kill. Virilio charts this in a logical sequence. First there is the hunt for food, whose victim is the animal. This gives way to a second stage of hunting: a hunt whose victim is woman. The domestication of woman enables a third stage of the hunt, which Virilio identifies as the fundamentally homosexual hunt: war as we commonly know it. The homosexuality of the resulting duel is the basis of the beautiful in its more conventional sense, a beauty carved in the semiotics of the body:

> L'homme fatal est le modèle de la femme, le maquillage des préliminaires de la mise à mort précède celui des amours, la séduction du guerrier travesti est comme pour toute l'espèce animal la caractéristique du mâle, l'homosexualité du duel est à l'origine du beau, ce beau qui n'est que le premier degré d'une torture infligée aux corps, par les traits, les scarifications, les cicatrices, en attendant les mutilations, la mort. Le beau est peut-être le premier *uniforme*.[67]
>
> [The deadly male [*l'homme fatal*] is the model for the woman [*la femme fatale*], make-up for the preliminaries to the killing precedes that for loving, the seduction of the warrior in drag is, as for the whole animal species, the characteristic of the male, the homosexuality of the duel is at the origin of the beautiful, that beautiful which is but the first degree of a torture inflicted upon bodies, by strokes, scarifications, scars, all the way through to multilations and death. The beautiful is, perhaps, the first *uniform*.]

Such a violence in the foundation of the aesthetic might usefully be considered alongside Baudrillard's comments, in which he argues:

> Le déni de l'anatomie et du corps comme destin ne date pas d'hier. Il fut bien plus virulent dans toutes les sociétés antérieures à la nôtre. Ritualiser, cérémonialiser,

> affubler, masquer, mutiler, dessiner, torturer – pour séduire: séduire les dieux, séduire les esprits, séduire les morts. Le corps est le premier grand support de cette gigantesque entreprise de la séduction.[68]
>
> [The denial of anatomy and of the body as destiny does not date just from yesterday. It was much more widespread in all societies anterior to our own. Ritualising, ceremonialising, getting decked out, masking, disfiguring, marking, torturing – to seduce: to seduce the gods, to seduce the spirits, to seduce the dead. The body is the first great prop for the gigantic venture of seduction.]

Seduction, in Baudrillard, is much more than simply a sexual activity; he proposes it as a challenge to the logical primacy of the Marxist category of *pro*duction as a primary determinant of the condition of history. Given the political nature of such seduction, then, these statements from Virilio and Baudrillard turn out (perhaps surprisingly) to be much closer to Eagleton's recent work than we might have expected. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton proposes an argument which, grounded in the labouring body of Marxism, will aim to restore to the body its plundered powers via the aesthetic: in short, Eagleton – like Baudrillard, Lyotard, Virilio and many others who have challenged Marxism – wishes to restore to the aesthetic its full capacity for the political. The site for such a restoration is the human body.

When Hamlet suggests that 'the time is out of joint', he might well also have indicated that – in this play, at least – the body is also and equally 'out of joint', or disjunctive. The human body in *Hamlet* is itself a central site of the play's peculiar status as a 'modern' drama. First, there are a series of deliberations about the material status of the body, in the figure of the Ghost; this then gives way to reflections on the body as the site of theatrical enactment and representation when Hamlet considers the effects of the Player King's speech, a speech which has a physical effect on the Player, bringing tears to his eyes; then Hamlet, with the gravediggers, ponders the location of the human spirit in a specific corporal location when he fictionalises the downfall of Alexander:

> Alexander died, Alexander was buried. Alexander returneth into dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?[69]

Thus begins a series of more or less comic reflections on the 'disjunctive' human body in literature, perhaps culminating in Beckett, whose Murphy becomes precisely the ashes and dust mixed with the detritus of Alexander's beer-barrel.[70] Such a disjunctive body determines the necessity for the modern and postmodern aesthetic obsession with the body – a body now firmly in time, but in a disjunctive time, producing what Kroker characterises as a specifically postmodern 'panic':

> What is postmodernism? It is what is playing at your local theatre, TV studio, office tower, doctor's office, or sex outlet. Not the beginning of anything new or the end of

anything old, but the catastrophic, because fun, implosion of contemporary culture into a whole series of panic scenes at the *fin-de-millennium*.[71]

3 Just Politics

As Foucault indicated in *Discipline and Punish*, the human body is the site for the inscription of justice. Yet at the beginning of 'modernity', in the late eighteenth century, this body undergoes a significant change. In the immediately preceding period, the body was extremely visible in the moment of the exacting of justice: it enabled justice to be seen in the physical torments of punishment for crime, exhibited as public spectacle. But then a fundamental displacement takes place within the judicial system, whose effect is to change the significance – even the experience – of the physical body. Foucault points out that between roughly 1770 and 1840 in Europe, the spectacle of public physical torture disappears; but it is replaced by a supplementary judicial code:

> The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penality, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. If it is still necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much 'higher' aim. As a result of this new restraint, a whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists.[72]

This shift in the judicial system is reflected in the development of aesthetics as well. In the late-seventeenth-century English theatre, for instance, a character's response to her or his perception is marked by and on the body, which is extremely expressive. Style comes to the forefront of everything: Restoration theatre in England and Molièresque comedy in France feature characters who lack substantive psychological content and have only the form of style – a style expressed in manners, costume, corporeal decorum. By the late eighteenth century, however, in a text such as Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), this has become almost parodic. This novel looks backwards to a moment when a sociological norm of a specific 'sensibility' was a marker of class, and of sociocultural legitimacy and validation. If one's response to the world was so refined that it was *immediately* visible, legible in the tears or the general deportment of the individual, then that individual, and her or his social values, were validated. Here, a matter of aesthetics or taste determines social and political law. Those whose refinement was of a lesser order (i.e. those who were less 'fashionable') were also thereby stigmatised as the victims – the objects – of the law of the aesthete. As Bourdieu argued, taste becomes

law in a situation such as this; and, as in Foucault's horrific tales of punishment and torture, the body becomes the site of an inscription of sense as well as of sensibility.[73]

