INTERNATIONAL POSTMODERNISM

A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF LITERATURES IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES
SPONSORED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE LITERATURE ASSOCIATION

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(Eds. Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema)

INTERNATIONAL POSTMODERNISM

THEORY AND LITERARY PRACTICE

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GENERAL PREFACE

This is one of a series of volumes in the ''Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages'' (hereafter ''Comparative Literary History'') sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association. The series is under the supervision of a coordinating editorial committee consisting of sixteen scholars from various countries. The committee appoints the directors of the particular research projects, issues general guidelines to them, monitors the genesis of the manuscript, and gives final approval before publication.

The ''Comparative Literary History'' series was launched by the International Comparative Literature Association in 1967. It is based on two premises: one, that the writing of literary history confined to specific nations, peoples, or languages must be complemented by the writing of literary history that coordinates related or comparable phenomena from an international point of view; two, that we rely on structured teamwork drawing collaborators from different nations working in close cooperation.

Within these principles and criteria, the scholars entrusted with each project are given the latitude needed to put together the best possible volume. Writing a comparative literary history by way of international teamwork is a revolutionary procedure in literary historiography. Few scholars can claim ability to cover the entire range of literature relevant to the phenomenon under study. Hence the need for partial syntheses, upon which more and more truly international syntheses will be built as our series progresses.

The ICLA series of comparative literary histories, as a whole, has sought to do something very different from what *national* literary histories have done. In Europe, the sense of collective identity was conceived in the nineteenth century and born largely of the printed word and the literary genre we know as the novel – though others would, no doubt, want to argue for the centrality of drama or even opera. This general intertwining of the literary and the national, however, is not one abandoned in a comparative literary history, but to limit oneself to it would be to downplay the power of other imagined communities based on, say, language or geographic region rather than nation. Either of these categories might foreground the artificiality, not to say fragility, of national borders: after all, as historical entities, such borders have changed often and, indeed, change constantly.

The volumes in this series are collaborative projects of many scholars from different countries, cultures and procedures, but volume editors and the Coordinating Committee have worked to produce well defined historiographic systems of explanation that give literary scholarship a broader and more accurate assessment of the cultural past.

As the current President of the Coordination Committee I have been entrusted with the responsibility of continuing and expanding the series of ''Comparative Literary History'' launched by Professor Jacques Voisine of the University of Paris III, and continued by Professor Henry Remak of Indiana University and brought up to its present level of achievement by Professor Jean Weisgerber of the Free University of Brussels.

Literary scholarship is indebted to the project directors for their scholarship, undaunted courage, patience and faith in the international community of scholars.

Mario J. Valdés
President, Coordinating Committee

FOREWORD

All essays in this volume were written upon the request of the editors who had a specific idea in mind of what a comprehensive study of international postmodernism should look like. Basically their plan consisted of (1) a section of introductory studies from different points of view, (2) a section dealing with postmodernism in other arts than literature, (3) a section discussing renovations of narrative genres and other strategies and devices in postmodernist writing, and (4) a section studying the reception and processing of postmodernism in different parts of the world. This plan was approved of by the Coordinating Committee of the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages of the ICLA on June 25, 1991, and, more remarkably, materialized exactly as it initially was proposed. Perhaps the work could have been done with greater speed, but no one familiar with similar international projects will underestimate the laborious aspects of an undertaking whose fifty contributors are located in twenty-one different countries. All contributors have written original essays (one of which has in the meantime also been published elsewhere), with the exception of one contribution which was reprinted from an earlier book, edited by Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens and published in 1988.

With eight introductory essays it is unnecessary to say much about the character of this volume, but there are three things which should be emphasized.

First, we more or less consistently distinguish between postmodernity and postmodernism – the former referring to a general cultural atmosphere or *Zeitgeist* which supposedly results from a change in the conditions of industrial production, the emergence of new information technologies, and the globalization of the market for products and ideas; the latter to postmodern manifestations in literature and the arts, partly reflecting postmodernity, partly reacting to modernist literature and art. Most authors are aware of the distinction and many touch upon it in the course of their argument.

Second, we are interested as much in the making and diffusion of postmodernism as in the workings of literature. This means that we do not value an eager and full-fledged assimilation of postmodernism more than a reserved treatment or even a rejection. We did not wish to establish a hierarchy of more and less postmodernist literatures. From a reception point of view, the resistance to postmodernism is as interesting as its acceptance.

Third, we wish to alert the reader to a problem which is pertinent to all interpretation as well as to all constructions of period formations and literary currents. Some authors rely predominantly on their own readings of supposedly postmodernist texts, others prefer to discuss the varying critical reception of those texts. In our conception, the two positions are not mutually exclusive. We believe that nowadays there is a fairly large consensus among literary scholars that while different readers may read a particular text in different ways, textual features remain a point of reference in any reading

and steer the resulting interpretations in various degrees. In interpretation, both the text and the reader (i.e., the reader's knowledge, experience, interests, and competence) are crucial factors. The various contributors have, at least implicitly, defined their own position between the two possibilities of emphasizing the input of the text and emphasizing that of the reader. Unnecessary to add that those positions are not fixed, but may vary from case to case.

The idea that in interpretation the relative importance of textual features and that of the reader's constructive effort may vary has a parallel in the construction of period formations and literary currents. In the construction of postmodernity and postmodernism, theorists may variously emphasize either the textual aspects, the early critical reception and other contemporary data, or their own creative input in that construction – an activity which, as in interpretation, aims at making sense. There is no given solution for this dilemma; different authors have expressed different positions with equal force of argument. Continuing the parallel with interpretation, we believe that the historians' construction of literary currents cannot be successful without arguments that refer to textual and reception data but also that the ordering of that material by necessity relies on the creative input and hindsight of the literary historians who, from a later point of view, impose their framework on the earlier events. As will appear from the contributions in section 1, these general observations pertain more in particular to our concept of postmodernism, which we divide in an early and a late postmodernism with a caesura around 1980.

It will be argued that the literary texts usually associated with postmodernism and written before 1980 in general differ from those written after that year: the early postmodernist texts seem to express an attitude of ''anything goes,'' a tendency which remained not unnoticed in contemporary criticism, whereas the later postmodernist texts apparently distance themselves from that notion and are more open to political and ideological commitments. However, as will be shown as well, theorists of postmodernism have discovered those political and ideological commitments only at a fairly late stage, in the course of the 1980s, even if they tend to read such commitments also in (or into) early postmodernist texts. We wish to draw attention to the fact that, within the North American context, there are two ''generations'' of theorists of literary postmodernism: John Barth and Ihab Hassan, for instance, belonging to the first, Fredric Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, and Linda Hutcheon to the second. The first generation emphasized the notion of ''anything goes'' or ''nothing makes any difference'' and had its reasons to do so, the second generation (which had equally good but different reasons for their argument) made postmodernism acceptable to feminist and leftist circles. When the discussion of postmodernism disseminates to other parts of the world this distinction between two generations of theorists no longer applies. Umberto Eco, for instance, who joined the debate on postmodernism in the early 1980s, does not share the political interpretation of postmodernism advanced by Jameson, Huyssen, and Hutcheon. The distinction between varieties of postmodernism is at the center of all theorizing about the concept and will be further discussed in chapters 1.1. and 1.2.

This book does not expressly focus on American postmodernism, although, of course, American interpretations of postmodernism are a major point of reference. If we have learned anything in reading the various essays, in particular the various reception studies, it is that each local setting is

different. The varying literary and cultural conditions in this world are bound to produce endless varieties of postmodernism. When, for instance, postmodernism reached Russia or India the concept changed to such an extent that it can hardly be identified with its earlier manifestations. That is what made us decide to opt for the title *International Postmodernism*.

The international perspective also influenced our treatment of non-English languages. All titles of literary works are given in the original language, when necessary followed by a translation into English. Here a typographical distinction has been made. If we were aware of an English translation, the English title has been printed in italics. As a rule, quotations from the French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish are also given in the original languages and followed by an English translation.

This volume would never have materialized without the individual intellectual efforts of the various contributors, who have shown continued interest in this truly international enterprise. We feel greatly indebted to all of them. Further we wish to thank the Coordinating Committee for its generous support, which in particular made possible the translation of two essays from German into English. We greatly profited from the detailed reviewer's report which Linda Hutcheon prepared at the request of the Coordinating Committee. We also would like to thank Judith Middelveld, research-assistant, who helped solving last-minute problems, and Carien Breed for her loyal and professional assistance in preparing a printable manuscript.

Utrecht, July 1996 The Editors

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Section 1

Introductory Essays

1.1. **The Debate on Postmodernism**

HANS BERTENS

1. Although it has not yet been officially pronounced dead – but, then, who would be in a position to sign such a death certificate – there would seem to be a general feeling that postmodernism is at least moribund, both as a creative moment that has in the last thirty years manifested itself in virtually all artistic disciplines and as a subject for academic research. The postmodern impulse seems to have run out of steam, the cutting edge of literary-critical interest flexes its muscles – if I may mix my metaphors – in more recently established fields of intellectual inquiry such as cultural studies and, more in particular, postcolonial studies, and publishers are getting wary of new manuscripts on the postmodern because the market gives every sign of being saturated.

The last years of the twentieth century, then, would seem to offer an ideal opportunity for taking stock of what, after modernism, has been the second great upheaval in the arts of the twentieth century, an opportunity for getting things right, in the correct perspective, for balancing the books, and, not in the least, for cleaning the slate, so that future periodizers of Western art can use the impending turn of the century as a neat break between the afterglow of the postmodern and whatever the twenty-first century will bring.

Unfortunately, and even though this volume is at least partly motivated by such lofty aspirations, our intellectual and literary reality does not permit such a definitive inventory. Far from having exhausted itself, the postmodern impulse is alive and well, although its current manifestations are admittedly not those of thirty, or even those of twenty or fifteen years ago. Insisting on difference and declaring war on sameness in the name of intellectual, moral, and political freedom, and seeing never-ending process where other world views saw (and see) stability, postmodernism has itself also been protean rather than fixable and has again and again remade itself without, however, losing its most distinctive qualities. And so, even if the postmodernism of the 1960s is no longer with us, the postmodernism of the 1990s surely is. Although, for instance, postcolonial theorists have virtually unanimously declared that what they call postcolonial literature should under no condition be confused – let alone equated – with postmodern literature, there are excellent arguments for placing much of that postcolonial literature in a postmodern framework. The same goes for much of the work that is done in the field of cultural studies, even if those working in the field would rather keep their distance from the postmodern and often like to suggest, just like the postcolonial theorists, that their interest in the political and their focus on the politics of representation sufficiently distinguishes them from those working with postmodernism. One can respect their desire to defend their turf against intruders but that defense is based upon a view of the postmodern that is highly suspect because it fixes the postmodern in time and place – equating it with late 1970s and early 1980s American deconstructionism for reasons that are in themselves political. However, over the past thirty-odd years

the postmodern has proven itself to be an ever-widening circle, or, to reverse the metaphor, a vortex that sucks everything that it comes in contact with into its center. In the late 1990s the postmodern still dominates our intellectual agenda, directly through the conceptual apparatus that it got widely accepted in literary studies and in the humanities at large and through the concomitant politicization of humanities research, indirectly through the violently adversary reactions that it has provoked and that now are beginning to be institutionalized (in, for instance, the recently founded Association of Literary Scholars and Critics).

2. The debate on postmodernism has practically from the very beginning led to a good deal of confusion because postmodernism was, again practically from the start, many things at once. I will here first sketch the main ways in which the terms postmodern and postmodernism have been used, and then go on to discuss the terms's major uses in a more specifically literary context.

Helped a good deal by the hindsight that the passage of time, as it more generally does, has made available to us, we can now see that the terms postmodern and postmodernism were even in the earliest stages of their circulation applied at widely different levels of conceptualization. At the most concrete level, they were applied to the experimental art of the 1950s and 1960s and to the various pop art movements and manifestations that joined it after the mid-1960s. In its rejection of modernist forms postmodern literature and postmodern art in general sought to deflate what it saw as overly pretentious and ultimately self-serving modernist views of art and the artist. Since in its early stages the debate was conducted exclusively by American critics, whose idea of modernism was largely based on the mainstream modernism that had dominated – and at that point still largely dominated – the American and the British literary scenes, not much attention was paid to a possible overlap between this postmodernism and the activities of the various avant-gardes that complicate the modernist picture on the European continent. When the critics involved in the debate, notably Ihab Hassan, became aware of this source of confusion, they understandably sought to further define, or even partly redefine, postmodernism in order to distinguish it from the historical avant-garde, thus initiating a first reorientation in a debate that would be marked by such reorientations.

In some of those early contributions to what would later become a wide-ranging and complex international debate, however, we already find a much more encompassing view of the postmodern. Articles such as Susan Sontag's ''One Culture and the New Sensibility'' of 1965 and Leslie Fiedler's ''The New Mutants'' of the same year described a more general revolt against the pretentiousness and the privileging of timeless, transcendent 'meaning' that were associated with modernism and had, even if those accusations against modernism proper could not be made to stick, in any case been canonized by postwar establishment culture. Sontag, Fiedler, and other critics noted the dawn of a new postmodern culture that rejected what it saw as the elitist and repressive liberal humanist culture of the establishment and its institutions and that opposed eclecticism and radical democracy to establishment elitism and to its repressive tactics. The idea of postmodernism as a sort of new cultural formation (although not necessarily ever that of a majority) was in the course of the 1970s vigorously pursued by Ihab Hassan (see, for instance, his *Paracriticisms* of 1975) and other critics who like Hassan claimed that the counterculture of the 1960s had ushered in a new postmodern culture, even

if that culture was largely bounded by generation, race, and class (the affluent white middle classes of the West, more in particular the United States).

