PRZEGLĄDY I RECENZJE

I. PRZEGLĄDY

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POSTMODERNISM AND THE CRITICS: AN OVERVIEW

Before it was generally accepted in critical circulation at the end of the 1970s, postmodernism had for a long while been a controversial and provocative label for writers and critics alike. Thus John Barth—himself the history of American postmodernism—notices in his programmatic "Literature of Replenishment" that

> a principal activity of postmodernist critics (also called 'metacritics' and 'paracritics'), writing in postmodernist journals or speaking at postmodernist symposia, consists in disagreeing about what postmodernism is or ought to be (1980 : 65).

The absence of critical consensus is even reflected by the inconsistent spelling of the term or the attempts to substitute other names for the phenomenon allegedly recognized as postmodernist writing.[1] Though critical discussions that began in the late 1950s and the early 1960s have taken various directions and assumed different degrees of vehemence, the question of postmodernism, despite signs that the movement entered a low ebb in the 1980s, still arouses conflicting emotions. One can recall here Malcolm Bradbury's statement that the writing of literary history, especially the tactics, methods and presumptions of periodization partake "in some of the fictionality—sometimes the same *kind* of fictionality—that goes into the making of the creative arts themselves" (1983 : 311).

For the sake of convenience, we shall presently adopt Susan Suleiman's classification of critical approaches to postmodernism into 3 groups: evaluative/ideological; diagnostic; and classificatory/analytic (1986 : 257). They represent different motives that she sees behind the various attempts at definition and categorization:

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[1] For example, "postmodernist" has such variants as "post-modernist" (Stevick 1977), "post-Modernist" (Kostelanetz 1981), "Postmodernist" (Bradbury 1983) or "Post-Modernist" (Newman 1985), Also Kermode's "neomodernism" (1968), Federman's "surfiction" (1975) or Klinkowitz's "post-contemporary fiction" (1975).

these three motives may, perhaps even must, coexist to varying degress in any single critic; however, one motive usually predominates *(ibid.)*.

Suleiman's typology can provide the framework for a diachronic survey of postmodernist criticism, which will enable us to present changing responses to the movement in a more dynamic perspective. As it turns out, even a cursory look at the critical opinions voices during the thirty years' debate on postmodernism reveals characteristic shifts of emphasis and certain attitudes and concerns which have played a formative role in the emergence and development of what Jean François Lyotard calls the postmodernist "metanarrative".[2]

Evaluative/ideological attidues seem to prevail in the earliest phase of the postmodernist debate, manifest in the opinions of such critics as Irving Howe, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag or William Spanos.[3] Both Howe and Levin express serious doubts about postmodernism which for them reflects the growing amorphousness of the postwar American society. The type of fiction produced in the 1950s is characterized by antiintellectualism, passivity, the debasemant of traditional values, the loss of strong beliefs, a "distance from fixed social categories", and metaphysical concerns (Howe 1959 : 428—433). Speaking from the position of detractors of postmodernism, both commentators are eager to save the tradition and authority embedded in modernism. A similar bias is shared later by Gerald Graff and Robert Alter, writing in the 1970s.[4] Graff in particular continues to view postmodernism against the background of large-scale social and cultural changes and claims that "the social context of postmodernism [...] is a bourgeois society [...] which in the sixties and seventies has absorbed and commercialized the self--consciously alienated ideologies, rhetorics, and personal styles of literary and cultural modernism" (1975 : 320). On his part, Alter attacks the postmodernist self-conscious novel for the lack of human involvement and self--indulgence, that is for its "arid exercise and indiscriminate invention" (1975 : 214).

In total contrast to the above, Fiedler and Sontag obviously sympa-

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[2] Cf. Lyotard 1984 : XXIV ff.

[3] Cf. Howe's essay *Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction* (1959); Levin's 1960 essay *What Was Modernism* in his *Refractions* (1966); Fiedler's *The New Mutants* (1965) and *Cross the Border—Close the Gap: Postmodernism* (1975); Sontag's *Against Interpretation* (1966) and *Styles of Radical Will* (1969); and Spanos's *The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination* (1972).