A mere thirty years later, however, the entire sensibility tradition is being thoroughly satirised in Austen and others. The body is more 'distanced' from the public display of emotion: the beginnings of a specifically 'English' sang-froid or phlegmatic nature are being developed, at a moment when, as Deane has shown, the idea of a 'national character' is gaining ground.[74] That phlegmatic nature, however, is one which distances – or, better, alienates – the human body from art – indeed, even from perception. The history of that alienation, and of its consequent political effect, is charted in Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic* and in Ferry's *Homo Aestheticus*.

So the modern might be charted in terms of an attitude to the human body and, more importantly, to its appearance and disappearance. For Foucault, the developing history of punishment is one which eradicates the traces of the body as such: even the condemned prisoner's last pain is denied her or him under the anaesthetising needle of the doctor, so that the human body as a material entity almost entirely disappears, even for the human Subject itself. This process, which begins in the eighteenth century, finds its culmination in another attitude to the body in the Nazi atrocities which were also concerned to make certain human bodies disappear in the interests of maintaining a mythic, purely formal body.

What happens to justice in all this? What is the proper relation, in this modernism, between the aesthetic and the political insertion of the body in human space? The just has always been intimately linked to the true; and justice depends upon a revelation of truth. There is a clear structural similarity between this and a Marxist hermeneutic. The project of an ideological demystification starts from the presupposition that a text (or the object of any criticism) is always informed by a specific historical and political nexus, and that the text is the site for the covering over (the disappearance) of the contradictions implicit in this historical conjuncture. The task of criticism here is one which is in the first instance epistemological: it involves the necessary revelation of a truth lying concealed behind an appearance. But it is precisely this opposition – between ideological appearance on the one hand and true reality on the other – which has come under strong speculative pressure. As a result, the question of justice has also required fundamental reconsideration.

This can be explained further. I have already argued for a consideration of the city not as a point in space but rather as an event in time. In general, that which we had assumed to be a relatively stable essence whose true shape can be revealed in analysis turns out to be unstable, traversed by an internal historicity. By extension now, justice cannot be indicated by a series of specific legal 'cases', presented as 'factual', for instance; rather, justice itself can exist only as an event, not as the repetition of a formula or as a judgment made in conformity with a pre-given rule. The real, as modernism already knew, is always in flux. But it now follows that the real is itself not something which can be determined according to a dialectic of

appearance and reality; rather, the real depends upon the dialectical – and political – speed regulating appearance and disappearance.

The essence of the political in our time is formulated upon precisely this relation between appearance and disappearance. Since we live in what Debord characterised as a 'society of the spectacle',[75] our politics – and our justice – have become increasingly 'spectacular', a matter of 'show trials' and 'live' TV courtroom drama. A poignant icon of this state of affairs is to be found in the example often cited by Virilio of the women of the Plaza de Maya, who congregate in silence at regular intervals simply to bear witness to their relatives who have been made to 'disappear'. Political systems – including soi-disant 'democratic' systems – increasingly deal with dissident thought by controlling and regulating its appearances; and, on occasion, dissident thinkers themselves are entirely 'disappeared' – or, as Orwell characterised this in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 'vaporized'.[76]

To know the real is no longer to know something stable: epistemology is contaminated by history. As a result, knowledge itself – predicated upon a stable relation between Subject and Object of knowledge, a moment of anagnorisis or recognition producing the Identity of the Subject – has entered into crisis. This crisis was foreseen, long before Lacan and Derrida, by Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant faced up to the question of the scientificity – by which he meant verifiability – of knowledge about the world. He argued for the necessity of *a priori* judgement in such matters. But more than this, he argued that an *a priori* knowledge gleaned simply from analytic methodology would simply tell us a great deal about the methodology, and not necessarily anything new about the world: it would provide only anamnesis. That is to say, to perceive the world at all, consciousness needs a form in which to comprehend it; that form – the analytic method of perception – serves primarily the function of self-legitimation. Kant wanted the world to be able to shock us into new knowledge; he wanted the reality of the world to serve the function of an avant-garde: that is, to be able to shock us out of the ideological conditioning of our mental structures – those structures which, according to the Romanticism of Kant's time, shape the world. He wanted, thus, what he called a *synthetic a priori*, which would exceed the *analytic a priori*. This would not only confirm the method of epistemological analysis of the world, it would also allow for the structural modification of the very analytic method itself to account for and encompass a new given, the new and therefore unpredictable data of the world. It would thus provide not just anamnesis, but the actual event of knowledge.

In the *Critique of Judgement*, this distinction between analytic and synthetic *a priori* more or less maps on to a distinction between determining and reflective judgement. In a determining judgement, the Subject of consciousness is not implicated in the act or event of judging at all: a method, a structure, determines the result of the judgement. In reflection, we have a state of affairs akin to that when we consider the aesthetically beautiful: we judge – in what has become the famous and controversial phrase – 'without criteria'.[77] In short, all this means is that we judge without a predetermining theory. Judgements are then replaced by judging;

and the *form* of justice (a justice which is 'seen to be done', and is legitimised *simply because* it is 'seen', televised, disseminated and distributed 'democratically') by the *event* of justice.