The various impulses that constituted this postmodern culture and that in its early stages were virtually indistinguishable began in the course of the 1970s to disentangle themselves from each other. For some, the new postmodern freedom limited itself to a cultural eclecticism and to the expectation of an unprecedented tolerance in matters of individual behavior and taste that could, with some give and take, be accommodated by a socio-political framework that took its liberal pluralist principles more seriously than it had so far done. The postmodernism of this, on the whole a-political, group would in the late 1980s find a number of major theorists, the most prominent of which are probably the British sociologists Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. Featherstone's *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991) argues that postmodernism is best defined as a life style based on consumption and on a relentless aestheticization of experience. Although that life style is an unmistakable influence in all strata of contemporary Western societies, its center of gravity is the affluent new professional middle class – active as ''cultural intermediaries'' and in the ''helping professions'' – that sets both tone and pace in the large urban centers. Casting a wider net, Scott Lash, in his *Sociology of Postmodernism* (1990), sees postmodernism as a major reorientation of Western culture. While modernist culture was primarily discursive, formalist and rational, postmodern culture is figural in its privileging of images and of the spectacle and its sensibility is that of the id rather than that of the (modernist) ego. But although Lash's postmodern culture is a good deal more encompassing than Featherstone's, their central assumptions, involving eclecticism, aestheticization, and what Lash calls the ''newer, post-industrial middle classes'' (1990: 215), are similar enough, with Lash giving special emphasis to the omnipresence of images – on movie, television, and computer screens – in the contemporary world. The sociological postmodernisms of Featherstone and Lash will return in the overview of the sociological response to the postmodern that follows below, in Chapter 1.8. (''The Sociology of Postmodernity'').

But the emerging postmodern culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s took also a more interesting turn. Whereas the postmodern culture that would later become the target of sociological inquiries such as those of Featherstone and Lash was and is a-political (in the sense that it is not actively interested in politics), another offshoot of the postmodern culture first sighted in the 1960s became increasingly political and intellectualistic and would become a major force on the American academic scene from the late 1970s onwards. In the context of this development, postmodernism stands for an ever-increasing suspicion of and distance from the liberal humanism that never bothered Featherstone's and Lash's postmodern yuppiefied middle class. Especially after the later 1970s, when Ihab Hassan and others forged a link between American postmodernism and French poststructuralism, this academic postmodern culture took a very dim view of such liberal humanist mainstays as the integrity and autonomy of the subject, the transparency of language – and its concomitant capacity to represent reality – and the essentialist character of truth (or at least some truths). This deconstructionist postmodernism, that briefly dominated the contemporary literature sections of American Departments of English, is, like the Derridean poststructuralism from which it derives, governed by the idea that ultimately language is doomed to self-reflexivity and that because it cannot reflect the world language paradoxically must constitute whatever we take to be reality.

However, such linguistic determinism does not only go against the liberal humanist grain, it goes, like all determinisms, in particular against the American grain. Not surprisingly, the anti-representationalism and the textuality of deconstructionist postmodernism soon modified itself into a postmodernism that returned to the question of representation and to the subject, without, however, abandoning its broadly poststructuralist orientation. Drawing on Foucault, and especially on the later Foucault's return to the vexing problem of the subject, this postmodernism recognizes that in the absence of representation it matters more than ever who has authored, or who controls, any given representation. If representations do not represent the world they must represent something else and in so doing they will inevitably be political, always emerging within a time- and place-bound ideological framework. The emphasis, in other words, is on power. Representations do not only reflect power and power relations; they are vehicles of power. This postmodernism, of which Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is an early and influential example, works to expose and undo hierarchies of power and advocates difference in order to let the countless victims of representations speak for themselves. It is this postmodernism that after the mid-1980s has informed what are now termed postcolonial and cultural studies. In their attempts to create their own recognizable and separate niche in the literary-critical world theorists of postcolonial literature quarrel loudly with an a-political deconstructionist postmodernism. But that postmodernism already was practically defunct when postcolonial studies arrived on the scene.

This is not to equate the postmodern critique of Western culture and its representations with the critiques found in the postcolonial debate and/or in cultural studies. However, the difference between the postmodern critique on the one hand and the postcolonial and cultural studies critiques on the other hand is not primarily a matter of politics – the absence or presence of a political agenda. The difference lies most of all in the strategies that these respective critiques employ. It is no secret that in its earlier stages postmodernism was almost completely dominated by writers who were white and male and who hailed to a disproportionate extent from North America. In other words, these writers were very much part of the liberal-humanist culture that postmodernism sought to attack and undermine. In pursuing their critique of liberal humanism they therefore found themselves in the awkward and highly ironical position of sawing off the bough on which they were sitting. Inevitably, the auto-critique that postmodernism forced upon them and the absurdity of their position were reflected in their self-mocking uses of irony and more in general in the literary strategies that they used to give shape to their dilemma. But that does not mean that their work is not political. It is, moreover, often enough also political in the sense in which postcolonial writing is political. To write off the efforts of early postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon or Robert Coover as a-political is to ignore Pynchon's shocking description of German colonial rule in what is now Namibia in *V.* and Coover's openly political stance in *The Public Burning*. Moreover, after the mid-1970s the Foucauldian interest in the politics of representations that we already see in Coover's novel increasingly determined the postmodern agenda, further emphasizing its political dimension.

Still, one does not want to deny that the postcolonial critique of Western culture and its representations can take forms that are appreciably different from what one finds in postmodern literature. This is true of the critique presented by the victims of colonialization, notably Third World writers and

writers belonging to indigenous minorities (the Maori, the Inuit), but also of the critique presented by those former colonizers – Canadians, Australians, and so on – who have reason to feel marginalized by the 'mother' culture. Although this latter critique is inevitably deeply ambiguous, because of the historic complicity of the groups the writers in question belong to with the colonization process, it is also different from the auto-critique of the earlier postmodernists because of this sense of marginalization.

However, while these distinctions are useful, they should not be exaggerated. They are most useful in discussions of primary literature and recognize the fact that postcolonial literature is not necessarily postmodern in its strategies and techniques. At the theoretical level, however, these distinctions do not carry much weight. It cannot escape anybody's notice, for instance, that important theorists of the postcolonial such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Robert Young are deeply indebted to poststructuralist thought and that there is little, if any, difference between their intellectual and political postions and those of a good many postmodern critics. If we are talking about critiques of representation that seek to reveal Western representation's dependence on the liberal-humanist hegemony that characterized modernity, then clearly 'postmodern' is not a bad term for describing them, no matter whether they are offered by postcolonial critics, by cultural studies writers, or by feminists. In this context, the term postmodern signals that such critiques are the product of an intellectual and political dispensation that has definitely broken with a modernity that was the exclusive prerogative of the male white North Atlantic bourgeoisie, to use Richard Rorty's term. While postmodernism as a literary-historical development was largely the creation of that white male bourgeoisie – a state of affairs reflected in the various contributions that will follow – postmodernism in this sense is not. Taken in this sense, as a set of theoretical assumptions, or, even better, as the framework for an ongoing debate concerning the nature of language, the subject, the provisionality of meaning and truth, the inevitability of power relations, the political nature of representations, and so on and so forth, postmodernism is still very much with us and so are the various reading practices that have emerged from those assumptions, no matter what their practitioners may call them.

Referring to those assumptions, academics working in the field of contemporary culture often speak of the postmodern world that we inhabit. But that is an unwarranted annexation of a late twentieth-century world that is largely if not wholly ignorant of the postmodern intellectual culture that I have just sketched and quite probably prefers it that way. This is not to say that to speak of a postmodern world is nonsensical; indeed, a good many theorists have done so. At the most encompassing and most abstract level the terms postmodern, as in Jean-François Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne* (1979), and postmodernism, as in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), have frequently been used to refer to the new era that Western society at large – and not simply Western culture, either in its highbrow or in its popular manifestations – has supposedly entered. In such analyses, postmodernism, or postmodernity, as theorists such as David Harvey and Philip Cooke wisely prefer to call it, may refer to the new artistic practices that first emerged in the 1950s and it may also refer to both the life-style postmodernism and the theoretical, intellectualist postmodernism of the previous paragraphs. More importantly, however, these and other studies trace such developments to an underlying transition from an industrial to a post-industrial

social matrix and to an incisive restructuring of international capitalism. At this most abstract level, postmodernism refers to the state of the world after modernity, a state that we supposedly have entered at some point in the last twenty-five years. This postmodern condition, at or least some of the models that its theorists have proposed, will be examined in more detail in the chapter on the sociology of postmodernity (1.8.).

3. Let me, after this introductory round-up of postmodernisms, return to the main subject of this volume: literary postmodernism and its various theorizations. I will in the remainder of this section on the postmodernism debate briefly trace the main developments in the academic response to postmodern literature. The aim is not only to give the reader an overview of the most important approaches that over the last twenty years have established themselves but also to enable him or her to 'place' the discussions of the various national postmodernisms that make up the second half of this volume.

The major academic approaches to postmodern literature (and art in general) established themselves very early in the debate and they follow rather predictable patterns. From the very beginning there are those critics who focus on the formal properties of texts in determining their 'postmodernness' and those for whom 'postmodernness' is established by content, by a specific postmodern thematics, rather than by form, while for again others it is certain themes (which can take the form of an apparent absence of a thematics) emerging out of certain formal procedures that establish the postmodern character of a text.

We find early examples of the formalist approach in such essays as Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" and "Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*," both of 1964, in which Sontag argues that critical interest should be formal rather than thematic and that the most gripping contemporary works of art are interesting because of the immediacy of their images and their handling of problems of form. Sontag's essays stand at the beginning of a long line of critical work that, for diverse reasons, emphasizes the formal at the expense of the thematic in its discussions of the postmodern. The thematic approach is already present in some of Charles Olson's essays of the 1950s and in Leslie Fiedler's and Ihab Hassan's work of the 1960s. What is emphasized here is a postmodern attitude, expressed through a variety of themes, that resists the modernist intellectualization of experience and that rejects modernism's supposed interest in transcendent, timeless meaning in favor of provisional meaning, that is, meaning as a product of social interaction. From the perspective of the third approach, which is simultaneously formalist and thematic, and in which a specifically postmodern thematics is produced by the manipulation of form, the postmodern literary work begins to approximate theory and operates within an intellectual framework that is very close to, or even identical with, that of poststructuralism, initially of the Derridean, later of the Foucauldian variety. Arriving somewhat late on the scene, after Ihab Hassan and others have started to link postmodernism with poststructuralist positions, this approach begins to flourish in the late 1970s, not only in literary criticism, but in other artistic fields as well, and in the course of the 1980s comes to dominate the others. As we will see, most of the contributors to this collection use at least two of these three approaches, and as often as not all three of them, to survey the postmodern scene in the specific

literature they write about. What this of course suggests is that, like postmodern theory, postmodernism itself comes in a number of guises, employing a whole range of possibilities from radical formalist experimentation to formal traditionalism coupled with thematical novelty, with a gradually increasing emphasis on the creation of theme through formal manipulation. In most of the national literatures that will be discussed in the second half of this volume, all three modes have manifested themselves, with the third gaining prominence in more recent years. Because of that prominence it is understandable, even if rather dubious from a historical perspective, that some critics have sought to remove the other two altogether from the ranks of the postmodern. However, the reader will find that our contributors do not go in for such radical gestures.

The formalist approach is exemplified, for instance, by David Lodge's chapter on postmodern fiction in his *The Modes of Modern Writing* of 1977. According to Lodge, postmodern fiction suggests that the world resists interpretation (a brief excursion into the realm of thematics) through such techniques as contradiction, permutation, discontinuity, randomness, excess, and short circuit, by which he means ''combining in one work violently contrasting modes – the obviously fictive and the apparently factual; introducing the author and the question of authorship into the text; and exposing conventions in the act of using them'' (Lodge 1977: 240). Other early examples include André Le Vot's ''Disjunctive and Conjunctive Modes in Contemporary American Fiction'' (1976), Bruce Morrissette's ''Post-Modern Generative Fiction'' (1975), and Christopher Butler's *After the Wake* of 1980, which sees in contemporary art a dialectic between two major modes: ''the dialectic between the huge over-organization of *Finnegans Wake* and the deliberate lack of it in the *Cantos* conditions the whole of the postmodern period'' (Butler 1980: 5). In the 1980s this formalist tradition was continued by Douwe Fokkema, who offers a retrospective formalist analysis of early postmodern fiction in Chapter 1.2. (see his *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism* of 1984 and the significantly titled ''The Semantic and Syntactic Organization of Postmodernist Texts'' of 1986), and by Brian McHale, whose *Postmodernist Fiction* of 1987 and *Constructing Postmodernism* of 1992 exhaustively and with panache work out the numerous possibilities for creating ontological confusions contained in David Lodge's short circuit, that is, for the confrontation of worlds – of, for example, author and character, or contemporary character and historical figure – that cannot be reconciled with each other.