[4] Cf. Graff's *The myth of the postmodernist breakthrough* (1973) and *Babbitt at the abyss: the social context of postmodern American fiction* (1975), both reprinted in his *Literature Against Itself* (1979); and Alter's *The self-conscious moment: reflections on the afermath of modernism* (1975), reprinted in *The Partial Magic* (1975).

thize with postmodernism in which they find a new sensibility and "a new spontaneity identified with the Americal counterculture of the 1960s" (Bertens 1986 : 14). They both pronounce modernism defunct and oppose its authoritative myths of rationality and meaning. For Fiedler, postmodernism closes the gap between elite and mass culture "by parody or exaggeration or grotesque emulation of the classic past" (1975 : 359), as well as by the adaptation of the Western, Science Fiction and Pornography as "the oldest and most authentic American Pop forms" (*ibid.* 353). For Sontag, it means a flight from interpretation:

> It doesn't matter whether artists intend, or don't intend, for their works to be interpreted.. the merit of these works lies elewhere than in their meanings (1966 : 19).

In her 1967 essay *The Aesthetics of Silence* (reprinted 1969), she speaks of the contemporary art's yearning for silence as "a metaphor for a cleansed, noninterfering vision" (Brooke—Rose 1981 : 340). Both Fiedler and Sontag advocate the version of postmodernism associated with "a celebration of immediate, not intellectualized experience" (Bertens 1986 : 15), with a worship of energy and vitalism. The former postulates a return of "the Dream, the Vision, *ekstasis* [as] the avowed goals of literature" (Fiedler 1975 : 364) whereas the latter proclaims that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (Sontag 1966 : 23). Their vitalistic, antiintellectual view of postmodernism will be developed later in the theories of "performance" and "surfiction".[5]

The concept of surfiction was launched in the mid-1970s by the novelists Raymond Federman and Ronald Sukenick.[6] To Federman, the time is ripe for the novel to discover its freedom and to explore and transform the genre: "to write...is to *produce* meaning, and not *reproduce* a pre-existing meaning" (1975 : 8). Together with Sukenick, they opt for "the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination" and that reveals man's creations of reality through language, rather than multiplying fictional interpretations of reality (*ibid.* 7). Therefore they engage in visual, typographic play, shaping the fictional dis-

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[5] See, for example, Richard Poirier's *The Performing Self* (1971), or the volume *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, edited by Benamou and Caramello (1977). One of the contributors to the latter, Campbell Tatham, extolls imagination and play as the components of postmodern performance: "The weary existential *angst* of the modern is transformed/performed by the spirited free play of the postmodern... Shift your focus, imagine the funny edge of the world, whispers the New Vision, assume nothing precisely in particular, open to all and all is possible, imagine" (1977 : 137).

[6] Cf. Federman 1975, revised edition 1931; and Sukenick 1977. Jerome Klinkowitz (1975), an apologist of a new fiction, calls the type of writing represented by Federman and Sukenick "disruptivist", in contrast to the "literature of exhaustion" practised by Barth, Pynchon or Coover.

course according to "the contours of the writing itself as it takes shape" (11), insisting on the transparence of the process of writing/storytelling, and calling for active participation of the reader in the production of meaning.

On the other hand, postmodernist writing has been qualified in terms of radical philosophical rather than intuitive revolt against modernism by those critics who exhibit strong links with Heideggerian existentialism. Spanos discovers the sources of the postmodern imagination "in an existentialist critique of the traditional Western view of man in the world" (1972 : 148). A favourite paradigm of postmodernist writing is "the antidetective story", because it violently frustrates familiar expectation by refusing to offer teleological patterns and closures. In contrast to symbolist modernism, which was "committed to an iconic poetic of transcendence," postmodernism should accept the contingent "historicity of the human condition" (ibid. 162). Another existentialist, Richard Palmer sees in "the postmodernist hermeneutics of performance" a "shift in the presuppositions of our thinking" that might move "beyond the subjectivity of man" and restore power to "visionary reality" (1977 : 21). The same "desire for a gnostic state of consciousness, a mystic union of self and world," is a tendency Charles Russell recognizes in contemporary literature (1974 : 356).[7]