In this state of affairs, the operation of reason is extending itself beyond its own internally coherent framework, and attempting to grasp the new. This extension is one in which we begin to see a shift in emphasis away from what we could call scientific knowledge towards what should properly be considered as a form of narrative knowledge. Rather than knowing the stable essence of a thing, we begin to tell the story of the event of judging it, and to enact the narrative of how it changes consciousness and thus produces a new knowledge. Barthes once advocated a shift 'from work to text'; the postmodern advocates a shift 'from text to event'.[78]

Lyotard understands this in terms of a movement away from any subscription to totality. A scientistic knowledge would be one which is grounded in the totality of a governing theory; and whose formulations and propositions are tested 'internally', by reference to that theory itself. This is also what Lyotard describes as a modern mood; the postmodern, by contrast, is characterised by an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'[79] or, more simply put, by a suspicion of the scientistic nature of much theory. The postmodern prefers the event of knowing to the fact of knowledge, so to speak.

An old problem now returns: how can one legitimise an 'event' of judging? With respect to what can one validate what must effectively be a singular act? For Lyotard, credulity towards metanarratives (i.e. subscription to a prevailing theory against whose norms single events of judging might themselves be judged and validated) is tantamount to a concession to systems theory. Even Habermas, who is opposed to Lyotard on many counts, opposes this. Habermas attacks Luhmann, for instance, after whom there is a danger that 'belief in legitimacy ... shrinks to a belief in legality'.[80] For Habermas, the corrective to this lies in a discursively organised social rationality. Habermas accepts (*pace* the received wisdom) in large measure the basis of Lyotard's critique of Enlightenment reason. He is profoundly aware that there is a potential inequality in a system which claims reason for itself and stigmatises all those with whom it will communicate as being inherently unreasonable. That is, Habermas is aware that the consciousness which pronounces itself reasonable is in danger of imposing its norms, in imperious manner, upon all and every other possible consciousness. The counter to this lies in a 'theory of communicative action'; but here Habermas and Lyotard diverge once more.

For Habermas, it is not only desirable but also possible to establish a consensus among the participants in the event of communication: and it is logically possible to organise a social formation on more rational terms, through a discursively agreed consensus. Lyotard associates such consensus with the end of thinking, and (rather like Adorno, in fact) suggests that such consensus would be merely formal, a means of covering up injustice under a veneer of justice. In a debate with Rorty – who shares with Habermas a faith in some kind of 'conversation' – Lyotard indicates that there is a 'soft imperialism', a 'conversational imperialism' at work in the drive to establish consensus between participants in a dialogue.[81] Only if we respect – and

stress – the heterogeneity of language-games will we save the possibility of thinking. In short, this means that it is only in the refusal of consensus and in the search for 'dissensus' that we will be able to extend thinking, to allow it to be shocked into the new, the (chronological) postmodern. Consensus is a means of arresting the flow of events, a mode whereby eventuality can be reduced to punctuality; it is a way of reducing the philosophy of Becoming to a philosophy of Being. The modernist assumes that it is possible to pass from Becoming to Being; the postmodernist believes that any such move is always necessarily premature and unwarranted.

Politics, as we usually think it, depends upon consensus; most often, of course, such consensus articulates itself under the rubric of 'representation' (a category which has already come under pressure in its aesthetic formulation), in which there is first an assumed consensus between representative and represented, and secondly the possibility of consensus among representatives. This is bourgeois democracy, hardly a democracy at all. In place of such a politics, it might be wiser to look for a justice. Justice cannot happen under bourgeois democracy, which is always grounded in the tyranny of the many (and even, of course, in many 'democractic' systems, on the tyranny of the few – on the hegemonic control of thought exercised by a few who mediate the norms of a social formation). We can no longer legislate comfortably between opposing or competing political systems, for we no longer subscribe to any such totalising forms; but we can address the instance, the events, of justice.

Here lies the basis of an ethical demand in the postmodern, a demand whose philosophical roots lie in the work of a thinker such as Levinas. We must judge: there is no escape from the necessity of judging in any specific case. Yet we have no grounds upon which to base our judging. This is akin to Levinas:

> I have spoken a lot about the face of the Other as being the original site of the sensible. ... The proximity of the Other is the face's meaning, and it means in a way that goes beyond those plastic forms which forever try to cover the face like a mask of their presence to perception. But always the face shows through these forms. Prior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions, which cover over and protect with an immediately adopted face or countenance, there is the nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, vulnerability itself. ... In its expression, in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business.[82]

The face-to-face implicates us in a response, in the necessity of sociality. We must behave justly towards the face of the Other; but we cannot do that according to a predetermined system of justice, a predetermined political theory. The Other is itself always other than itself: it is not simply a displaced Identity in which we may once more recognise and reconstitute ourself. The demand is for a just relating to alterity, and for a cognition of the event of heterogeneity. In short, therefore, we must discover – produce – justice. It is here that the real political burden and trajectory

of the postmodern is to be found: the search for a just politics, or the search for just a politics.

Notes

Where full details are available in the Bibliography, references contain only essential information.