Still, although Fokkema and McHale take it well into the 1990s, the formalist approach has in the last fifteen years lost much of its former magic, at least in the United States. The formalist approaches that I have briefly sketched here have increasingly come to be seen as remnants of an earlier, outmoded theoretical dispensation, condemned to the garbage container of intellectual history by the poststructuralism that supposedly has undone them. Paradoxically, the most radically formalist approach of the postmodern has escaped that fate, precisely because it never talks about actual form. Fredric Jameson, arguing that experimental video is the purest representative of the postmodern impulse in art, tells us that

> what characterises this particular video process (or 'experimental' total flow) is a ceaseless rotation of elements such that they change place at every moment, with the result that no single element can occupy the position of 'interpretant' (or that of primary sign) for any length of time; but must be dislodged in

> turn in the following instant…falling to the subordinate position in its turn, where it will then be 'interpreted' or narrativised by a radically different kind of logo or image-content altogether. (Jameson 1987: 218)

Since for Jameson it is enough to conclude that no theme (and therefore meaning) could possibly be assigned to a work of art in order to call it postmodern, he does not have to identify the formal procedures that lead to the effect he describes. One might, since Jameson is of course primarily interested in theme and since theme is his starting-point, call his model thematic rather than formalist, but since he fails to find anything remotely resembling a thematics he ends up with a postmodernism that is completely formalist. In fact, as soon as a postmodern work of art allows a theme to emerge, it either stops being postmodern or is deeply flawed:

> If interpretation is understood, in the thematic way, as the disengagement of a fundamental theme or 'meaning,' then it seems to me that the postmodernist text…is from that perspective defined as a structure or sign-flow which resists meaning, whose fundamental inner logic is the exclusion of themes as such in that sense….New criteria of aesthetic value then unexpectedly emerge from this proposition: whatever a good, let alone a great, video-text might be, it will be bad or flawed whenever such interpretation proves possible, whenever the text slackly opens up just such places and areas of thematisation itself. (212)

While for David Lodge, Douwe Fokkema, and others the formal difficulty of the postmodern text stands metaphorically for the world's resistance to interpretation, for Jameson the inaccessibility of the postmodern work does no such thing. Or, rather, it does stand for the world's impenetrability, but not metaphorically: it unintentionally, helplessly, reflects that condition. The inaccessibility of the postmodern world is reflected in the art that it produces. For Jameson postmodernism signals our helplessness vis-à-vis the postmodern world, and is therefore a deeply regrettable sign of the times.

The thematic approach of postmodern literature had its heyday in the earlier stages of the postmodernism debate. Taking two rather different routes, it manifested itself as a call for authenticity after the artificiality of modernism, or, alternatively, as a rejection of the transcendent truths that modernism supposedly was after in favor of provisional, socially constituted truths. Although they have important differences, both approaches emphasized a new artistic humility that should take the place of the supposed elitist arrogance and self-confidence of modernist art.

The call for authenticity was heard loudest in the various discussions of postmodern poetry. Taking their clues from Charles Olson's Heideggerian existentialism, various contributors to William Spanos's *boundary 2* attributed to postmodern poets the desire, in Charles Altieri's words, to "have the universal concretized, they see the particular as numinous, not as representative" (Altieri 1973: 611). For Altieri, Paul Bové (at least in that phase of their careers), Spanos himself, Richard Palmer, and others – even Hassan seemed at times drawn to this position – the postmodern impulse was characterized by a desire for authentic existentialist historicity and could lead to a postmodern poetry that, in Robert Kern's words, would "embody the presence of living speech. Heidegger's 'Saying' " (Kern 1978: 216).

It is perhaps because of this early identification of postmodern poetry with a new authenticity that

the postmodernism debate moved away from poetry in the late 1970s, when the idea of authenticity rapidly started losing credence under the influence of poststructuralist thought. Indeed, since the early 1980s poetry has played an increasingly marginal role in the discussion. This no doubt reflects the current relative marginality of poetry in our academic debates. However, it may also point to the relative marginality of the postmodern impulse within contemporary poetry itself. Significantly, the discussions of American postmodern poetry that have appeared in recent years keep returning to postmodern poetry's early years, focusing on poets – prominent among them Charles Olson, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Creeley, John O'Hara, Charles Merrill, W.S. Merwin, and John Ashbery – that were born before 1930. (A case in point is Mutlu Konuk Blasing's *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry: O'Hara, Bishop, Ashbury, and Merrill* of 1996.) Because poetry will only make sporadic appearances in the contributions that follow, one of the introductory essays (Chapter 1.3., ''The Inscription of Postmodernism in Poetry'') will offer a comprehensive account of poetic postmodernism.

The deep awareness of historicity that we find in early postmodern poetry also characterized the other thematic angle, perhaps best represented by the work of Alan Wilde. Not overly interested in the formal side of things, although they certainly do not ignore them, Wilde and like-minded critics argue that postmodern literature exhibits a specifically postmodern intellectual attitude, a form of irony that must be sharply distinguished from the irony of the modernists. Whereas modernist irony offered ''in opposition to its vision of disjunctiveness a complementary vision of inclusive order, thereby generating a hope that more often than not outstrips belief,'' postmodern ''suspensive'' irony never includes such a vision. While modernist ironists in the final analysis are ''*an*ironic,'' ''postmodern ironists…acknowledg[e] the inevitability of their situation in the world they describe. Whether or not they are involved with that world, they are *of* it, their perspective conditioned by a view from within reality itself'' (Wilde 1981: 121). Such an acknowledgement of the historicity of one's perspective, however, does not inevitably lead to resignation. Quite to the contrary, Wilde sees in his postmodern ''midfiction'' ''the possibility of genuine if limited affirmation'' (123) and the ''attempt, inspired by the negotiations of self and world, to create, tentatively and provisionally, anironic enclaves of values in the face of – but not in the place of – a meaningless universe'' (148). A ''narrative form'' that ''negotiates the oppositional extremes of realism and reflexivity (both their presuppositions and their technical procedures)'' (192) and that accommodates truth and meaning as long as these are not seen as absolutes, this thematic postmodernism has much in common with later theorizations of postcolonial literature and, indeed, quite adequately describes later reorientations of the postmodern impulse in novels such as Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* and *Moon Palace* or T. Coraghessan Boyle's *World's End*. The important point about this postmodernism is that it positively enables, and even encourages, moral stances and political platforms, while never losing sight of the fact that *sub specie aeternitatis* everything is provisional.

I emphasize the moral and political dimensions of Wilde's midfiction because the third, and last, major approach to literary postmodernism that I want to discuss has increasingly stressed its moral and political impotence. In this last model, in which, as I have pointed out before, literature begins to approximate theory, form and formalist manipulation serve to make the reader aware of the fact

that language constitutes, rather than represents, reality; that the autonomous subject of an earlier intellectual dispensation has given way to a postmodern agent whose identity is largely other-determined, multiple, and always in process; that meaning is a social construct; that knowledge only counts as such within a given discursive formation and is therefore if not merely an effect of power then in any case bound up with it; that knowledge therefore is inevitably institutional; that in the absence of representation representations must necessarily be political; and so on and so forth. What we have here is the literary counterpart to poststructuralist theorizing, in particular in its Foucauldian guise.

Although this model has its origins in the late 1970s encounter between the postmodern and poststructuralist debates, its major theorizations have appeared in the 1980s, with as absolute high points Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* of 1988 and her *The Politics of Postmodernism* of the following year. Since then, what one may without exaggeration call a Hutcheon school has further promoted this poststructuralist postmodernism and succeeded in practically cornering the market (see, for instance, Alison Lee's *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* of 1990 and Brenda Marshall's *Teaching the Postmodern* of 1992, in which Lee and Marshall both acknowledge their personal debt to Hutcheon).

For Hutcheon, postmodernism is a willfully contradictory phenomenon. Starting from its "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (Hutcheon 1988: 5), it "asserts and then deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control, and identity…that have been the basic premises of bourgeois liberalism" (13). Employing parody and other destabilizing techniques, postmodernism "establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past (118); it "reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing…problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (89); and it "underlines its existence as discourse and yet still posits a relation of reference (however problematic) to the historical world" (141). In other words, postmodernism is a continuous balancing act, but rather than having one's cake and eating it too, it is a matter of not having one's cake but not eating it either. Postmodernism is deeply political in its interrogation of all the institutions and systems that are our sources of meaning and value, but for Hutcheon its politics are ultimately negative. As she puts it in *The Politics of Postmodernism*: "the postmodern may offer art as the site of political struggle by its posing of multiple and deconstructing questions, but it does not seem able to make the move into political agency" (Hutcheon 1989: 157). Although postmodern literature does an admirable job of deconstructing the premises of liberal humanism, it does and cannot offer a political agenda.

It seems to me that Hutcheon's critique, although not unjustified, does not adequately take into account the historical circumstances in which postmodernism first manifested itself. I would want to argue that literary postmodernism can best be seen as belonging to the first wave of attacks on the political and intellectual status quo of the 1950s and early 1960s, in other words, on Enlightenment democracy as interpreted and rigidified to its own advantage by the white male Western middle class of the period. I would further want to argue that those attacks, like the concurrent and subsequent attacks that were mounted from outside that white male domain, those by for instance feminists and blacks, mobilized the ideals of the Enlightenment – freedom, equality, and brother/sisterhood –

against the way those ideals had been violated under modernity. What we have is a clash between Enlightenment *ideals*, which have a supposedly universal validity, and Enlightenment *assumptions* concerning rationality, the subject, the language, and so on, which firmly place the male white bourgeoisie at the center of that universe. In so doing, these assumptions effectively limit the realization of those ideals to one single privileged group. I should perhaps point out that this clash is by no means new. We already find the same tension between universal claims and limited concrete application in the second half of the eighteenth century and we see it erupt every time a new group – laborers, women – uses the most radical ideals of Enlightenment democracy as these were originally conceived to gain access to, for instance, the democratic process. Whenever this tension mounts we find a running battle between those who want to hang on to the status quo and those who invoke the universal nature of the rights implicit in the Enlightenment ideals. Seen from this perspective, postmodernism is the literary manifestation of the latest round in this continuing fight over the heritage of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism is part of a large-scale intellectual and cultural self-examination, an auto-critique that is guided by Enlightenment ideals and that stands in the tradition of Enlightenment critiques even if it at first sight would seem to reject that Enlightenment wholesale. However, what it rejects is the severely reductive Enlightenment democracy of the 1950s, which, from a global perspective, reserved its benefits for a relatively small white male elite. Seen from this angle, postmodernism cannot be seen apart from the sudden acceleration of a stalled process of democratization – stalled after the franchise had finally been extended to women in the 1920s – that we witness all over the West after the mid-1960s. Literary postmodernism, then, has had an important enabling function. It has created new artistic possibilities and it has opened up new fields of intellectual and, either implicitly or explicitly, moral and political inquiry.

It will be clear that in spite of their different emphases the approaches of the postmodern impulse in literature that I have sketched here have a good deal in common. Their differences are, at least in part, differences concerning the question of what postmodernism means – which is, admittedly, large enough – and differences about the texts that should make up the canon. It is, in any case, these three ways of approach that often in combination with each other inform the discussions of postmodern literatures that will follow in the second half of this volume.

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1.2. **The Semiotics of Literary Postmodernism**

DOUWE FOKKEMA

Whatever the philosophical justification or political motivation of postmodernism, it cannot be denied that postmodernist writers have shown a preference for certain strategies and devices which have been singled out by critics as characteristic of postmodernism and have been enjoyed as such by an increasing number of readers.

Perhaps this statement can indeed not be denied in a straightforward manner, but almost every word of it can be questioned. From a poststructuralist point of view one may ask whether it is still appropriate to use the term ''justification,'' even in a subordinate clause that aims to discard the problem, or ''motivation,'' as if all action is motivated. There is also the denial of the possibility to distinguish between postmodernism and earlier literary currents – involving a denial of the possibility to single out literature as a separate field of inquiry, as well as of our ability to distinguish between clusters of literary strategies and devices. Serious questions have been raised about the very notion of strategy (Hjort 1993), as well as about the possibility of considering formal devices as carriers of meaning (Fish 1980). Moreover, the statement suggests a relation between authorial intention and critical reading, which seems rather optimistic in a world of misunderstandings and misreadings. Indeed, misreadings – rather than ''correct'' readings – have been called creative. In a critique of Umberto Eco, Jonathan Culler has argued in defense of overinterpretation, since extreme interpretations ''have a better chance … of bringing to light connections or implications not previously noticed or reflected on than if they strive to remain 'sound' or 'moderate' '' (Collini 1992: 10). And what does it mean if something is considered characteristic of something else? Isn't this plain reductionism, an attempt to overlook differences, whereas meaning results precisely from difference and should therefore never become fixed? Finally, the idea that readers *enjoy* the reading of texts that are considered postmodernist can be deconstructed as an attempt to ignore the fact that ''every representation always has its politics'' (Hutcheon 1989: 168). The aesthetic experience distracts from other responsibilities, and the tendency to consider reading postmodernist texts as something to be enjoyed is, from such a political perspective, again an unwarranted reduction. These questions and critical observations prevent us from immediately jumping to an enumeration of postmodernist strategies and devices, which can be found only at the end of this chapter. A considerable preliminary discussion must precede our actual exposition of pragmatic, semantic and syntactic conventions in postmodernist writing and reading.

If I do believe that the opening statement of this essay can be maintained it is because most of the objections just mentioned have been raised from a level of abstraction that is not pertinent to my argument. From a philosophical point of view any concept and certainly any label can indeed be deconstructed, as Nietzsche already knew and practiced. However, on the basis of psychological

research we know that in communicative practice people use abstract notions which are reductions, schemas, and models. It is possible to study these notions as they are actually used. I consider the notions of postmodernism, literature, strategy, device, sign, politics, and aesthetics such reductions, which play an indispensable role in all processes of communication, including communication through or concerning texts, whether considered literary or not.

There are two questions which cannot be dismissed that easily. First, there is the question of whether the interpretation of texts can be and should be related to features or properties of those texts. In other words, do texts serve as Rorschach tests and are readers completely free to interpret them in whatever way, or are they made up of signs with conventional meanings which readers that are familiar with these conventions will be inclined to decode in certain ways and not in others? Only in the latter case will it be possible to claim that particular clusters of these signs may induce readers with some knowledge of postmodernism to recognize them as postmodernist.