The diagnostically-oriented approaches are more inclusive: with such critics as Ihab Hassan, Jean-François Lyotard or Matei Calinescu the term "postmodernism" becomes indicative of a new radical episteme that has emerged in Western thought and culture after the second World War.[8] Hassan's international postmodernism "includes works by writers as different as Barth, arthelme, ecker, eckett, ense, lanchot, orges, recht, urroughs, utor [...]" (1975 : 44). He extends his concept so as to embrace the field of criticism, whose "leitmotifs" are:

> the literary act in quest and question of itself; self-subversion or self-transcendence of forms; popular mutations; languages of silence (1975 : 46).

In a later essay, he suggests three models of cultural change in our century—Avant-Garde, Modern and Postmodern—which together "per-

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[7] See also Charles Altieri's remarks on the postmodern search of unity of self and object, in Altieri 1973.

[8] Cf. Hassan's The Dismemberment of Orpheus... (1971), Paracriticism (1975), and Ideas of Cultural Change (1983); Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition... (1984) and Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism? (1983); Calinescu's From the One to the Many: Pluralism in Today's Thought (1983) and Postmodernism and Some Paradoxes of Periodization (1986). A different version of the diagnostic impulse appears in Fredric Jameson's Marxist theory of postmodernism (1983), discussed by Suleiman (1986 : 262—263).

petuate the Western 'tradition of the new'" (1983 : 24).[9] The Avant-
-Garde movements of the early 20th century "assaulted the bourgeoisie
with their art, their manifestos, their antics... [and] have all but vanished
now"; the hieratic, olympian and formalist modernism has "proved more
stable" (1983 : 24). By contrast, be characterizes postmodernism as

> playful, paracritical, and deconstructionist. In this, it recalls the irreverent spirit
> of the Avant-Garde [...] Yet it remains 'cooler', in McLuhan's sense, than older
> vanguards—cooler, less cliquish, and far less aversive to the pop, electronic
> society of which it is a part (1983 : 25).

Hassan's scheme of postmodernist ransformations is characterized by
a double tendency, "indeterminacy" and "immanence:"

> [indeterminacy] is compounded of sub-tendencies which the following words
> evoke: openness, heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, randomness, revolt, defor-
> mation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decre-
> ation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, dis-
> continuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystifi-
> cation, detotalization, delegitimation [...] Through all these signs moves a vast
> will to unmaking, affecting the body politic, the body cognitive, the erotic body,
> the psyche of each individual—affecting, in short, the entire realm of human
> discourse in the West (1983 : 27—28).

The opposite tendency, which is called "immanences," is evoked by such
words as

> dispersal, diffusion, dissemination, diffraction, pulsion, integration, ecumenism,
> communication, interplay, interdependence, interpretation, etc. [It depends] on
> the emergence of man as a language animal...a creature constituting himself,
> and increasingly his universe, by symbols of his own making (*ibid.* 29).

Thus Hassan's concept of postmodernism is an interplay of the mo-
vement toward "multiplicity" and the movement toward "oneness", or of
"unmaking" and re-making, "an unmaking of all authority, a re-making
through a decentered language, a new immanence of language" (Bertens
1986 : 30).