1. The areas in which postmodernism is already well known can be found in the bibliography, but I draw attention here to some random articles which demonstrate how postmodernism has begun to infiltrate unexpected areas: D. R. Griffin (ed.), *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern proposals*, 1988; Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a postmodern theology*, 1984; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (on geography), 1989; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 1990; David Platten, 'Postmodern engineering', 1986, 84–6; David Widgery, 'Postmodern medicine', 1989, 897; J. H. Wikstrom, 'Moving into the post-modern world', (on forestry) 1987, 65.
2. See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1. (1934; 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1935), p. 1, n2; vol. 5 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1939), p. 43.
3. Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973; repr. 1987, pp. 61–2.
4. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 1946; transl. Willard R. Trask; repr. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1974, p. 552; cf. my comments on this in Docherty, *After Theory*, 1990, pp. 122–3.
5. On schizophrenia and its relation to the postmodern, see e.g., Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 1991, pp. 25 ff. The larger debates around schizophrenia and culture began largely in the 1960s, most especially in the work of the 'anti-psychiatrists' such as R. D. Laing, Rollo May, David Cooper, Norman O. Brown; and it was related directly to political culture in the writings of Felix Guattari. This movement fed directly into the 'philosophy of desire', and led Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to collaborate on what they called 'schizanalysis' in their two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1972; transl. 1984, especially ch. 4; and *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, transl. 1987.
6. For an explanation of this in terms of active and reactive forces in Nietzsche, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1962; transl. Hugh Tomlinson, Athlone Press, 1983, pp. 39 ff.
7. Leslie A. Fiedler, 'The new mutants', 1965, 505–6.
8. See, e.g., Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, 1981; transl. 1984, esp. section III, 'Intermediate Reflections: Social action, purposive activity, and communication'.
9. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 1978; Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 1990.
10. For a full account of this, see Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought*, 1990.
11. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 1985. Gramsci and Foucault, in general, began to be read in ways which offered more purchase for an 'oppositional' political criticism than did the concept of class. It would probably be accurate, if a little oversimplified, to indicate that it is largely British cultural theorists who have retained and wish to rehabilitate the concept of class.

12. See Jean-François Lyotard, *L'Economie libidinale*, 1974; Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit.; Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, 1973; transl. 1975; cf. my comments on this in *After Theory*, pp. 207–13.
13. See Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet*, 1982. This problematisation of the status of the Subject is fairly central to the work of critics such as Catherine Belsey in, e.g., *The Subject of Tragedy*, Methuen, London, 1985; and *Critical Practice*, Methuen, London 1980; or in that of Antony Easthope, *Poetry and Phantasy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. For a different, extremely productive and suggestive argumentation relating the questioning of the subject to postmodernism, and especially to popular cultural forms, see Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 1991.
14. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944; transl. 1986, p. 6.
15. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment*, vol. 1, 1966, p. xiii. This collocation of criticism and creativity prefigures the twentieth-century avant-garde; see Section 2 below.
16. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 3.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
19. See Plato, 'The Meno' in *Five Dialogues Bearing on Poetic Inspiration*, Dent, London, 1913, p. 91: 'all our knowledge is reminiscence'. The reduction of cognition to recognition is particularly pertinent to English Romanticism, perhaps most especially in Wordsworth, whose poetry typically celebrates the repetition of an emotion, the recognition of a place or of a state of affairs. There is thus a neo-Romantic hangover in this tendency to mathesis in reason.
20. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 9.
21. J.-F. Lyotard, 'Svelte appendix to the postmodern question' (transl. Thomas Docherty) in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Across the Frontiers*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1988, p. 265.
22. Philip Sidney, 'Apology for poetry', in Edmund D. Jones (ed.), *English Critical Essays: Sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1922; repr. 1975, pp. 20–1.
23. See, e.g., J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975; Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1966; Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972; and *Is There a Text in this Class?* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1980; W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory*, 1985, which includes a 'more-pragmatist-than-thou' statement by Richard Rorty, the most explicitly 'New Pragmatist' of current 'pragmatic' theorists.
24. See Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*. But cf. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 66: 'What distinguishes Fish's reader is this propensity to fall into the same traps over and over again. Each time it is possible to interpret the end of a line of verse as completing a thought, he does so, only to find, in numerous cases, that the beginning of the next line brings a change of sense. One would expect any real reader, especially one striving to be informed, to notice that premature guesses often prove wrong and to anticipate this possibility as he reads. Stanley E. Fish, after all, not only notices this possibility but writes books about it.' In Fish's work, this has become increasingly accepted. Fish's answer to this is to adopt a pragmatist position in which he is, as Culler suggests here, precisely enabled to predict the response of a reader. For example, given a reader's predisposition for deconstruction, say, it is entirely

predictable that her or his engagement with a text will be a deconstructive one, and her or his reading is entirely predictable.

25. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, p. 11. See also Gottlob Frege, 'On sense and meaning', in Max Black and P. T. Geach (eds), *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 1952.
26. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 7.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
28. Voltaire, *Candide*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, *passim*.
29. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 1966; transl. 1983, p. 404.
30. The indebtedness of this mode of thinking to Kierkegaard should be clear. The sense that one is always 'embarked' and that the grounds upon which one makes judgements are constantly shifting was always close to the centre of Kierkegaardian thinking. Consider, for example, a typical passage in *Either/Or*, in R. Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaardian Anthology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1946, pp. 102–3: 'Think of the captain on board his ship at the instant when it has to come about. He will perhaps be able to say, "I can do either this or that"; but in case he is not a pretty poor navigator, he will be aware that at the same time his ship is all the while making its usual headway, and that therefore it is only an instant when there is no longer any question of an either/or, not because he has chosen but because he has neglected to choose, which is equivalent to saying, because others have chosen for him, because he has lost his self.'
31. See J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 1979; transl. 1984, p. xxiv.
32. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 1973, p. 258.
33. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 1989, p. 7.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–3.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
38. Jacques Derrida, *Margins: Of philosophy*, 1972; transl. Alan Bass, Harvester, Brighton, 1982, p. 213.
39. Gay, *Enlightenment*, vol. 1, p. 24, argues that Enlightenment thought was itself contaminated by the very religiosity it hoped to circumscribe. Cf. Lyotard on contemporary paganism in his *Rudiments païens* (Union générale d'éditions, Paris, 1977), and *Instructions païennes*, 1977. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 1973; transl. 1976.
40. Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison*, Plon, Paris, 1961, *passim*.
41. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, transl. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman; Semiotext(e), New York, 1983, p. 25.
42. Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 1963; transl. 1984, pp. vii–viii.
43. G. E. Lessing, *Laokoön*, 1766; transl. William A. Steel, Dent, London, 1930.
44. J.-F. Lyotard, 'Reécrire la modernité', in *L'Inhumain*, Galilée, Paris, 1988, pp. 33–44.
45. See, e.g., Alexander Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry*, transl. K. Aschenbrenner and W. B. Holther, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1954; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952.
46. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1979; transl. 1984, pp. 66–72.
47. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, para. 1, sect. 13, p. 72.
48. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 1990, p. 14. The sentiment expressed at this and similar moments in the book are oddly reminiscent of Eliot's complaints at the