It is not only counterintuitive that intelligent human beings would try to communicate by means of texts whose composition is completely arbitrary, it also in practice appears that particular texts are interpreted rather in one way or in a restricted number of ways than in other ways. We can discuss the contents of a newspaper article with other readers of that article, and we usually do so without serious difficulties over our interpretations of the text in question. Likewise, we will interpret Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* in a restricted number of ways: for instance, as a modernist or as a symbolist novel – or even as a postmodern text (Gray 1992) –, but not as an example of expressionist drama. As a caveat I should add that the interpretations of texts which are more complicated – more metaphorical, more fictional – tend to diverge more than the interpretations of simple messages. I maintain, however, that it is possible to examine textual devices which are characteristic of post-modernist literature; these devices are either incorporated intentionally in the text by the author, or recognized as being postmodernist by readers, or both. The authorial intention and the readers' acceptance referred to here are part of pragmatic conventions. In studying literary communication we cannot separate the texts from the individuals who produce and consume them. In practice, it appears that formal devices and thematic selections are always enclosed by and subordinate to pragmatic conventions which steer the production and interpretation of meaning (Posner 1991, and thesis 5 in Posner 1993: 225). Often there is a homologous relation between the textual features and these pragmatic conventions, which in the act of communication may become strategies to reach a certain goal, but such a homology is no necessity and will be absent, for instance, in the case of parody or irony.

In imitation of Fredric Jameson (1991: 4), Remo Ceserani, however, states that "we cannot rely on style differences in order to make cultural and historical differences, especially when we deal with a period-change of the magnitude of one that has taken place in our world since the 50s and 60s" (1994: 378). I, too, would not argue that stylistic features can serve as indexes of cultural change on a global scale and do emphasize the pertinence of pragmatic conventions, but I also have a different and more modest aim in mind: I simply wish to answer the question whether writers who have been characterized as postmodernists have favored particular techniques and devices and particular identifiable pragmatic strategies. My problem is the difference between modernism and

postmodernism in literature and literary communication, not postmodernity in the sense of a globalization of economics and politics, postmodern modes of production and consumption, or, if one prefers a more idealist phrasing, a postmodern *Zeitgeist*.

Susan Suleiman writes ''that the effort to define postmodernism chiefly as a formal (or even as a formal and thematic) category and to place it as such in opposition to modernism is, even when successful, of limited interest'' (1990: 186). However, she ignores the possibility of examining pragmatic conventions in addition to formal features and thus overlooks an essential aspect of semiotic analysis. Like Ceserani, she appears to be enthralled by questions of considerable magnitude such as: ''Where is postmodernist practice going? Can it be political? – should it be?'' etcetera (ibid.). Her interest is mainly political and feminist, leading to the common sense conclusion that she would ''rather be an ironist than a terrorist'' (1990: 197).

An interest in progressive politics or ''in the material structure of society, in its economic organization, [and] in its modes of production'' (Ceserani 1994: 376), provides no excuse for ignoring the semiotics of literary communication, notably if that is what our expertise is about. After all, both Suleiman and Ceserani are interested in what the effects of postmodernist writing are or can be. Thus, they should be interested as well in the factors that may produce postmodernist texts and make readers recognize these texts as postmodernist. If they want to discuss the significance of postmodernist literature, they themselves, too, should be able to first recognize what they wish to talk about.

The other question concerns the kind of phenomena we will investigate. In short: if we wish to distinguish between modernism and postmodernism, at what level would it be possible to find the distinctive features we are looking for? And, if the labels modernism and postmodernism refer to successive or competing literary sociolects or codes, how can we explain the succession of or competition between these codes?

In using the term ''code'' I deviate from the definition proposed by George A. Miller, which includes the necessity of a ''prior agreement between the source and destination'' about the representation of meaning (Miller 1951: 7). This condition can apply only to artificial codes, not to the codes of language or literature which have their roots in a long history of social communication. In language and literature, codes are systems of conventions which regulate the generation and attribution of meaning. Instead of a prior agreement, there may be a *posterior* agreement between sender and receiver or, if there is no communication with the sender, among groups of recipients about the meaning conveyed by a particular text or message. Whatever the case, the attribution of meaning remains based on a social convention, on knowledge shared by a group of people.

Yurij Lotman distinguished between a linguistic and a literary code, but, as I argued on an earlier occasion (Fokkema 1984), a further distinction can be made between, on the one hand, general conventions distinguishing literary from nonliterary communication and, on the other, clusters of more specific conventions which regulate the differentiation between genres (e.g., fiction versus poetry), literary currents, sociolects, or group codes (e.g., modernism versus postmodernism), cultural characteristics (e.g., British versus American literature), gender styles, and the idiolects of individual authors.

The distinctive features we are looking for can be found at the level of the literary sociolects or

group codes, formerly and mistakenly called period codes. The latter term is misleading since postmodernism does not dominate the whole area of literary production, but only part of it (nor did modernism, or symbolism, or realism etc.); indeed I believe that most canonized and popular literature so far has escaped the imprint of postmodernism. The competition between modernism and postmodernism is one between groups of people. A particular group of writers, critics, and general readers, which can be described rather well in literary-sociological terms, has advocated the conventions of postmodernism at the expense of modernism, existentialism, realism, and other literary sociolects. The older conventions, however, may still be upheld by other readers and writers, whose work thus equally contributes to the cultural communication and confusion of the day. These older systems of conventions are also kept alive by contemporary readers who in spite of their postmodernist preferences at times wish to return to earlier literature, such as nineteenth-century realist fiction. Those older novels will usually be read and interpreted with reference to realist conventions, although a postmodernist interpretation of Flaubert is not impossible and has indeed been proposed (Schor and Majewski 1984). Educated readers have knowledge of a great variety of interpretive conventions, which will be activated whenever they are deemed relevant.

Having linked the rise and diffusion of new conventions to particular groups of people we have also come one step closer to the explanation of literary historical change. It is social and psychological pressures which make writers turn to new strategies and devices and which persuade critics and general readers to accept some of them (and reject others). It is not my aim to sketch literary history as a unilinear development which could not have taken another course. To the contrary, the development of literary history is multifarious and rather unpredictable. In order to explain literary historical change we have recourse to at least three theories:

(1) The cognitive (or epistemological) theory of change holds that the strategies and devices of literature will change if the obtaining social and political conditions are changing and people have become aware of these changes. The argumentation is that radical changes in so-called reality or knowledge about reality call for new literary means of expression. This theory was dominant in Marxist explanations of literary change, but it can also be connected with Karl Popper's notion of problem solving, as was argued by Karl Eibl (1976).

(2) The aesthetic theory of change, which was popular among the Russian Formalists, focuses on the dialectics of familiarization and defamiliarization. If certain strategies and devices have become too familiar among a certain audience, that audience will look for new literary techniques. Writers will design new strategies and devices, and critics and other readers will accept those which they find a welcome surprise. The literary historian H.R. Jauss as well as the psychologist D.E. Berlyne have elaborated different aspects of this theory. The neurological hypothesis underlying the theory is that repeated identical impulses have a decreasing effect. In due time, habituation will turn the most daring metaphor into a cliché.

(3) There is a third theory of change, which has an anthropological or sociological inspiration. The argumentation is that, at times, human beings wish to change the prevailing conventions, ostensibly for no other reason than to emphasize the arbitrariness of all conventions (Lewis 1969). The inclina-

tion to change current conventions may apparently also be motivated by the wish to enhance one's own (or one's group) identity and to demonstrate one's competence to bring about change. This reasoning comes close to Bourdieu (1979); here the motivation is not to acquire traditional cultural capital but to create new cultural assets. It is well known, for instance, that, at the instigation of Robbe-Grillet, the writers of the *nouveau roman* formed a group which in their struggle for recognition quite intentionally enhanced their own identity. Such a motivation can be explained by the anthropological and sociological theory of change, which, among other things, is pertinent to generational conflict.

In an attempt to explain the rise of postmodernist writing we may resort to all three theories in combination. There is a striking difference between the social and political conditions after World War II and those of the interbellum, notably with respect to general prosperity and the number of people having access to higher education and participating in cultural life. It is, however, not only the numbers which count. As is well known, the new literary audience also had a diverse social and cultural background. It made Leslie Fiedler write and speak about closing the gap between elite and popular culture. The world had changed, and both readers and writers were aware of it. They became suspicious of the intellectual merits of mainstream modernism which had had its heyday in the interbellum with the work of Eliot, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Proust, Gide, Mann, Musil, Svevo, du Perron and others. The postwar generation was under the impression that, in spite of their pretensions, the modernists had been quite powerless in their attempts to prevent the war. Modernism was by some even held to be an accomplice in the Vietnam War (cf. Spanos in this volume). The cognitive theory of change can partially explain the call for a new system of literary conventions.

The aesthetic theory of change also applies. After having been exposed for so long to the intellectual deliberations and qualifications of the modernists and to their very selective use of subject-matter, readers and writers looked for something different. In the two decades after World War II the modernists were canonized in anthologies, literary historiography, and academic teaching. This kind of canonization called for a new and daring avant-garde, which was to try new conventions and would be less selective in its choice of thematic material.

Finally, the anthropological and sociological theory applies as well. For the new generation the choice was either to become epigones of the great modernists, or to invent something different. It is clear now that it will be the postmodernists whose names will enter literary history; the epigones will soon be forgotten. An interesting aspect of investigating contemporary literary history is that we can see how in one culture after the other young writers resorted to making use of postmodernist strategies and devices in order to create a cultural space for themselves. The pursuit of a literary existence was carried on by means which were borrowed from foreign literatures and which were sometimes radically transformed in the process: North American writers borrowing from Spanish-American and French literature, European writers looking for inspiration in works published in South or North America. More on this will be said in our introduction to the reception of postmodernism in various parts of the world.

Most current explanations of the rise of postmodernism derive from the cognitive theory of change and have ignored matters of aesthetic effect and generational conflict. This makes such explanations

– which in McHale's (1992) conception are no more than ''stories'' – biased, vulnerable, and less persuasive. Let us briefly look at how some influential critics have posited and defended the concept of postmodernism.

The most well-known reduction of the differences between modernism and postmodernism to one clear statement is Lyotard's suggestion that in postmodernism there is no place anymore for master narratives (''grands récits''). His argument was directed against all cosmologies of a religious origin and all ideologies, notably against Habermas's project of modernization which aims to pursue the still uncompleted realization of Enlightenment ideals.

Since the publication of *La Condition postmoderne* in 1979, Lyotard's argument has attracted much attention. In general his critics have favored his emphasis on the heterogeneity of the rules (''hétérogénéité des règles'') and the futility of hoping for a consensus (Lyotard 1979: 106), but they also saw a paradox in this (last) ''master narrative'' that announced the end of all master narratives (cf. Welsch 1987 and Jameson 1991). Like Welsch, the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut sees both continuity and discontinuity in the relation between modernism and postmodernism. In fact, the solution to the problem of the postmodernist breakthrough (Graff 1973) depends on the level of abstraction we choose for our argument. At a high level of abstraction we may see continuity, whereas at a lower level, closer to the actual technique of writing, we will see discontinuities. Thus, Finkielkraut can disagree with Lyotard on the relation between postmodernity and the Enlightenment but concur with his notion of the heterogeneity of language games:

> Que veut la pensée postmoderne? La même chose que les Lumières: rendre l'homme indépendant, le traiter en grande personne…. Pour entrer effectivement dans l'être de l'autonomie, il nous faut transformer en *options* toutes les *obligations* de l'âge autoritaire. (What does postmodern thinking aim at? The same thing as the Enlightenment: to restore the independence of man, to treat him as an adult…. In order to really enter the era of autonomy, we need to transform all *obligations* of the authoritarian epoch into *options*.) (Finkielkraut 1987: 141)

A second reduction of the difference between modernism and postmodernism which is frequently referred to – also in this volume – has been proposed by Brian McHale (1987). On his view, the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological, that of postmodernist fiction ontological. There is a rather wide consensus that modernists have reflected on cognition, on ways of how to know the world we live in and how to represent it. That reflection on cognition can be called epistemological. However, McHale has some difficulty in explaining the term ''ontological.'' According to standard usage as codified in dictionaries, ontology would mean: reflection on the nature and relations of being. McHale has a more specific meaning in mind and certainly wishes to get away from the idea that postmodernism would offer a particular theory about the nature of being. He argues that postmodernist fiction focuses on questions such as: ''What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?'' (McHale 1987: 10). It appears that McHale sees postmodernism as a way of writing that explores possible worlds, or even impossible but thinkable worlds.

However, the word ''ontology'' has the connotation of traditional philosophy, of serious and

explicit reflection on ways of being, and very little of this can be found in postmodernist writing. Moreover, questions such as ''What kinds of worlds are there?'' cannot exclude an epistemological approach. Postmodernist writing seems to be as much epistemological as ''ontological,'' or as little ontological as epistemological. In fact, if we wish to look for an ontological approach in literature, we should turn to existentialism, which, in my view, is the last current in Western literature which concentrates on questions of an ontological nature. As I will argue below, the postmodernist writers have completely relinquished the search for essences, including the search for existential truth. They are no longer interested in ontological problems. The term ''ontological'' can be used in connection with postmodernism only if it is both stretched and narrowed to mean ''the making of autonomous worlds'' (Connor 1989: 125). I would argue that the worlds that are summoned up by postmodernist texts are posited and described rather than justified or reflected on. The particular usage of the term ''ontological'' that is advocated by McHale tends to be misleading, which is why I shall not further use it.

A third reduction of the differences between modernism and postmodernism we find in Achille Bonito Oliva's diagnosis of ''the end of modernism as the end of the developmental or historical paradigm'' (as summarized by Jameson 1991: 324). Under the aegis of postmodernism, chronology has become insignificant. There is no need anymore to refer to a historical background – history has become meaningless now that it is impossible to think of a telos. Jameson likes this explanation more than Lyotard's, but he is bound to observe that, of course, the historical past has not simply been abolished; only the use of the historical ''raw material'' has changed.