Lyotard's view of postmodernism is also epistemic. For him the post-
modern age is broadly characterized by "incredulity toward metanarra-
tives" and the crisis of the "apparatus of legitimation," which involves
the shattering of a belief in "the great narratives" of Western philosophy
and science, such as the idea of progress, the positive valorization of

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[9] In his early writings, Hassan proposes the avant-gardist concept of postmo-
dernism as a movement toward silence, which develops in two directions: on the
one hand, "the negative echo of language, autodestructive, demonic, nihilistic,"
while on the other the "positive stillness, self-transcendent, sacramental, plenary"
(1971 : 248). Hassan's typological approach has been criticised for its inclusiveness
and confusion of formal and thematic categories by Brooke-Rose (1981 : 346ff) and
Suleiman (1936 : 259ff).

knowledge or the privileging of the subject (Lyotard 1984 : XXIV).[10] Postmodern science concerns itself with "undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflict [...] 'fracta', catastrophies and pragmatic paradoxes," thereby "theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical" (*ibid.* 60). He advences a striking hypothesis that "modern" and "postmodern" are alternating moments: "a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant" (Lyotard 1983 : 338—339). If modern aesthetics sets out to "present the fact that the unpresentable exists," while still nostalgically searching the comfort and pleasure of endurable forms, postmodern aesthetics offers a different mode:

> 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. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for (Lyotard 1983 : 340—341).

Lyotard's vision of postmodern literature as engaged in a search for instabilities and exposing its own *aporias* anticipates the problem faced by postmodernist writers: how to salvage their own narratives if the delegitimation of the great unifying and totalizing metanarratives puts in question the idea of narrative itself.

The concept of postmodernism as subversion and disruption of "higher" discourses reoccurs in Calinescu, for whom postmodernism means "the *affirmation* of the Many" (Calinescu 1983 : 273). Postmodernist "pluralism" allows for a reopening of the field of history as a play of innovation and renovation, a process comprising.

> a multiplicity of continuous/discontinuous knowledges and know-hows, practices and counterpractices, as a variety of traditions and *not* as the imaginary Tradition against which the Modernists revolted in the name of a no less imaginary Lost Unity (Calinescu 1986 : 252).

Nowhere is this variety of traditions and multiplicity of discourses more distinctly pronounced than in a number of classifying/analytic approaches, which try to develop

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[10] Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as "distrust/disbelief in metanarratives" is convincingly employed by Theo D'Haen in his survey of various tendencies in American postmodernist fiction and art (1986).

some 'applied' concepts of postmodernism, concepts that do not assume epistemic
proporties, but that seek to describe more or less successfully defined bodies
of postmodernist literature (Bertens 1986 : 35).

In 1973 [11] Philip Stevick differentiated

new fiction... from old on the basis of its fabulation, its willingness to allow
the compositional act a self-conscious prominence and to invest that act with
love, a sense of game, invention for its own sake, joy (Stevick 1977 : 216).

In his general remarks on the techniques of "new fiction," he concen-
trates on the "fabulative" strain of postmodernist writing, ignoring for
example the nonfiction novel.[12] A different approach emerges from the
studies written by David Lodge, Christopher Butler, Alan Wilde or Chris-
tine Brooke-Rose [13], which are all essays on "descriptive poetics" of post-
modern writing. For example, Lodge's definition of postmodernism is
grounded in linguistic theory: "we can best define the formal character
of postmodernist writing by examining its efforts to deploy both meta-
phoric and metonymic devices [of modernism and mimetic realism] in
radically new ways, and to defy [...] the obligation to choose between
these two principles of connecting one topic with another" (1977 . 228).
The postmodernist resistance to interpretation manifests itself in the
use of such strategies as Contradiction, Permutation, Discontinuity,
Randomness, Excess and Short Circuit.

Most commentators in this group try to distinguish between at least
two general modes within postmodernism. Thus Butler speaks of

the dialectic between the huge over-organization of *Finnegans Wake* and the
deliberate lack of it in the *Cantos*, [which] conditions the whole of the post-
modern period; and what mediates between these at all points is the phenome-
nological concentration upon the mental processes of the artist (1980 : 5).

Brooke-Rose proposes a different distinction, "cutting across all the
philosophic, semiotic, psychoanalytic, thematic and formal considerations,"
namely that between "parody" and "stylization" (1981 : 364). The parody-
-type novels dramatize "the theme of the world's non-interpretability,"
operating by means of "implausible but (technically) realistic representa-
tions" *(ibid.)* "Stylizations" double this theme by taking up a their
models "the very process of reading" or "the artist's creative act" *(ibid.
372—373).* She goes on to show how various authors, usually subsumed
under such labels as "metafictionists" or "surfictionists", fluctuate bet-
ween these two poles. For example, Barth represents "pure parody" but

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[11] The essay reprinted in Bradbury 1977.