'dissociation of sensibility': see T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical poets', in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn, Faber & Faber, London 1951; repr. 1980, pp. 281–91, esp. 286–8.

49. Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus*, 1990, pp. 256n, 259; my translation.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 260; my translation.
51. The reference here is to the journal *Tel Quel*, which, it might be argued, continued the work of surrealism via a prolonged engagement with structuralism, whose burden was the importance of political debate over the values of identifiable cultural practices.
52. 'Recognition' has had a specific place in the structure of tragedy at least since Aristotle's *Poetics* (esp. ch. 16). An art based upon the kind of *anagnorisis* I describe here might thus be aligned with tragedy. Given that I am now also suggesting that it links not only to a specific tradition of 'realism' but also to pragmatism, one might intercalate at this point a comment on Kenneth Burke, in whose *Language as Symbolic Action*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1966, there is a terse footnote, p. 20, n2:

    > In his *Parts of Animals*, Chapter X, Aristotle mentions the definition of man as the 'laughing animal,' but he does not consider it adequate. Though I would hasten to agree, I obviously have a big investment in it, owing to my conviction that mankind's only hope is a cult of comedy. (The cult of tragedy is too eager to help out with the holocaust ...).

    Such a comedy, as part of the 'risibility' which Burke aligns in the same footnote with 'symbolicity', is germane to the kinds of incongruity which are an important structural feature of the effect of the avant-garde.
53. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 81.
54. See Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*; but cf. Peter Bürger on 'The new' in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 1974; transl. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, pp. 59–63.
55. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 1987, Part 1.
56. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A selection*, 1966; transl. Alan Sheridan; Tavistock, London, 1977, p. 141. See also M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981; Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.
57. Georg Lukács, 'Realism in the balance', in Ernst Bloch *et al.*, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 1977; Verso, London, 1980, p. 48.
58. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 81.
59. Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus*, p. 264; my translation.
60. See, e.g., Samir Amin, *Le Développement inégal*. There is, of course, and especially in English studies, a whole new growth area in Subaltern Studies and the logic of cultural imperialisms. But for a different view of the bases of such imperialist problematics, see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 1986.
61. Interestingly, this corresponds historically with the popular development in music of crisscross rhythms, especially in freestyle jazz and in the odd musical tempo frequently adopted by bands such as Soft Machine or Osibisa in the 1970s. Cf. Jacques Attali, *Noise*, 1977; transl. 1985, for a different inflection of the political economy of music.
62. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport, 1832; Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1982; Paul Virilio, *Défense populaire et luttes écologiques*, 1978, pp. 14–15.
63. Virilio, *Défense populaire*, p. 17; my translation.

64. The event, as I describe it here, is necessarily conditioned by mutability. It is important to note in passing, moreover, that the English term 'static', which is ostensibly the opposite of such mutability, in fact contains within its etymology precisely the same kind of mutability. It derives from *stasis* which means in modern Greek a bus stop, but in Ancient Greek a civil war: that is, a state in which there is a great deal of internal dissent and struggle, but where the external boundaries of such a state are not themselves called into question. For a perhaps more conventional way of expressing the basic idea here, see Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 1961; Penguin, Hamondsworth, 1979, p. 13: 'Human life swings between two poles: movement and settlement.'
65. See Umbro Appolonio (ed)., *Futurist Manifestoes*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1973, *passim*.
66. Paul Virilio, *L'Horizon négatif*, 1984, p. 100.
67. *Ibid*., pp. 101–2; my translation.
68. Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction*, 1979, p. 123; my translation.
69. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 5, scene i.
70. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, Routledge, London, 1938.
71. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene*, 1988, pp. ii–iii.
72. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1975; transl. Alan Sheridan, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977; repr. 1985, p. 11.
73. In relation to this, one might add Malcolm McLaren: 'Fashion is always right', in discussion on BBC2, 'Did you see?'
74. Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England 1789–1832*, 1988, esp. chs 1 and 2.
75. Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*, 1968; cf. Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 1990.
76. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1954; repr. 1982, p. 19. and *passim*.
77. See J.-F. Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, 1979; transl. 1985, for the most pressing debate on the 'criterion' question.
78. See Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, ed. Stephen Heath, Fontana, Glasgow, 1977.
79. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv; see especially sections 9 and 10.
80. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 98.
81. J.-F. Lyotard and Richard Rorty, 'Discussion', *Critique*, 41, 581–4.
82. Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Séan Hand, 1989, pp. 82, 83.