Lyotard's, McHale's and Bonito Oliva's views of the differences between modernism and postmodernism show various degrees of plausibility, but they certainly do not tell the whole story. Therefore, let me offer a fourth synopsis of the differences between modernism and postmodernism. In this explanation, modernism is primarily characterized by epistemological doubt; my characterization of modernism relies on Fokkema and Ibsch (1984, 1988) and coincides with that of Brian McHale (1987). In modernism, all essences are subjected to criticism and any new narrative form, any new literary device, is treated with the greatest suspicion. This position was eloquently summarized by Nathalie Sarraute in her essay *L'Ère du soupçon* (*The Age of Suspicion*, 1990), originally published in 1956, when the heyday of modernism was over and modernism had been succeeded in France by the *nouveau roman*, which with almost equal force of argument can be subsumed under the label of modernism as under that of postmodernism.

In existentialist writings we see that epistemological doubt broadens into moral doubt and ontological anxiety. In existentialism the point of no return is reached. Suicide is a much discussed and sometimes practiced option. There is a genealogy that runs from modernism through existentialism to postmodernism; that is at least a reading proposed by Gerhard Hoffmann, a German professor of American Literature (American critics may prefer a different genealogy, although Hassan [1975] has suggested a similar linkage). Devices belonging to modernism and existentialism can be found side by side in the writings of Sartre and Camus, as well as in a novel by the Dutch modernist E. du Perron (*Het land van herkomst*, 1935; *Country of Origin*, 1984). The French existentialists were read by American authors such as Donald Barthelme, John Barth, John Hawkes, and Robert Coover, who

later became known as postmodernists (Hoffmann 1986). It is as if these early postmodernist authors went through a phase in which they saw life as absurd, although to them absurdity was no reason to fall into a state of despair. The narrator in John Barth's *The Floating Opera* (1956) argues as follows:

> To realize that nothing makes any difference is overwhelming; but if one goes no further and becomes a saint, a cynic, or a suicide on principle, one hasn't reasoned completely. The truth is that nothing makes any difference, including that truth. Hamlet's question is, absolutely, meaningless. (Quoted by Hoffmann 1986: 201)

If ''nothing makes any difference,'' then why should one commit suicide? One may as well decide to continue to live, to forget about epistemological and moral doubt, to ignore ontological questions, to disregard the impossibility of narrating a convincing story, and just tell any story. This fourth explanation of the differences between modernism and postmodernism is the one which I find most convincing.

In ''The Literature of Exhaustion'' (1967) John Barth provided a parallel argument, not referring to existentialism but to the ''literature of silence,'' as exemplified by Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy*. Beckett's way, Barth suggests, could not be continued. He had to be succeeded by writers who would do something different. Therefore, Barth writes, after the attempts to reduce literature to a minimum of action and words:

> I add on behalf of the rest of us, it might be conceivable to rediscover validly the artifices of language and literature – such far-out notions as grammar, punctuation … even characterization! Even *plot*! – if one goes about it the right way, aware of what one's predecessors have been up to. (Barth 1967: 74)

After having become aware of the absurdity of writing and having been exposed to a literature reduced to silence, the postmodernists freed themselves from these ''deep'' considerations and embraced again the seeming superficiality of telling stories. They began writing ''novels which imitate the form of the Novel'' (Barth 1967: 79).

''Anything goes'' is the slogan of early postmodernism and it had a liberating effect, discarding the intellectual considerations of modernism as well as the plight of the moral dilemmas which in the aftermath of World War II the existentialist writers had taken pains to construct. Postmodernist literature was written by authors who refused to commit suicide. The stories they wrote may appear frivolous and superficial, but a more serious interpretation is possible if we remember the genealogy of postmodernism, the literary ancestry of these writings. Marc Chénetier reminds us of this modernist ancestry in the title of his book on contemporary American literature: *Au-delà du soupçon* (1989, Beyond Suspicion), which echoes Nathalie Sarraute's essay.

All four views of postmodernism rely heavily on broad changes with respect to social and political conditions and involving the information society, secularization (the loss of a telos), cultural democracy, the hybridization of cultures, and other thematic issues. The awareness of these changes has destroyed traditional forms of legitimation. Exposure to the idea that no final legitimation is available anymore, however, did in practice *not* lead to the conclusion that all literary conventions are in principle arbitrary – that ''anything goes,'' whatever one wishes to write. Whether we read Barth,

Hassan, Hutcheon, the later Jameson, the later Huyssen, Lyotard, or Welsch, we are being persuaded to consider postmodernism as a more advanced stage in comparison to modernism, postmodernism being more in tune with the conditions of our time. This probably has to do with an argument which in these critics usually remains implicit, viz. that postmodernism was also motivated by aesthetic needs and the rise of a new generation. If all literary conventions were arbitrary, one might as well continue to write in the same way, according to the conventions of realism or modernism. In a mock-attempt to show what postmodernism is like, Donald Barthelme indeed retold the story of Eugénie Grandet without adding anything particular but quotation marks at the beginning and ending (Barthelme 1974: 21–30). The quotation marks, however, remind us of a contextual change, just as the *Don Quixote* written by Pierre Menard could never be the same as the original one (Borges 1970: 62–71). From an a-historical point of view, postmodernism is no more adequate than modernism, just as modernism was no more adequate than realism or symbolism. However, the historical, including the generational, context of postmodernist writers made a changing of the guard a welcome event, for both aesthetic and identificational reasons.

There is an implied polemics behind the rise of postmodernism, and postmodernist writers and critics have used all the tricks of polemics, making modernism look biased, old-fashioned, dogmatic, and conservative. Modernism was pushed back into the nineteenth century and more or less equated with realism, as not only Flaubert, but also Balzac and Zola were provided with ''modernist credentials'' (Schor and Majewski 1984: xi). In his writings and lectures on architecture, ignoring the difference between functionalism and fundamentalism, Charles Jencks has argued that *Bauhaus* modernism was close to the ideological background of fascism (Jencks 1985). Fredric Jameson has asserted that the modernist aesthetic paradigm was almost ''confirmed as a virtual religious doxa'' (1991: xi). Such judgments are usually supported by selective examples and quotations, referring to Ezra Pound and the later T.S. Eliot, but not to André Gide, Robert Musil, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, or Gertrude Stein. It was in the interest of the new generation to assert that the modernists had favored an essentialist preference for order, whereas in fact, following Nietzsche, they used to criticize any symptoms of essentialism. When the concept of modernism had been reduced to a pale and hateful abstraction, postmodernism could be detected in major modernists – as exemplified by Margaret Gray's *Postmodern Proust* (1992).

John Barth does not join these lame attempts at calumniating modernism but tries to bolster the idea of postmodernism by drawing attention to its respectable ancestry:

> Anticipations of the ''postmodernist literary aesthetic'' have duly been traced through the great modernists of the first half of the twentieth century – T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, André Gide, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, Gertrude Stein, Miguel Unamuno, Virginia Woolf – through *their* nineteenth-century predecessors – Alfred Jarry, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and E.T.A. Hoffmann – back to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767) and Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1615). (Barth 1980: 173)

Three years later Umberto Eco again broadened the historical dimensions of the concept by arguing that postmodernism is both of all times and a reaction to modernism. As a ''metahistorical category'' it is another name for mannerism (Eco 1983). At the same time, Jean-François Lyotard, elaborating

on as well as departing from the concept of postmodernity he developed in *La Condition postmoderne* (1979), tries to persuade us to accept an a-historical notion of the postmodern:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (Lyotard 1983: 340)

The idea of postmodernism is further watered down and reaches the level of a platitude where Lyotard posits that the postmodern text is ''not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and … cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text'' (Lyotard 1983: 341). Isn't the postmodern text being equated here with what traditionally was known as ''great literature''? We seem to have understood Lyotard correctly and his conclusion that ''the essay (Montaigne) is postmodern'' (ibid.) does not come as a surprise. It is questionable, however, whether this diluted concept of postmodernism has really added to its prestige.

Since literary terms, such as realism, modernism, and postmodernism, can be used to indicate group codes manifesting themselves at a particular historical juncture as well as a-historical typological features, it would be imprudent to argue that Eco and Lyotard are wrong. In this essay, however, I have chosen to use the term ''postmodernism'' in the social-historical sense, as a characterization of the writings of a group of contemporary authors. I am not arguing that other ways of carving up literary history are impossible, but my point of departure is the assumption that, for cognitive, aesthetic, and identificational reasons, a new generation, which now is conveniently called post-modernist, has rejected the conventions of modernism and designed their own instead.

The corpus of postmodernist texts: early and late postmodernism

The conventions of postmodernism are only superficially based on the notion of ''anything goes.'' Their polemical nature, their opposition to modernist ways of writing – dictated by social-historical, generational, and aesthetic mechanisms – made *quasi* nonselection a basic principle: the post-modernists appeared to select their strategies and devices at random, but in fact were forced to do something different from what the modernists had done. Modernism was their negative point of departure.

In the description of the sociolect of postmodernism it is necessary to establish the historical moment when it arose (i.e., when the new conventions were introduced and recognized by the critics), and when it fell into decline (i.e., when the postmodernist conventions were replaced again by other ones and critics noticed this new change of the guard). It is not only a matter of *when*, but also of *where*, since the introduction and eventual demise of postmodernism did not take place synchronically in all literatures of this world. Finally, there is also a sociological delimitation of postmodernism, which usually is taken for granted, except by critics such as Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan, who both believed that postmodernism addressed itself to a larger, nonelitist audience and was a vehicle for closing the gap between elite and mass culture. Little research has been done on the potential

of postmodernist literature to indeed reach a wider audience, and where postmodernist texts – somewhat unexpectedly – became best-sellers, as in the case of García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1970) or Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (1980; *The Name of the Rose*, 1983), other factors may have been at work. Eco's novel offers the possibility of a complex reading based on intertextuality, as well as an uncomplicated and more widely applied one which emphasizes the lifeworld of medieval monks or the whodunit-type of plot. Similarly, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* joins, as Hutcheon (1988: 223) argues, ''the historiographical and the metafictive.'' Equal attention to both levels is rare and most readers tend to emphasize the first rather than the second. When they expected a break with the elitist tradition of reading neither Fiedler nor Hassan had such twofold decodings in mind.

The argument can be made, and is at various points made in this volume, that postmodernist conventions were first spotted around 1960. The precise year is less important than a further specification of what we mean by singling out such a historical moment. We follow Matei Calinescu's (1987) assumption that it is North American critics, such as John Barth and Ihab Hassan, who codified postmodernist conventions – modeled on the work of foreign authors, such as Borges, Beckett, and Nabokov (if the latter can be called foreign after having lived for almost two decades in the United States). In this volume Theo D'haen castigates the annexation of Borges by critics with vested interests in promoting the new code. Beckett and most of Nabokov's fiction, too, can equally well be subsumed under modernism. The foreign models, however, seem to have provided prestige and distinction, but the raising of these foreign banners could not conceal the identificational motivation on the part of those American critics and writers who wished to establish a group code of their own invention: the first North American indigenous poetics with international resonance, apart from Whitman's free verse and the feeble attempts of imagism. In addition, aesthetic motivation played a role, as high modernism – which in the United States was first of all represented by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and further by Joyce, Proust and Mann – had gradually been killed by academic teaching through overexplanation and the resulting boredom.

Both Hassan and Barth emphasized the polemical relation between postmodernism and modernism. Hassan tried to distinguish postmodernism from modernism in ''POSTmodernISM, A Paracritical Bibliography'' (1971, reprinted in Hassan 1975: 39–59) and provided a list of binary distinctions standing for the difference between modernism and postmodernism: purpose/play, design/chance, distance/participation, hypotaxis/parataxis, selection/combination, determinacy/indeterminacy (Hassan 1980: 123). This constructed characterization of differences obviously is no more than a hypothesis, or a postulate; it has been criticized as a demonstration of binarism, which is not in fashion nowadays, and, with more ground, as a rather heterogeneous list of properties which, with the exception of the pairs hypotaxis versus parataxis and determinacy versus indeterminacy, can hardly be made operational in research. In ''The Literature of Exhaustion'' (1967) and ''The Literature of Replenishment'' (1980), John Barth also focused on differences between the modernists and their successors. Whereas in 1967 he could do not much more than asking the theoretical question of ''how to succeed not even Joyce and Kafka, but those who've *succeeded* Joyce and Kafka and are now in the evenings of their own careers'' – i.e., Beckett and Borges – (1967: 73), in the later essay he mentioned a number of

"American fictionists most commonly included in the [postmodernist] canon," such as Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Stanley Elkin, William Gass, John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and himself (1980: 172). Moreover, partly following Gerald Graff (1975), he presented a list of modernist and postmodernist conventions. In fact, his analysis of the literary differences between modernism and postmodernism is one of the clearest and most influential early statements in the codification of postmodernism.

His catholic attitude made Barth favor a comprehensive, yet rather loose, concept of postmodernism. On the one hand he rightly warned that "actual artists, actual texts, are seldom more than more or less modernist [or] postmodernist …" (176), thus guaranteeing the freedom of writers to escape from these labels; on the other hand he proposed a broad idea of postmodernism:

> The ideal postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and "contentism," pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction. (Barth 1980: 178)

In particular the idea that the postmodernist novel should rise above the polarity of pure and committed literature, thus ending the monopoly of "anything goes," created a basis for a reconsideration of the original concept of quasi nonselective postmodernism. It was, in fact, a call for "great literature," but it also provided Linda Hutcheon with a cue for her later interpretation of postmodernism as "fundamentally contradictory" (1988: 4).

If I restrict my analysis of postmodernist strategies and devices to a selection of texts which appeared roughly between 1960 and 1980, in North America and elsewhere in the world, the period I choose is supported by what I believe is a largely shared consensus as far as the first year is concerned. However, 1980 is not the end of postmodernism. With twists and turns, the narrative and stylistic devices of postmodernism as well as their semantic correlates have lived on, were absorbed and promulgated in new social-historical contexts, became intertwined with different traditions, and dissipated only when they were superseded by new interests.

I do not wish to consider the early postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s as "purer" than the later one for hybridization seems to belong to postmodernism, neither do I wish to favor American-style postmodernism over foreign variants, nor high-brow postmodernism over widely diffused forms. The only thing I want to do here is to delimit a corpus of texts that can be analysed and whose analysis can then be discussed, confirmed or rejected.