[12] In contrast to Lodge (1977a) and Zavarzadeh (1976), who both add the non-
-fiction novel to the spectrum of postmodernist writing.

[13] Cf. Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing...* (1977); Butler's *After the Wake...*
(1980); Wild'es *Horizons of Assent...* (1981) and his *Strange Displacements of the
Ordinary...* (1982); Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal...* (1981).

tends towards stylization; Pynchon is "ostensibly parodic," tends toward stylization, but is "still heavily realistic in manner;" Coover moves "further toward stylization;" Gass is a more overt Stylizer, "still tipping back into realism;" Brautigan and especially Barthelme represent "pure stylization;" surfictionists like Ishmael Reed or Sukenick find the more subtle balance between realism and its stylization (_ibid_. 385).

Thus we can see how in the critical "metanarrative" of postmodernist fiction strategies the initial radicalism of opinion seems gradually to cool off and the avant-gardist spirit of Fiedler, Sontag, Spanos or the early Hassan gives way to a less enthusiastic and more rigorous evaluation by such critics as Brooke-Rose or Wilde. Rather than extolling the "novelties", drastic discontinuities and "disruptions" in the techniques of new fiction,[14] the latter critics tend to view the postmodernist aesthetics as a complex interplay of innovation and renovation. Brooke-Rose's scheme is more precise than the earlier efforts to subdivide postmodernist literature into "apocalyptic" and "visionary" (Graff 1973), "self-retifactive" and "performative", that is, game-oriented and play-oriented tifactive" and "performative", that is, game-oriented and play-oriented modes (Mellard 1980). What could be seen at the basis of all such divisions is the old dilemma of reflexivity and referentiality, or the question of a degree to which different postmodernist authors still try to engage "the world out there." On the whole, as Hans Bertens writes,

> we can locate two major modes within postmodernist literature [...]: one mode that has given up referentiality and meaning, another one that still seeks to be referential and sometimes even tries to establish local, temporary, and provisional truths (1986 : 47).[15]

These two modes can be blurred in a single piece, as for example in that type of postmodernist writing which Wilde calls "midfiction".[16] "Neither reductive nor, on the other hand, hopeful of reestablishing in art or in life an aesthetic or total order, this fiction represents the attempt, inspired by the negotiations of self and world, to create, tentatively and provisionally, anironic enclaves of value in the face of—but not in place of—a meaningless universe" (Wilde 1981 : 165, 148). Midfiction thus "negotiates the oppositional extremes of realism and reflexivity (both their presuppositions and their technical procedures)" (1982 : 192), being neither exclusively experimental in a narrowly meta-

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[14] As did, for example, Stevick (1977), Lodge (1977) or Klinkowitz (1975) before them.

[15] Similarly, Charles Newman opposes two tendencies within postmodernism: Formalism and Neo-Realism, focusing respectively on technique and vision (1985 : : 170ff).

[16] Wilde lists the recent fiction of Stanley Elkin, Max Apple and Donald Barthelme as examples of "midfiction" (1982); these are the same authors whom he earlier defined as representatives of "postmodernist generative irony" (1981).

fictional manner nor representational in a traditional fashion. Wilde's contribution, according to Charles Caramello, provides an important corrective to such views of American postmodernism "which consider mimesis and the variants of its rejection crucial" (1983 : 79).