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Part One

Founding Propositions

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Introduction

The debate around postmodernism has a long history. Yet it would be true to say that the contemporary interest in the question dates from 1968, that *annus mirabilis* which is the great '1848' of modern Europe. After the perceived failures of certain 'revolutionary' movements in 1968, a substantial rethinking of the question of cultural politics became not only necessary but also – through a questioning of the 'modern' itself – available in new, interesting and challenging, ways. If the logic of a structuralist Marxism was, for whatever reasons, unsuccessful when put into practice, then how might a left-wing politics advance its cause? How can the critic of culture *know* or *predict* the political effects of her or his discourse? In short, if a political theory had failed on the occasion of May 1968 to produce the requisite practice, then from now on, how does one safely ground an emancipatory cultural politics? In philosophy, there arises a whole series of 'anti-foundational' modes of thinking, already foreshadowed in the early deconstruction of Derrida in his three great 1967 texts. In more general terms, one might say that the critique of a foundational – or, perhaps, 'totalising' – theory begins from within theory itself. The general culture faces what Habermas diagnosed in 1973 as a 'legitimation crisis'.

In the arena of science, there was the beginning of the same problem, though mediated in a slightly different manner. So-called 'rogue scientists', such as Paul Feyerabend and Fritjof Capra, had begun to question what we might call the 'theoreticist' basis of contemporary science. In the anarchist science of Feyerabend, more attention is paid to the ways in which empirical practice actually deviates from the theoretically reasoned scientific theorem, for instance; and the theorem itself begins to be considered as something carceral, as a 'form' which polices the actual 'content' of scientific experiment. Knowledge, for Feyerabend and his like, should not be thus 'imprisoned' within the bounds of a series of Western rationalist models whose sole purpose is to bolster Western modes of thinking and of representing the 'truth' about the world.

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn had proposed a specific way of understanding the procedures through which our scientific 'models' for explaining the world change across history. There were, he argued, certain 'paradigms' according to which the world could be satisfactorily explained. But, given an expanding scientific research and increasingly exacting testing of specific problems within science, the paradigms always begin to come under pressure, producing less satisfactory, less predictable results. After a long time, when the existing paradigm is seen as increasingly useless,

a new paradigmatic model for explaining the world begins to gain sway. This shift between paradigms constitutes the 'structure of scientific revolutions'. The book bearing this title had enormous influence across all fields of knowledge. It is itself a symptom precisely of a paradigm shift in the field of knowledge and philosophy, away from a model which proclaimed the availability of 'truth' towards one which proclaims instead the much more modest 'pragmatic usefulness'.

Cultural criticism at this moment has begun to go 'relativist', so to speak. Since the eighteenth century in Europe, it had been taken more or less for granted that knowledge gave an entitlement to legislation. That is, social and political formations were grounded upon a truthful knowledge about the ways of the world. But after 1968, all such knowledges begin to be deemed 'local' and specific to the pragmatic necessities of the specific culture from which the knowledges emanate and whose interests they serve. Now, knowledge does not give power; rather, it is utterly imbricated with power from the outset, and is thus not a pure knowledge at all but a practical knowledge, a knowledge whose *raison d'être* is power itself. From 1968, the leftist intellectual begins to be suspicious of a knowledge which will legislate for any culture other than the very culture which produced that knowledge in the first place.

Increasingly, the possibility of criticism itself enters into crisis. It seemed that there was a basic alternative. On the one hand, one could retain the idea of a 'foundational' criticism, according to which the critic, working from a 'rational' ground, might legislate for any and every eventuality and might make all the necessary and determined judgements regarding any cultural practice. On the other hand, this mode of criticism begins to be rejected as a symptom of an imperialist cast of mind, according to which one culture arrogates to itself the right to legislate for all other cultures whose foundations might be radically different.

Once the legitimation crisis becomes articulated in these terms, it becomes more and more obvious to refer to the first model as a European and 'Enlightenment' model of criticism. Further, given the fact that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers saw themselves as 'progressive' and 'modernising', the foundationalist mode of criticism became increasingly stigmatised as specifically 'modernist'. The anti-foundationalist criticism, by dint of the very fact that it subjects modernist thought to speculative pressure, postulates thereby the possibility of an 'outside' of modernist thinking.

The word 'postmodern' was increasingly used to describe this 'outside' of modernist thought; but its meaning was somewhat obfuscated by the prefix 'post-', which carried too much the weight of a simple chronological tardiness. The articles here address this situation. Lyotard's 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' not only begins to offer a serious definition of the term, but alludes directly in the title to the history of the question. Lyotard's title is meant explicitly to call to mind Kant's famous piece 'What is Enlightenment?'. To begin to address the postmodern, one has also to address an entire trajectory of European philosophy dating from the Enlightenment. The more immediate 'local' reason for this allusion to Kant, of course, is that in the French philosophical institution attention had

begun to turn to Kant, swerving away from the extremely influential version of Hegel proposed by Kojève in the 1930s. In his letter of 1985 to Jessamyn Blau, Lyotard maintains a rigorous sense for the troublesome prefix 'post-', in the face of its increasingly sloppy chronological usage.

The proper sense in which 'postmodern' describes an 'after' of the modern really derives from a sociological discourse referring not to modernism but to modernity. Here, Habermas and Jameson share something of the same terrain, in the sense that they both discern the beginning of a shift in consciousness which is appropriate to the contemporary moment. Habermas is much troubled by such a shift, and has maintained a vigilant regard for the serious and continuing elucidation of modernity, in the face of what he sees as a neo-Nietzschean tendency to nihilism in the contemporary validations of relativism. The fragment included here dates from his 1985 lectures, and is a succinct formulation of what Habermas sees as the main dangers for the building of a rational society – dangers which are exacerbated by the postmodern tendency in contemporary culture. Jameson's piece is the famous, much reworked and much discussed 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', first published in this extended form in *New Left Review* in 1984 (and subsequently further revised in his book *Postmodernism*). Jameson seems much more ambivalent about the postmodern: on the one hand, he is deeply suspicious of it as the articulation of a continued capitalism which is branded by covert exploitation and oppression; yet on the other hand he is, by his own admission, more than half in love with the very practices and objects of a postmodern culture which he wishes to expose as politically disreputable. The four pieces together offer a broad survey of a variety of 'postmodern' concerns apparent in the work of the three most influential figures in the field of the contemporary debate. They are founding – if sometimes anti-foundational – propositions for all the work which follows.