Although postmodernist writing continues to the present day, the year 1980 marked a significant caesura, not only because of the publication of "The Literature of Replenishment" with which John Barth modified his earlier statement, but also because of other factors: the debate between Habermas and Lyotard which introduced new issues in the discussion of postmodernism, the publication of *The Name of the Rose* which had an immense influence on the European reception of postmodernism, the sudden rise of both an academic and a more general interest in postmodernism, the fading away of the postmodernist polemics against literary modernism, and the appearance of various new initiatives which contradict the quasi nonselective kind of postmodernism and which we will discuss presently. As Hans Bertens (1995) has shown, in various ways the critical debate on postmodernism took a political turn in the early 1980s.

If I will now name a number of texts to which my analysis applies, the dilemma is still one between mentioning too many and too few. In this respect I have no defense, except that I wish to be economical and am restricted by my limited knowledge. The texts I will mention are mainly fiction, with some exceptions such as plays by Duras (*Agatha*), Strauss (*Der Park*), Plenzdorf, Stoppard and Bond, and poetry by Handke (*Die Innenwelt der Aussenwelt der Innenwelt*) and Bienek. More poetry is mentioned in James McCorkle's essay on "The Inscription of Postmodernism in Poetry," which follows this chapter.

In North America, then, in the 1960s and 1970s, the following texts were published which in my view and that of many other critics were predominantly read and appreciated as specimens of postmodernism:

John Barth: *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), *Chimera* (1972)
Thomas Pynchon: *V* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)
Donald Barthelme: *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964), *Snow White* (1967), *City Life* (1971), *Sadness* (1972)
Richard Brautigan: *In Watermelon Sugar* (1968), *Trout Fishing in America* (1970)
Kurt Vonnegut: *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), *Breakfast of Champions* (1973)
Joan Didion: *Play It as It Lays* (1970)
Raymond Federman: *Double or Nothing* (1971), *Take It or Leave It* (1976)
Stanley Elkin: *The Dick Gibson Show* (1971)
Ishmael Reed: *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)
Rudy Wiebe: *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977)
Ronald Sukenick: *Out* (1973), *98.6* (1975)
John Hawkes: *Death, Sleep and the Traveler* (1974)
Leonard Michaels: *I Would Have Saved Them If I Could* (1975)
Renata Adler: *Speedboat* (1976)
Don DeLillo: *Ratner's Star* (1976)
Michael Ondaatje: *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976)
Robert Coover: *The Public Burning* (1977)

Almost simultaneously we find clusters of postmodernist writings in other literary traditions which closely followed the American examples or, rather, independently from what happened in North America, found similar answers to the changing social-historical conditions and the demise of international modernism. The early Latin-American texts which we now regard as postmodernist were certainly no derivatives of North American fiction. It is impossible to trace influences here, except in specific cases. A major complicating factor is the rise of the *nouveau roman*, which, like postmodernist fiction in North America, was an answer to existentialism but, unlike North American postmodernism, avoided the tendency towards fabulation. Although the techniques and devices of the *nouveau roman* did not coincide with those of the majority of the North American postmodernists, the philosophical impetus of the *nouveau roman* and of North American postmodernist fiction was fundamentally similar, directed as it was against the cognitive conjectures of modernism and the ethical pretensions of existentialism. American critics were aware of the similarity, as appears from Robbe-Grillet's much-quoted pronouncement in *Pour un nouveau roman* (1961): "The world is neither significant nor absurd. It *is*, quite simply." (Quoted from the American translation *For a New*

Novel [1965] by Gerald Graff [1975: 209], by Alan Wilde [1981: 71], and before them hinted at by John Barth [1967: 79].)

As Lernout argues elsewhere in this volume, it is not French but foreign critics who have labeled the *nouveau roman*, or at least the *nouveau nouveau roman*, as postmodernist (Hassan 1975, Lodge 1977, Barth 1980, Wilde 1981, Calinescu 1987, McHale 1987, and others). Whether French critics employ the label postmodernist for writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor or not, I believe it is warranted to include them in our corpus – which nevertheless, for reasons of space and clarity, will be rather exclusive than inclusive.

The following Spanish-American texts have often been named as representative of postmodernism:

Carlos Fuentes: *Aura* (1962; *Aura*, 1965), *Terra nostra* (1975; *Terra Nostra*, 1978)
Julio Cortázar: *Rayuela* (1963; *Hopscotch*, 1967), *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966; *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories*, 1973)
Gabriel García Márquez: *Cien años de soledad* (1967; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1970)
Mario Vargas Llosa, *Conversación en la catedral* (1969; *Conversations in the Cathedral*, 1975)
Manuel Puig: *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976; *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 1979)

Let me repeat that the early texts cannot have been influenced by North American examples. The same applies to Brazilian fiction, such as João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão* (1956; *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, 1963), or Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro* (1961; *Apple in the Dark*, 1967).

The French new novel provides another case of "autogenesis." My selection of French postmodernist texts would consist of:

Alain Robbe-Grillet: *La Jalousie* (1957; *Jealousy*, 1959), *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959; *In the Labyrinth*, 1960), *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961; *Last Year at Marienbad*, 1962), *La Maison de rendez-vous* (1965; *La Maison de Rendez-vous*, 1966)
Michel Butor: *La Modification* (1957; *Change of Heart*, 1969), *L'Emploi du temps* (1957; *Passing Time*, 1960), *Mobile* (1962; *Mobile*, 1963), *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune singe* (1967, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Monkey), *Boomerang* (1978, Boomerang)
Claude Ollier: *La Mise en scène* (1959, Stage Setting)
Claude Mauriac: *Le Dîner en ville* (1959, Dinner in Town)
Marguerite Duras: *L'Amante anglaise* (1967, The English Lover), *Agatha* (1981, Agatha)
Philippe Sollers: *Nombres* (1968, Figures)
Monique Wittig: *Les Guérillères* (1969, The Guerrilleras)
Georges Perec: *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975; *W or The Memory of Childhood*, 1988), *La Vie mode d'emploi* (1978; *Life A User's Manual*, 1987)

Various shades of postmodernism can be discovered in texts published in the 1960s and 1970s in German:

Peter Handke: *Die Innenwelt der Aussenwelt der Innenwelt* (1969; *The Innerworld of the Outerworld of the Innerworld*, 1974), *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (1970; *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 1977), *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied* (1972; *Short Letter, Long Farewell*, 1974)
Horst Bienek: *Vorgefundene Gedichte* (1969, Found Poems)

Ulrich Plenzdorf: *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1973, The New Suffering of the Young W.)
Ror Wolf: *Die Gefährlichkeit der grossen Ebene* (1976, The Danger of the Great Plains)
Peter Rosei: *Wer war Edgar Allan?* (1977, Who Was Edgar Allan?)
Botho Strauss: *Die Widmung* (1977, The Dedication), *Der Park* (1983, The Park)
Günter Grass: *Der Butt* (1977; *The Flounder*, 1983)
Thomas Bernhard: *Wittgensteins Neffe* (1982, Wittgenstein's Nephew)

When thinking of postmodernist fiction in English (apart form North America), it strikes one that from an international point of view it appears to be a relatively late discovery, with the exception of Muriel Spark. Here, too, our list will be confined to the period of between roughly 1960 and 1980, but we cannot ignore that very interesting works appeared later, such as Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), Jeannette Winterson's *Art & Lies* (1994).

Muriel Spark: *The Comforters* (1957), *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973)
Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), *Travesties* (1975)
Edward Bond: *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968), *Lear* (1971), *Bingo* (1973)
John Fowles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), *Mantissa* (1982)
Anthony Burgess: *MF* (1971)
Angela Carter: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* (1972), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977)
Christine Brooke-Rose: *Thru* (1975)
John Banville: *Doctor Copernicus* (1976)
Emma Tennant: *The Bad Sister* (1978)
Alasdair Gray: *Lanark* (1981)
Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* (1981)
D.M. Thomas: *The White Hotel* (1981)

Here, I will halt my quasi systematic listing of early postmodernist texts. Apart from those mentioned, other writers, including writers in other languages, contributed to establishing and confirming the postmodernist conventions, among them Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, Antonio Tabucchi, José Saramago, Juan Goytisolo, Michel Tournier, Christoph Ransmayr, Péter Esterházy, Andrej Bitov, Venedikt Yerofeyev, André Brink, Etienne Leroux, Louis Paul Boon, Hugo Claus, Ivo Michiels, Walter van den Broeck, Louis Ferron, Leon de Winter, Wim T. Schippers, Cees Nooteboom, Harry Mulisch – the last nine writing in Dutch (Ibsch 1989, Musschoot 1994). Any further listing would become more and more biased and I do not wish to preempt the various reception studies of postmodernism in the last section of this volume.

It would be naive to assume that postmodernism, as a critical construction, was the result of an easy consensus and remained unchanged over several decades. The question *whether* its apogee is over, and, if that is the case, *when* postmodernism went into decline, is closely related to the possibility of postmodernism having been gradually transformed due to various pressures, and to the question whether such transformations should be still considered "postmodernist." So far I have merely

suggested to accept the year 1980 – when ''The Literature of Replenishment'' and *The Name of the Rose* were published – as a caesura between early and late postmodernism.

The initial emphasis on ''anything goes,'' which is so evident in the quotation from *The Floating Opera* given above, weakened when the idea of a polemical opposition to modernism became less compelling. The literature of ''anything goes'' was judged to be meaningful only insofar as the readers remembered the literary-historical predicament that the modernist and existentialist writers had gone through. However, the memory of readers happens to be short. As soon as the genealogy of postmodernist narrative was forgotten – as soon as modernism was no longer the ostensive negative example –, the idea that postmodernism was based on the principle of ''anything goes'' lost its attractiveness.

The idea of a group code built on ''anything goes,'' on principles of nonselection (instead of quasi nonselection) came under attack from at least five sides, which all demanded some kind of commitment and thereby rejected the ''nothing makes any difference'' variety of postmodernism: (1) feminist writing, (2) historiographical fiction, (3) postcolonial fiction, (4) autobiographical writing, (5) fiction focusing on cultural identity.

It is a matter of interpretation, or historiographical expedience, whether the combined efforts to bury the connotation of superficiality inherent in a poetics based on ''anything goes'' should be considered the end of postmodernism or rather a creative modification of it. An argument can be made for both, just as Welsch's philosophical compromise between Lyotard and Habermas can be considered either a requiem for postmodernism, as Barrento (1990) has suggested, or a nonessential modification. Whichever argument will survive, it is clear that by 1995 in much contemporary, including avant-garde, literature a referential reality is being admitted again, the first signs of which became visible at least ten or fifteen years earlier. I mentioned John Barth's argument for a fiction that would rise ''above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature.'' I should further point to Ihab Hassan's essay ''Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective'' (1986), which unexpectedly concludes with a ''call for pragmatic constituencies of knowledge, sharing values, traditions, expectancies, goals,'' and for restoring ''civil commitments, tolerant beliefs, critical sympathies.'' This conclusion refers to a passage in William James which equates the ''spirit of inner tolerance'' with ''empiricism's glory'' (Hassan 1986: 32, 35). Finally, a large degree of referentiality and commitment is included in Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism as ''fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political'' (1988: 4). The ''anything goes'' variety of postmodernism is still with us, but rather in literatures which are far removed from the early centers of postmodernism, or in popular artforms, design, and advertising, which follow literary and artistic developments with considerable delay.

Let us discuss the five kinds of writing which, in their combination, signify the end of postmodernism or, at least, have drastically modified the concept.

1. *Feminist writing*: For a fairly long time postmodernism appeared to be an exclusively male affair. Among the writers who were considered postmodernist by early critics, such as Ihab Hassan, John Barth, Alan Wilde, or Gerald Graff, hardly any women are mentioned, the only exceptions being Renata Adler, Angela Carter, Joan Didion, and Muriel Spark. In her essay ''Naming and Difference:

Reflections on 'Modernism versus Postmodernism' in Literature'' (1984), Susan Suleiman made a point of this, making the following observation:

> One ''strand'' of contemporary (modern) writing that invariably gets left out in current discussions of Postmodernism is the work of certain women writers who are exploring new possibilities in language and narrative: Marguerite Duras, Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Chantal Chawaf, and others in France; Susan Sontag (as novelist and story-writer), Renata Adler, Joan Didion in the United States; Christine Brooke-Rose and Angela Carter in England, to mention only a few. Could it be that Postmodernism is an exclusively ''male'' domain, both for critics and authors? (in Fokkema and Bertens 1986: 268)

In general, critics have been receptive to the suggestion, although they also were aware of the fact that writings emphasizing female identity, such as *écriture féminine*, posed a problem from the perspective of a poetics built on ''anything goes,'' including the more sophisticated quasi non-selection. Ten years onwards, any critic challenged to provide a list of postmodernist authors will include several women. The conflict with the early characterization of postmodernism, however, has not been solved. To the contrary, the alliance of feminists and postmodernists has a plainly political significance. Suleiman argues that ''feminism brings to postmodernism the political guarantee postmodernism needs to feel respectable as an avant-garde practice'' (1990: 189).

2. *Historiographical fiction*: In 1988 Linda Hutcheon pointed out that historiographic fiction (or ''metafiction,'' as she prefers it), through rewriting official history in an ironic mode or from the point of view of the losers, serves a progressive goal. She was one of the first to detect a political commitment in postmodernist writing such as García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*, and John Fowles's *A Maggot* – texts which in part had appeared before 1980. Elisabeth Wesseling (1991) further analysed this kind of fiction, in which historical time was relived and recreated as an alternative course of events. In addition to utopian literature, she argued that we now also have ''uchronian'' writing, a term which refers to ''the type of counterfactual fantasy which devises alternatives within the confines of documented history'' (Wesseling 1991: 101; see also Wesseling's essay in this volume). Wesseling mentions Günter Grass's *Der Butt* (*The Flounder*) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* among her examples. Another early specimen of this highly interesting kind of writing is Juan Goytisolo's novel *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (1970, The Reclamation by Count Don Julián), in which the history of Spain is told from an Arab point of view, which leads to a result which must appear to Roman Catholic believers as blasphemous as *The Satanic Verses* did to Muslims.