To sum up, we can say that it is possible to isolate certain characteristic attitudes and concerns that reappear in the context of any debate on postmodernism. Most commentators agree that the historical boundaries of postmodernist literature stretch chronologically from the mid--1950s into the 1980s.[17] However, the question of dates becomes more problematic when the term postmodernism is used typologically rather than as a periodconcept.[18] The problem of plurality of "postmodernisms" is then frequently raised, together with the arguments about "international" or "specifically American" character of the phenomenon.[19] The issue of the continuity or discontinuity between modernism and postmodernism is still a matter of controversy. It is interesting to note that at the early stage of the postmodernist debate mostly those critics whose attitude to the "new fiction" was rather suspicious inclined towards the "continuous" view whereas the sympathetic critics usually juxtaposed modernism and postmodernism in terms of "radical reaction".[20] However, according to Ihab Hassan, we may need both the disjunctive and the conjunctive view: "the first to *perceive* the New, the second to *comprehend* it" (1983 : 16).

Today the majority of critics agree that postmodernism is no more single than modernism, that they both have the common philosophical base in the epistemic doubt, which asserts the essential unknowability of "reality". In postmodernism, however, this epistemic anxiety is pushed further so that it becomes at a certain point the ontological plurality or instability. This is where Brian McHale sees the shift of dominant from modernism to postmodernism: "epistemological questions [...] 'tip

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[17] Cf. Graff (1973 : 386), McCaffery (1932 : 19), Fokkema (1986 : 81). Similarly, Fiedler (1975), Foster (1983), Bradbury (1983) or Bertens (1986).

[18] As for example in Hassan (1975) or even in Lyotard (1983) who quotes an example of the Montaigne-type essay as characteristic of his model of postmodernism.

[19] Among those who argue for the international character of postmodernism, see Hassan (1975), Spanos (1972) or Nägele (1980). On the other hand, Wilde (1981) and especially Suleiman (1986) insist that postmodernism is an exclusively American notion. Foster (1983), Bradbury (1983), McHale (1986) or Bertens (1986) prefer to speak of a number of "postmodernisms."

[20] The "continuous" view is represented by Kermode (1968), Graff (1973), Alter (1975), Mellard (1980), Wilde (1981), Newman (1985) or Suleiman (1986). "Radical discontinuity" is claimed by Spanos (1972), Fiedler (1975), Stevick (1977), Palmer (1977), Butler (1980) or Kostelanetz (1981).

over' into ontological questions" (1986 : 60).[21] The problem of ontologi-
cal uncertainty is absolutely central to postmodernism, for which myth,
history, language and consciousness—the modernist bases of authority—
—have lost their validating power. To quote Hans Bertens again, "it
is the awareness of the absence of centers, of privileged languages, hig-
her discourses, that is seen as the most striking difference with moder-
nism" (1986 : 46). If the rhetoric of crisis is equally characteristic of mo-
dernism and postmodernism,[22] with the latter it is often transformed into
the "rhetoric of terminality," expressed by such terms as "exhaustion",
"self-parody" or "death" (Newman 1985 : 55). Yet, apart from its more
radically formulated episteme and the differences in idiom, postmoder-
nism is viewed as an extension and continuation of the aesthetic tradi-
tion of modernism, especially in the matter of literary techniques.[23]

Perhaps then Charles Newman is right when he views postmodernism
as "the final battle in the century's war of attrition between Formalism
and Realism" (1985 : 11). Our own brief "metanarrative" of postmoder-
nist criticism seems to confirm that the "life-cycle" of this aesthetic phe-
nomenon has almost been exhausted: from naive radicalism of opinion,
through celebration of experiment and sophistication, to critical revalua-
tion of its own premises and reconciliation with traditional modes. That,
with the 1980s approaching their end, postmodernism itself may be co-
ming to a close is also signalled vividly by the publication of synthetic
monographs of the movement.[24] For, to quote Norman Holland's remark,

> already, by writing papers about it, by publishing books and special issues of
> journals, we announce we are through Postmodernism and out the other side
> (1983 : 306).