1 □ *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*

Jean-François Lyotard

A Demand

This is a period of slackening – I refer to the color of the times. From every direction we are being urged to put an end to experimentation, in the arts and elsewhere. I have read an art historian who extols realism and is militant for the advent of a new subjectivity. I have read an art critic who packages and sells 'Transavantgardism' in the marketplace of painting. I have read that under the name of postmodernism, architects are getting rid of the Bauhaus project, throwing out the baby of experimentation with the bathwater of functionalism. I have read that a new philosopher is discovering what he drolly calls Judaeo-Christianism, and intends by it to put an end to the impiety which we are supposed to have spread. I have read in a French weekly that some are displeased with *Mille Plateaux* [by Deleuze and Guattari] because they expect, especially when reading a work of philosophy, to be gratified with a little sense. I have read from the pen of a reputable historian that writers and thinkers of the 1960 and 1970 avant-gardes spread a reign of terror in the use of language, and that the conditions for a fruitful exchange must be restored by imposing on the intellectuals a common way of speaking, that of the historians. I have been reading a young philosopher of language who complains that Continental thinking, under the challenge of speaking machines, has surrendered to the machines the concern for reality, that it has substituted for the referential paradigm that of 'adlinguisticity' (one speaks about speech, writes about writing, intertextuality), and who thinks that the time has now come to restore a solid anchorage of language in the referent. I have read a talented theatrologist for whom postmodernism, with its games and fantasies, carries very little weight in front of political authority, especially when a worried public opinion encourages authority to a politics of totalitarian surveillance in the face of nuclear warfare threats.

I have read a thinker of repute who defends modernity against those he calls the

From Hassan, I. and Hassan, S. (eds), *Innovation/Renovation*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 1983, pp. 71–82.

neoconservatives. Under the banner of postmodernism, the latter would like, he believes, to get rid of the uncompleted project of modernism, that of the Enlightenment. Even the last advocates of *Aufklärung*, such as Popper or Adorno, were only able, according to him, to defend the project in a few particular spheres of life – that of politics for the author of *The Open Society*, and that of art for the author of *Ästhetische Theorie*. Jürgen Habermas (everyone had recognized him) thinks that if modernity has failed, it is in allowing the totality of life to be splintered into independent specialties which are left to the narrow competence of experts, while the concrete individual experiences 'desublimated meaning' and 'destructured form', not as a liberation but in the mode of that immense *ennui* which Baudelaire described over a century ago.

Following a prescription of Albrecht Wellmer, Habermas considers that the remedy for this splintering of culture and its separation from life can only come from 'changing the status of aesthetic experience when it is no longer primarily expressed in judgments of taste', but when it is 'used to explore a living historical situation', that is, when 'it is put in relation with problems of existence'. For this experience then 'becomes a part of a language game which is no longer that of aesthetic criticism'; it takes part 'in cognitive processes and normative expectations'; 'it alters the manner in which those different moments *refer* to one another'. What Habermas requires from the arts and the experiences they provide is, in short, to bridge the gap between cognitive, ethical, and political discourses, thus opening the way to a unity of experience.

My question is to determine what sort of unity Habermas has in mind. Is the aim of the project of modernity the constitution of sociocultural unity within which all the elements of daily life and of thought would take their places as in an organic whole? Or does the passage that has to be charted between heterogeneous language-games – those of cognition, of ethics, of politics – belong to a different order from that? And if so, would it be capable of effecting a real synthesis between them?

The first hypothesis, of a Hegelian inspiration, does not challenge the notion of a dialectically totalizing *experience*; the second is closer to the spirit of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*; but must be submitted, like the *Critique*, to that severe reexamination which postmodernity imposes on the thought of the Enlightenment, on the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject. It is this critique which not only Wittgenstein and Adorno have initiated, but also a few other thinkers (French or other) who do not have the honor to be read by Professor Habermas – which at least saves them from getting a poor grade for their neoconservatism.

Realism

The demands I began by citing are not all equivalent. They can even be contradictory. Some are made in the name of postmodernism, others in order to combat it. It is not necessarily the same thing to formulate a demand for some referent (and objective reality), for some sense (and credible transcendence), for an

addressee (and audience), or an addressor (and subjective expressiveness) or for some communicational consensus (and a general code of exchanges, such as the genre of historical discourse). But in the diverse invitations to suspend artistic experimentation, there is an identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity (in the sense of *Öffentlichkeit*, of 'finding a public'). Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, they must be assigned the task of healing it.

There is an irrefutable sign of this common disposition: it is that for all those writers nothing is more urgent than to liquidate the heritage of the avant-gardes. Such is the case, in particular, of the so-called transavantgardism. The answers given by Achille Bonito Oliva to the questions asked by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel and Michel Enric leave no room for doubt about this. By putting the avant-gardes through a mixing process, the artist and critic feel more confident that they can suppress them than by launching a frontal attack. For they can pass off the most cynical eclecticism as a way of going beyond the fragmentary character of the preceding experiments; whereas if they openly turned their backs on them, they would run the risk of appearing ridiculously neoacademic. The *Salons* and the *Académies*, at the time when the bourgeoisie was establishing itself in history, were able to function as purgation and to grant awards for good plastic and literary conduct under the cover of realism. But capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction. Classicism seems to be ruled out in a world in which reality is so destabilized that it offers no occasion for experience but one for ratings and experimentation.