3. *Postcolonial fiction*: Initially, third world writing was not included in the concept of postmodernism, which was coined in the United States in view of a specific development in American literature. The tendency to include at least part of postcolonial writing in an enlarged idea of postmodernism is motivated first of all by the increasing importance of third world fiction. The prestigious prizes for writers such as Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka as well as the almost universal awareness of Rushdie's predicament were of great symbolic significance. The rise and recognition of third world fiction destroyed the easy Eurocentric view of separate worlds and confirmed Rushdie's concept of the hybridization of cultures, which appears to be perfectly in line with early notions of post-

modernism but which ostensibly has another inspiration: migration, acculturation, and the urge to rewrite official history. Here, the second and third assaults on the bastion of a complacent literature based on ''anything goes'' become inextricably connected. By now, the division into a first, second, and third world has been deconstructed, at least as far as literature is concerned, by the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as by mass migration. Many writers associated with the former third world now live in Europe or America, were possibly even born there, and have at least been published there. Their position is ambiguous, for, instead of calling for a resistance to neocolonialism, they may defend Enlightenment ideals (Gates 1993) or remind Western heads of state of the basic principles of political democracy and human rights (Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison).

To writers emerging in the (former) third world the genealogy of postmodernism is of little importance. They may ignore the modernist legacy and rather seek allegiance with Latin-American magical realism (see D'haen's essay ''Postmodernisms: From Fantastic to Magic Realist'' in this volume). The chapter on the reception and processing of postmodernism in India by Indra Nath Choudhuri (also in this volume) shows that Indian ''postmodernism'' (*uttara adhunikata*) is a continuation of the indigenous, Tagorean concept of modernism rather than a reaction to foreign modernism. This Indian version of ''postmodernism'' emphasizes fabulation, the use of myth, and Indianness. The Indian tradition reduces the polemics against Anglosaxon modernism to an intellectual activity of minor importance. As a consequence, the concept of postmodernism must be widened if it is to include writers who ignore polemical attitudes with respect to international modernism, commit themselves to political ideals, or straightforwardly and without much irony devote themselves to a restoration of the narrative tradition.

Finally, such a widening of the concept of postmodernism was advocated by critics in the West who saw no point in continuing sophisticated formal experiments that were critical of modernism but left the exclusiveness of literature intact. These critics seemed to recall Leslie Fiedler's exhortation to close the gap between elite and mass culture. Their motivation was cognitive, even political, rather than aesthetic. As mentioned, Linda Hutcheon called postmodernism ''inescapably political.'' Inspired by Adorno, Andreas Huyssen (1984, 1986) offered a somewhat different argument, emphasizing that postmodernism, particularly in the American context, was an offshoot of the avant-garde and, as such, by nature progressive. The leftist political connotations which postmodernism as a result of these efforts acquired served as a counterpoise to Habermas's attack on postmodernism as neoconservative. Hutcheon and Huyssen made postmodernism acceptable – though not completely respectable – in the eyes of leftist critics such as Christa and Peter Bürger (1987) and Fredric Jameson (1991), who previously had been more critical. Postmodernism had become palatable, but it was no longer the same postmodernism as that of the 1970s.

4. *Autobiographical writing*: As early as 1985, at a symposium in Paris, Alfred Hornung observed an increasing interest in autobiographical writing among authors usually associated with postmodernism (published in Calinescu and Fokkema 1987: 175–199). Elsewhere in this volume he further pursues this topic. After all, the subject is not totally fragmented and can be reconstructed from the bits and pieces available in memory. Where memory fails, its role will be taken over by (postmodernist) fantasy. Hornung mentions some convincing examples: Raymond Federman's

bilingual *The Voice in the Closet/La Voix dans le cabinet de débarras* (1979), John Barth's *LETTERS* (1979), and Robbe-Grillet's *Le Miroir qui revient* (1984; *Ghost in the Mirror*, 1988) and his two successive volumes of autobiographical fiction. This turn towards autobiography has been explained as an attempt to rediscover older forms of narration, or to reconstitute a modest notion of self. It is symptomatic of a continued obsession with the problem of identity, either personal or collective.

5. *Fiction focusing on cultural identity*: There is as yet not much fiction which makes use of postmodernist strategies and devices and attempts at the same time to construct a cultural identity. Perhaps the connection between postmodernism and cultural identity is formed by voluntarism. If ''anything goes,'' I may invent anything of my liking; I may also invent an identity for myself or for the people I belong to. Not many human beings can live without something they can admire or despise, merely enjoying the luxury of ''anything goes.'' There is a psychological need for some fixed point of reference, indeed a kind of identity. When, in his novel *La campaña* (1990; *The Campaign*, 1992), Carlos Fuentes told the history of the wars of liberation in Latin America, he was at the same time constructing a cultural identity for Hispanic America. To the extent that he did this, he distanced himself from the postmodernism of ''anything goes.''

Perhaps future literary historians will single out Fuentes's novel as one of the first that again tried to construct a coherent world view. Whatever the future interpretation of this novel will be, one thing is certain: no other medium than fiction seems so well equipped to offer frameworks for making sense of the world. Fuentes's attempt to present a combination of indigenous Indian wisdom and European Enlightenment ideals is persuasive, although not compellingly so. On rereading other postmodernist fiction, such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Midnight's Children*, we may be struck by the possibility of interpreting these novels, too, as fictional arguments for a cultural identity rather than as stirring narratives which challenge the modernist world view.

The medium of literature seems to offer a playground for competing frames of reference. Of course, writers make use of the opportunity to fill the vacuum that results from the gradual withdrawal of the established political and religious institutions from the arena where ideological battles are fought. Recently, in some regions of the world, political systems have almost completely collapsed (the former Soviet Union, Italy), in other parts they never meant much in terms of providing social frameworks for making sense. Here, writers may be attracted by the possibility of playing a social role and offer hypotheses about how to make sense of life and of the world. I assume, however, that such a role brings them closer to the philosophy and poetics of modernism than to those of (early) postmodernism.

Whether the five factors that have influenced and widened the concept of postmodernism have also killed it, is hard to decide. In fact, this seems rather a matter of labeling, or definition. One thing is certain: it is easier to characterize and describe early or ''high'' postmodernism than its recent diversifications. I shall therefore focus here on the postmodernism of the 1960s and the 1970s, and only occasionally draw on texts that were published later.

Strategies and devices of postmodernism

Of course there are national differences in the implementation of postmodernist poetics. As a literary program postmodernism originated in North America and was accepted elsewhere only with hesitation and delay. On the other hand, there are tendencies in literary production, such as the French new novel, which arose independently from American postmodernism and were later incorporated into the concept – at least by several critics, including myself. As a result, there are chronological discrepancies in the development of postmodernism in the various literatures in which it manifested itself. Moreover, when North American postmodernism was introduced outside America, it was confronted with different historical, cultural, and literary traditions. Leslie Fiedler emphasized a cultural difference between America and Europe when he wrote:

> It makes a difference, after all, whether one thinks of the World Across the Border as Faerie or Frontier, fantasy or history. It has been so long since Europeans lived their deepest dreams – but only yesterday for us. (Fiedler 1975: 354)

It is possible to analyse the various national implementations of postmodernist poetics in greater detail, but that will be done in Section 4 of this volume.

In spite of the various ways in which postmodernism was received and processed in different countries and parts of the world, as a concept and a particular poetics it remained recognizably the same (except perhaps in India). The strategies and devices of postmodernism had symbolic value, almost commodity value, and were likely to remain more or less the same to have optimal effect, either in contradistinction to more traditional ways of thinking and writing, or as a lever, whose foreign origin was not concealed, for breaking up autochthonous petrified systems.

In contradistinction to devices, which are textual features, the strategies employed by writers, readers, and other users of postmodernist texts are pragmatic conventions and not necessarily reflected in the text. These strategies pertain to the production and presentation of texts, their distribution, and their intended audience and critical context. Readers, including critics, may project their postmodernist frame of mind on the text and interpret or use it accordingly. The following observations will deal with (*a*) reading and interpretation, (*b*) the distribution of texts, and (*c*) their production and presentation.

(a) *Reading and interpretation*: The strategies of early or high postmodernism – the qualification remains implicit in the next few pages – were polemically directed against modernism and often a negation of modernist strategies. If the modernists aimed at precise, intellectual distinctions, offering their carefully phrased hypotheses, they also seemed to invite careful and indeed meticulous interpretation. New Criticism was the critical answer to that attitude. The postmodernists, who believed or pretended to live in a world of nonselection and nonhierarchy, had abandoned the goal of authenticity and truthfulness and given up the search for reliable standards of description and narration. The modernist epistemological doubt first turned into despair and then into indifference. The idea of ''nothing makes any difference'' also destroyed the established standards of reading. Reading could lead to overprecise, indeed farfetched interpretations, as well as to no interpretation at all. It could

go against the grain of the text or remain at its surface. Reading was considered a highly individual affair, without preestablished rules. For Susan Sontag it was "erotic" (1966: 23). Robbe-Grillet advised his readers not to look for any general significance:

> Le lecteur est donc invité à n'y voir que les choses, gestes, paroles, événements, qui lui sont rapportés, sans chercher à leur donner ni plus ni moins de signification que dans sa propre vie, ou sa propre mort. (The reader is thus invited to see only the things, gestures, words, and events which are reported, without trying to attribute more or less meaning to them than [they can have] in his own life or his own death.) (Robbe-Grillet 1959: 5)

Similarly, a character in Barthelme's *Snow White* warns us not to go "reading things into things… Leave things alone. It means what it means" (Barthelme 1967: 107). Postmodernist writers do not seem to care about what will happen to their texts. The reader is as free as the writer. By denouncing the meticulous procedures of the New Critics, they created room for all kinds of readings, including deconstructive ones. The irony, of course, is that the deconstructive method was almost never applied to postmodernist texts, but to the earlier literary tradition. In this way the effects of the postmodernist view of interpretation were not restricted to contemporary literature alone but were felt in the handling of the whole literary tradition.

(b) *Distribution*: Fiedler's ideal of overcoming the gap between elite and mass culture was, to some extent, shared by several (but certainly not all) postmodernist writers, who did not shun publicity through the media, often provoked the general audience by dealing with topics which were under a taboo (political issues, pornography), or wrote in such a way that both sophisticated readers and a more general public could enjoy their texts. Umberto Eco has provided an outstanding example of the last category with his novel *The Name of the Rose*. Thomas Bernhard, Manuel Puig, Salman Rushdie and others have certainly succeeded in reaching a large audience precisely by provoking it. Peter Handke has thematized the provocation of the audience in his play *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966; *Offending the Audience*, 1971). Postmodernists are afraid neither of rough play nor of the technological reproduction of their work and ideas in film and the media. They accept cultural heterogeneity as a principle that opens up unthought-of opportunities.

(c) *Production and presentation*: In the hands of the postmodernists the notion of the text, its boundaries and integrity, was further subjected to erosion. As James McCorkle (in this volume) posits: "postmodern poetry rejects the notion of an autonomous poem, self, or culture." Graff observes with respect to Barthelme that he "assumes an irreverent stance toward his own work, conceding the arbitrary and artificial nature of what he creates" (1973: 234). This results in a preference for irony, parody, generic hybridizaton and eclecticism. Self-reflexivity is balanced by what McCorkle (in this volume) calls dialogism. Modernists would concede the artificial, but not the arbitrary nature of their texts (except in dada and other rare manifestations of the historical avant-garde which many critics nowadays distinguish from mainstream modernism). But the postmodernists allowed themselves a large degree of arbitrariness in borrowing from other writers and opened the way to unrestricted intertextuality, ironically referred to as the "recycling of semantic waste" (trans. from Strauss 1977: 85). Rewriting, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and so many earlier texts, could flourish only on the basis of a rejection of any claims at

originality. For John Barth there is only the possibility of ''novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author'' (1967: 79).

I call these strategies pragmatic as they pertain to the purported use to be made of the texts in question. However, the overall aims of postmodernism are often also reflected *in* the text, in the form of preferences for particular thematic and semantic material, and particular syntactic and textual structures. These preferences are not restricted to one literature; to the contrary, they appeared to be translatable and have been translated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Again our level of observation is that at which we examine possible differences between modernist and postmodernist texts. The postmodernist options were usually dictated by the negative example of modernism, and, if I use the term ''preference'' here, it means that particular semantic and thematic materials and particular syntactic and textual structures have been used more often by postmodernist writers than by modernist ones. I suggest therefore that there is a relative frequency of and a relative emphasis on particular textual features in postmodernist texts. A complicating factor is that, in their reaction to mainstream modernism, the postmodernists did not all go in one direction. Their stylistic preferences are dictated by a denial of semantic and syntactic stability, a denial even of a conjectured stability. It is indifference to the modernist goals of precision and authenticity that makes the postmodernists turn to either imprecision or overprecision, to either fantastic fabulation or a ''literature of silence.'' As a result, in their various texts they may resort to clusters of devices which are contradictory, with the French new novelists, for instance, displaying overprecision, and others, such as Pynchon, Barthelme, Cortázar, Angela Carter, or Edward Bond, celebrating imprecision. In the first case description and narration merely touch a visible surface, in the second case the writers mix levels of narration, fuse different worlds of experience, and seem to undermine the referential function of language by offering too much of it.