Finally, it goes without saying that the critical vocabulary of postmo-
dernism cannot be conceived without reference to structuralist and post-
structuralist theories that have been concurrently developed on the Con-
tinent and in the States. The influence of such thinkers as Michel Fou-
cault, Jacques Derrida or Roland Barthes seems to be reflected in both
the literary codes used by a number of witers and the modified modes
of critical understanding and interpretation. As Hal Foster puts it, "the
artifact is likely to be treated less as a *work* in modernist terms—uni-

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[21] Similarly, Newman writes that postmodernism "can be partially understood
as a shift in the *choice* of determinisms [...] from economic and political determi-
nisms, through a broader cultural determinism emphasizing technology and mass
psychology, to our recent obsession with a determinism which is essentially lingu-
istic" (1985 : 16).

[22] Cf. Graff (1973 : 388), Mellard (1980 : 127) or Bennett (1985 : 32).

[23] Cf. for example Newman (1985) or Bertens (1986).

[24] Of the most recent publications, the widest in scope are Brian McHale's
Postmodernist Fiction (1987) and Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism:
History, Theory, Fiction* (1988).

que, symbolic, visionery—than as a *text* in a postmodernist sense—'already written', allegorical, contingent" (1983 : X). The failure of the formalist notion of the literary work as an autonomous entity, together with the subsequent acceptance of a model of the literary text as a form of communication and manipulation account for the recent revival of interest in different variants of rhetorical criticism. The tendency to treat the text as the result of a communicative process is shared by a variety of poststructuralist approaches, the theoretical grounding of which may be semiotic, phenomenological, psychoanalytic or deconstructionist. Especially deconstruction, by insisting on the rhetorical, figural potentiality of all discourse, suspends the traditional distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, as well as other similar oppositions, such as fiction/history, object/representation, original/imitation, that have been used throughout in defining the concept of literature itself.

However, we should not ignore the reciprocal nature of a transaction between art theory: theoretical constructs may arise "pragmatically" from the problems of interpretation, which certain texts pose, or theory may "create" its own subject by means of generalizing certain convenient and appropriate artistic instances. Malcolm Bradbury expresses his doubts about the possibility of an "innocent" application of aesthetic-theoretical generalizations in the following way: either

> the contemporary arts are [...] revealing a new and radical episteme which is disabling to traditional critical practice [...] or it may be that contemporary criticism is itself creating a new epistemology seeking to read the world and the book in ways which are consistent with its own radical theories (1983 : 325— 326).

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KRYTYCY WOBEC POSTMODERNIZMU — PRZEGLĄD STANOWISK

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest zwięzłym przeglądem opinii czołowych krytyków, głównie amerykańskich, którzy w ciągu ostatnich trzydziestu lat zabierali głos w dyskusji nad literaturą postmodernistyczną, starając się odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czym jest postmodernizm, czy stanowi on jednolity ruch artystyczny, jakie są jego granice i powinowactwa estetyczne. Aby nadać pewien porządek tematyczny diachronicznej prezentacji zróżnicowanych poglądów, przyjęto model ramowy proponowany przez Susan Suleiman, która wyróżnia 3 główne nurty w krytyce: wartościująco-ideologiczny, diagnostyczny oraz klasyfikacyjno-analityczny. Ujęcie takie pozwala dostrzec w zarysie wyłanianie się zjawiska, które za Jean-François Lyotardem można by nazwać „metanarracją" krytyki postmodernistycznej. Obejmuje ona charakterystyczne przewartościowania ocen i przesunięcia akcentu, od początkowego entuzjazmu i radykalizmu opinii w latach sześćdziesiątych do bardziej wyważonych i krytycznych prób ustosunkowania się do estetyki postmodernistycznej w latach osiemdziesiątych. Głównym problemem teoretycznym, jaki wyłania się z dyskusji wokół postmodernizmu jest kwestia relacji pomiędzy sztuką zorientowaną autoreferencyjnie

a mimetycznie, czyli pomiędzy eksperymentem artystycznym a realizmem. Przez długi czas w centrum zainteresowania krytyki postmodernistycznej znajdował się także problem stosunku pomiędzy modernizmem a postmodernizmem. Patrząc z dzisiejszej perspektywy, można już chyba uznać ten etap rozważań nad nowymi nurtami estetycznymi za zamknięty i dokonać próby jego syntetycznego podsumowania.

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