This theme is familiar to all readers of Walter Benjamin. But it is necessary to assess its exact reach. Photography did not appear as a challenge to painting from the outside, any more than industrial cinema did to narrative literature. The former was only putting the final touch to the program of ordering the visible elaborated by the quattrocento; while the latter was the last step in rounding off diachronies as organic wholes, which had been the ideal of the great novels of education since the eighteenth century. That the mechanical and the industrial should appear as substitutes for hand or craft was not in itself a disaster – except if one believes that art is in its essence the expression of an individuality of genius assisted by an elite craftsmanship.

The challenge lay essentially in that photographic and cinematographic processes can accomplish better, faster, and with a circulation a hundred thousand times larger than narrative or pictorial realism, the task which academicism had assigned to realism: to preserve various consciousnesses from doubt. Industrial photography and cinema will be superior to painting and the novel whenever the objective is to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning, to reproduce the syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly, and so to arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity as well as the approval which he thereby receives

from others – since such structures of images and sequences constitute a communication code among all of them. This is the way the effects of reality, or if one prefers, the fantasies of realism, multiply.

If they too do not wish to become supporters (of minor importance at that) of what exists, the painter and novelist must refuse to lend themselves to such therapeutic uses. They must question the rules of the art of painting or of narrative as they have learned and received them from their predecessors. Soon those rules must appear to them as a means to deceive, to seduce, and to reassure, which makes it impossible for them to be 'true'. Under the common name of painting and literature, an unprecedented split is taking place. Those who refuse to reexamine the rules of art pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating, by means of the 'correct rules', the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it. Pornography is the use of photography and film to such an end. It is becoming a general model for the visual or narrative arts which have not met the challenge of the mass media.

As for the artists and writers who question the rules of plastic and narrative arts and possibly share their suspicions by circulating their work, they are destined to have little credibility in the eyes of those concerned with 'reality' and 'identity'; they have no guarantee of an audience. Thus it is possible to ascribe the dialectics of the avant-gardes to the challenge posed by the realisms of industry and mass communication to painting and the narrative arts. Duchamp's 'ready-made' does nothing but actively and parodistically signify this constant process of dispossession of the craft of painting or even of being an artist. As Thierry de Duve penetratingly observes, the modern aesthetic question is not 'What is beautiful?' but 'What can be said to be art (and literature)?'

Realism, whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch. When power assumes the name of a party, realism and its neoclassical complement triumph over the experimental avant-garde by slandering and banning it – that is, provided the 'correct' images, the 'correct' narratives, the 'correct' forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that public experiences. The demand for reality – that is, for unity, simplicity, communicability, etc. – did not have the same intensity nor the same continuity in German society between the two world wars and in Russian society after the Revolution: this provides a basis for a distinction between Nazi and Stalinist realism.

What is clear, however, is that when it is launched by the political apparatus, the attack on artistic experimentation is specifically reactionary: aesthetic judgment would only be required to decide whether such or such work is in conformity with the established rules of the beautiful. Instead of the work of art having to investigate what makes it an art object and whether it will be able to find an audience, political academicism possesses and imposes *a priori* criteria of the beautiful, which designate some works and a public at a stroke and forever. The use of categories in aesthetic judgment would thus be of the same nature as in cognitive judgment.

To speak like Kant, both would be determining judgments: the expression is 'well formed' first in the understanding, then the only cases retained in experience are those which can be subsumed under this expression.

When power is that of capital and not that of a party, the 'transavantgardist' or 'postmodern' (in Jencks's sense) solution proves to be better adapted than the anti-modern solution. Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion which reigns in the 'taste' of the patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics, and public wallow together in the 'anything goes', and the epoch is one of slackening. But this realism of the 'anything goes' is in fact that of money; in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield. Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all 'needs', providing that the tendencies and needs have purchasing power. As for taste, there is no need to be delicate when one speculates or entertains oneself.

Artistic and literary research is doubly threatened, once by the 'cultural policy' and once by the art and book market. What is advised, sometimes through one channel, sometimes through the other, is to offer works which, first, are relative to subjects which exist in the eyes of the public they address, and second, works so made ('well made') that the public will recognize what they are about, will understand what is signified, will be able to give or refuse its approval knowingly, and if possible, even to derive from such work a certain amount of comfort.

The interpretation which has just been given of the contact between the industrial and mechanical arts, and literature and the fine arts, is correct in its outline, but it remains narrowly sociologizing and historicizing – in other words, one-sided. Stepping over Benjamin's and Adorno's reticences, it must be recalled that science and industry are no more free of the suspicion which concerns reality than are art and writing. To believe otherwise would be to entertain an excessively humanistic notion of the Mephistophelian functionalism of sciences and technologies. There is no denying the dominant existence today of techno-science, that is, the massive subordination of cognitive statements to the finality of the best possible performance, which is the technological criterion. But the mechanical and the industrial, especially when they enter fields traditionally reserved for artists, are carrying with them much more than power effects. The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy convey with them one of the rules which supports their possibility: the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments.

This rule is of no little consequence. It is the imprint left on the politics of the scientist and the trustee of capital by a kind of flight of reality out of the metaphysical, religious, and political certainties that the mind believed it held. This withdrawal is absolutely necessary to the emergence of science and capitalism. No