The doubts that have been expressed with respect to the possibility of sketching a repertoire of postmodernist semantic and syntactic devices are motivated precisely by the observation that the options the various postmodernist writers have chosen are often contradictory. Although these devices show a family resemblance, some members of the postmodernist family are only distantly related and, so to say, not on speaking terms. For instance, the semantic connotation of ''assimilation'' or ''fusion'' which characterizes lexemes in many postmodernist texts is incompatible with the connotation of ''overprecision'' which we may see in lexemes in other postmodernist texts. The preferred semantic and syntactic devices listed below do not occur in *all* postmodernist texts at the same time. However, each of these devices contradicts the modernist preference for precise and goal-directed phrasing motivated by attempts at authenticity and truthfulness, and is, therefore, symptomatic of the postmodernist sociolect. If some of these postmodernist devices occur in a text written in the 1960s or 1970s, it usually is an indication that such a text can be profitably interpreted with reference to the postmodernist code. If they occur in texts written after 1980 one should be more careful and check, for instance, whether the pragmatic strategies of postmodernism apply. In late postmodernism the same devices tend to be used as in early postmodernism but they seem to have lost some of their polemical significance; in the hands of various writers they have been reduced to the state of aesthetic ornament or decoy.

The following description of devices preferred by postmodernist writers is based on the observations of other critics and on my own reading. That they partly rely on intuition – my own or that of others – cannot be denied. However, they seem to be regarded as distinguishing features of postmodernism by many readers, and whether they indeed play a role when readers distinguish postmodernism from modernism can empirically be tested. I am drawing attention to the possibility of testing by means of questioning readers acquainted with both modernist and postmodernist conventions, as I do not think that statistical analysis of texts (word counts, etcetera) will yield valid results, since the readers' perceptions of postmodernist devices in texts always take place against their varying background knowledge of competing literary sociolects, such as modernism. There is another obstacle to statistical research on semantic contents. Although statistical accounts can yield the relative frequency of particular lexemes in a text, it is at present still impossible to inventory connotations of words, or major themes of a text, without resorting to interpretation.

Prominent themes, lexemes, and connotations in postmodernist texts

(1) *assimilation*, ''the fusion of forms, the confusion of realms'' leading to ''indeterminacy'' (Hassan 1975: 58) stands in opposition to the precise distinctions and qualifications of modernism. Preferred lexemes related to the theme of ''assimilation'' are: ''labyrinth'' and ''journey without destination.'' Modeled on Borges's ''La biblioteca de Babel'' (1941, ''The Library of Babel'') the theme – and also the word – ''labyrinth'' is one of the shibboleths of the postmodernist sociolect. Obvious examples are Robbe-Grillet's *Dans le Labyrinthe*, the title story of John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, and Rosei's *Wer war Edgar Allan?* ''Journey without destination'' is a preferred phrase, which stands in opposition to the modernist conception of travelling with a purpose. Examples are: Butor's *La Modification*, Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Leon de Winter's *De (ver)wording van de jongere Dürer* (1978, The (De)formation of the Younger Dürer).

(2) *multiplication, permutation, enumeration* (Lodge 1977: 230–231). Themes related to mathematical devices have the connotation of arbitrariness, as if things subjected to an abstract order are not related to the real world. It is probably this notion of arbitrariness that has made these quasi exact devices popular among the postmodernists; they were not so in modernism. The prototypical text is Borges's ''El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'' (1941, ''The Garden of Forking Paths''), a later example is Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979; *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, 1982). The word ''mirror'' is a preferred lexeme occurring prominently in many postmodernist texts, from the title story of John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* to Robbe-Grillet's *Le Miroir qui revient*. Qualification and overprecision through repetition and rephrasing, as in the *nouveau roman*, can also be subsumed under this item.

(3) *sensory perception*, combined with an emphasis on concreteness and surface appearance. The emphasis is on observable, perhaps disconnected details (Lodge 1977: 239) or *surface* (Stevick 1973: 211; 1981: 40). The postmodernist preference for themes connected with sensory perception – such as pornography – prompted Mazzaro to write that ''postmodernism, for all its seeming mysticism,

is irrevocably worldly and social'' (1980: viii). Examples of sensory perception can be found, first of all, in the *nouveau roman*: Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*; also in Handke's *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied*, Bienek's *Vorgefundene Gedichte*, and Anthony Burgess's *MF*. The semantic field of observation is also prominent in modernism, but there it is usually combined with intellectual reflection and in-depth analysis.

(4) *movement*, or action, as a negation of modernist deliberation and introspection. Probably the generalization is warranted that there is more action in postmodernist texts than in modernist ones. This is, for instance, suggested by the postmodernist interest in the subgenres of the detective and the (meta)historical novel; see the essays by Bertens and Wesseling in this volume. Prominent examples are the novels by Pynchon, Coover, Fuentes, García Márquez, and Puig; also Günter Grass, Angela Carter, John Fowles, Edward Bond, and Salman Rushdie.

(5) *mechanization* and *automatization* are prominent in postmodernist texts, both as themes (Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Gerrit Krol's *De man achter het raam* [1982, The Man behind the Window]) and as semantic connotations. Postmodernist writers seem to welcome the appearance of a society that is enthralled by the computer. This is another way of departing from traditional humanist standards. Their interest in the genre of science fiction was certainly not shared by the modernists; see McHale's essay in this volume.

Prominent syntactic and textual structures in postmodernist texts

(6) *sentence structure*: Not much can be said here if Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) is included in the modernist corpus. If *Finnegans Wake*, however, should rather be considered a prototype of postmodernism, as several critics have argued, including myself (Fokkema and Ibsch 1988: 66–68), then one may assume that syntactic ungrammaticality, semantic incompatibility, and unusual typographical arrangement occur more often in postmodernist texts – such as Barthelme's *Snow White* (1967), Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), and Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971) – than in mainstream modernist ones (excluding the historical avant-garde). It would be difficult, however, to support this assumption with persuasive evidence. The difficulty is related to a tendency among some postmodernist writers in North America to assimilate techniques of the historical avant-garde – which had never really flourished in the United States –, whereas in the European context such an annexation did not take place, because to most postmodernist writers in Europe avant-garde techniques seemed to have been exhausted. The syntactic and semantic irregularities at the level of sentence structures in postmodernism would at most be a regional, i.e. North American, distinction of postmodernism.

(7) *text structure*: From the very beginning critics have speculated about the compositional rules of postmodernist texts. When Lyotard formulated the idea of the ''heterogeneity of the rules'' under the postmodernist dispensation and discussed the impossibility of a consensus, a metanarrative, or superior order (1979: 106), he provided a philosophical explanation for the textual fragmentation which so many critics had professed to see (Hassan, Lodge, Klinkowitz, Zavarzadeh, Stevick, Perloff,

and others). The argument runs as follows: if the rules of logical and narrative connectivity do not apply, then all connections are arbitrary, or at least unstable. Causality is replaced by random succession. Arbitrary connections, which find their iconic expression in mathematical manipulations such as duplication, multiplication, negation (mirroring), permutation, and enumeration, are exemplified, for instance, by the device of multiple endings. Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is the most cited example of a novel with more than one ending. Unstable connections are manifested either in the form of ''discontinuity'' (a device which denies the existence of connectivity), or in the form of ''redundancy'' (a device which offers confusingly much connectivity). Redundancy is related to paranoia (a recurrent theme and connective principle in Pynchon's fiction). Discontinuity and redundancy have in common that they both challenge the standard concept of connectivity in modernist texts. Both discontinuity and redundancy open up ways for rewriting and intertextuality in a seemingly disordered and eclectic manner.

It is not difficult to find absent, under-, and over-connectivity in a corpus of postmodernist texts written by John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Horst Bienek, Edward Bond, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Richard Brautigan, Christine Brooke-Rose, Michel Butor, Italo Calvino, Angela Carter, Robert Coover, Julio Cortázar, Marguerite Duras, Raymond Federman, John Fowles, Carlos Fuentes, Peter Handke, Manuel Puig, Thomas Pynchon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Peter Rosei, Botho Strauss, Ronald Sukenick, Kurt Vonnegut, Leon de Winter, and Ror Wolf, all published in the 1960s and 1970s. However, we may find these deviations from traditional connectivity also in earlier texts – in the work of Beckett, Borges, Nabokov, and *Finnegans Wake* – as well as in later ones, mainly in those literatures which discovered the possibilities of postmodernism at a later stage.

I consider these deviations from traditional (including modernist) connectivity a rather strong criterion for distinguishing postmodernist texts from modernist (and realist) ones. The philosophical notion of the ''heterogeneity of the rules'' has subverted the world of standard connectivity and found iconic expression in unstable narrative connectivity. If this yardstick is accepted, it has become easier to decide whether the recent diversifications, modifications, and transformations of postmodernism still deserve the label postmodernist. However, the more persuasive argument for naming a text postmodernist (or for reading that text in postmodernist terms) will be supported by references not only to the perception of postmodernist textual devices but also to the applicability of the pragmatic strategies of postmodernism.

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1.3. **The Inscription of Postmodernism in Poetry**

JAMES McCORKLE

Any description of postmodern poetry raises several crucial dilemmas: is the language itself of poetry now *postmodern*, or is it the processes of interpretation, the responses of readers, that constitute the *postmodern*? Or, conversely, is the phenomenon readers respond to the persistent (re)formations of *poiesis* which have occurred throughout the history of poetry? Postmodern poetry offers a passionate connection with and critique of our consciousness. Despite its frequent recourse to a renewed formalism, postmodern poetry rejects the notion of an autonomous poem, self, or culture; while truth or identity can not be anchored, the poem offers through its very inception the possibility of transformation.

The condition of the sign and the limitations of representation constitute the central field of inquiry of postmodern poetry. Immediately, then, the concerns of postmodern poetry are predicated on the examination of the ways in which language functions as a material entity. Such a poetics does not reduce or circumscribe poetry. Instead, there is a paradigmatic shift from the idea that language is transparent to the disclosure of its physicality, its intimacy, its obdurate persistence, and its paradoxical fragility.

What constitutes poetic language and how – or if – it is differentiated from other social discourses is a further issue concerning the description of language as a material texture. Certainly such an understanding has precedence in such moderns as Stéphane Mallarmé, Guillaume Apollinaire, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore. The materiality of language, however, has a deeper genealogy stretching to the inception of the graphic sign, as Charles Olson suggests by his fascination with Mayan glyphs or, earlier, by Ernest Fenollosa's investigations of Chinese ideograms. This genealogy of language's materiality reflects the desire for both structure and a phenomenology of process.

Postmodern poetry argues for the significance of the poem and the contexts of the work's readers. Implicit in these concerns is the relationship between ethos and aesthetics. The reader's position is contingent upon the poem and the poem's existence hinges upon the reader and the varieties of knowledge the reader brings to the poem. Accordingly, the poet Ron Silliman argues in his essay "'Postmodernism': Sign for a Struggle, The Struggle for the Sign" that the central issue for poets is the admittance of an addressee into the poetic model that "no longer yearns for a unified sign" (Silliman 1990: 95). The adequation of thing and sign has lapsed with the realization of the arbitrary condition of language.

The modernist proposition of a work's mimetic realism – operative in, for example, works by Eliot, Flaubert, Joyce, Stein, or Woolf – is a position that postmodernism subverts. The uncertainty of both the reader and the poem comes to be recognized, as does the provisionality of either's survival. This

field of questioning raises the issues of the importance of lyric poetry, of the conventional schism between ordinary language and poetic language, and, finally, of the position or identification of the self in language.

The refusal of the poem's autonomy is postmodern poetry's crucial breach with modernism. The central tenet of modernism, as propounded by Clement Greenberg, is that no text exists outside and beyond itself. This autonomy came to be reflected – and carried to distorted absolute ends – in twentieth-century political and social structures. Working through such modes as appropriation, synthesis, renovation, recombination, mutation, and generation, postmodern poetics expresses a commitment to the dialogical, social world. William Spanos summarizes this description of the relation between modernism and postmodernism and the implicit political stakes:

> despite certain surface continuities, postmodern art constitutes a significant and deliberate break with the 'spatial form' of modernism (especially of the New Criticism, its critical allotrope) in its paradoxical use of self-conscious art, not to separate itself from, but to refer to and engage (unsuccessfully in Jameson's Marxist view) the dominant discourse of hegemony, that is, the repressive cultural discursive practices that reproduce the sociopolitical world of late (consumer) capitalism. (Spanos 1990: 110)

The arguments of Silliman and Spanos comprise an area of postmodern poetry that is central to any discussion: the socio-political engagements postmodern poetry arrives at through the self-critical use of language. Such a position is exemplified in the serial and procedural forms described by Joseph Conte. A serial poem is formed not through symbolic depth, but through syntagmatic links: each ''element of the series is a module that asserts its position in combination with other elements; its place is not assigned by any external schema'' (Conte 1991: 21). The procedural form is typified by the ''recurrence of elements and a centripetal force that promises a self-sustaining momentum''; recurrence, furthermore, is ''lexical and semantic,'' thus the artifice is laid bare (Conte 1991: 42–43).

Conte's descriptions of serial and procedural forms can be illustrated in the opening lines of the third section of John Yau's ''Scenes from the Life of Boullée'':

> Without noticing the fire descending into the
> subway station. Descending into the copper
> sunlight. Going back again and again.
> Their voices. One dripping. The other dribbling
> to a stop. Lengthening each of the sounds into
> a staircase. I think there's three volumes.
> A salmon. A sale's on. Ceylon. Existence
> being the only record of their names. (Yau 1983: 42)

A sequence is offered here, but it is an arbitrary one, formal but not causal, lacking transitions other than linguistic. Narratives can be supposed or imagined by the reader's intervention, but there is no narrative truth or symbolic truth being 'packaged' in the wraps of poetry for us. Marjorie Perloff argues that

> we are now witnessing a return to *artifice* … characterized by its opposition, not only to 'the language really spoken by men' but also to what is loosely called Formalist (whether New or Old) verse, with its