

Introduction

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What is the relation between Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy? And why should this relation be a matter of importance now? In the North American context, a volume on such a topic would have been practically inconceivable ten years ago. Something important has taken place in the development of continental philosophy that its relation to postmodernism should now become relevant. Something important in the development of cultural criticism has taken place such that postmodernism enters into the context of continental philosophy. Indeed the question might well be asked at the present stage: is postmodernism anything other than continental philosophy, and is continental philosophy anything other than postmodernism?

To answer the latter question affirmatively and unequivocally would doubtless be extreme. However, that the question is even possible is indicative of a significant reformulation and consolidation of thinking in the 1980's. Continental philosophy has become the name for that whole orientation in thinking that appeals to certain trends in European philosophy since the late nineteenth century. Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva have become the textual context out of which continental philosophy is moulded. These figures (among others) unquestionably mark the domain characterized by continental philosophy as it is practiced in the English-speaking world.

Contrary to what one might expect, continental philosophy does not refer to whatever thinking takes place or has taken place in Europe. Indeed, many currents of thought originating from and practiced in Europe would not be considered to be within the frame of continental philosophy.

Rather, continental philosophy constitutes a general network of communication and dialogue in which common concerns, identifiable issues, and a recognizable language prevail in the practice of philosophy. This does not mean that all continental philosophers agree with one another. Not by any means. However, the basis of their disagreement can be articulated and identified. Criticism, debate, and disagreement have a context and a space in which philosophizing takes place. Sometimes one can translate these concerns into alternative modes of philosophical research. In the end, however, the real task is to advance research within the domain of continental philosophy *per se*. To the extent that translation and cross-communication is possible – all the better, but current research and new strides in the field must necessarily continue independently of their reformulation into alternative practices.

It is sometimes thought that continental philosophy has a restricted domain, that it is limited to matters of metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophical psychology, and political theory. One need only look at the tables of contents of former volumes in this series, such as *Descriptions* and *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (edited by Silverman and Ihde), to see the breadth of concerns from philosophy of science to philosophy of language to philosophy of literature exhibited by those working in continental philosophy – particularly in North America.

And what of postmodernism? Originally formulated in the context of architecture – even by some architects who were former proponents of modernism – postmodernism has become a broader concern in the arts and culture at large. What was modernism in literature, in painting and sculpture, in fashion, in science, and in philosophy is reread in relation to the limits of such modes of thinking. Taking modernism to its extremes, to its margins, to its frames is to rethink modernism altogether.

Modernism in philosophy goes back a long way: Bacon, Galileo, Descartes – pillars of the modernist conception of the fashionable, the new, and the innovative, – in short, all that is a break with classical and ancient tradition. Here philosophy attempted to be “scientific,” to appeal to a rigorous method and not to authority. With Kant, modernism took on a new shape: it combined the rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Locke and Hume. Modernism in philosophy could now be defined in relation to a transcendental and an empirical aspect – particularly where the transcendental could offer a unification of the manifold of experience by rational means. An *‘Ich denke’* which could prescribe what was presented to it would set the limits to apper-

ception. With this coordination of the subjective and the objective, the groundwork for a modernist philosophy was established solidly for Western philosophy in general. What European philosophers did with this ground was to formulate a notion of subjectivity that would not only become the place of retreat but also the condition for all knowledge.

This double strategy reformed modernism in such a way that it could be consistent with the literary and artistic movements that would later carry the same name. What Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Husserl – to name three diverse examples – did with the concept of subjectivity made a theory of consciousness possible. And it was some variety of this theory that various writers such as Kafka, Joyce, Woolf, and Proust found indispensable for a proper view of the world. The proper worldview was also a complexed one: Freud, Bergson, and James all presented a theory of the pure ego, of temporal experience, and of consciousness as separate from the objective view of things. The only way for modernism to gain its ground was to abstract itself from the external world. Heisenberg and Gödel found ways to incorporate uncertainty and indeterminacy, Tarski and Russell sought to provide a theory of descriptions which would not be contaminated by natural language, and Klimt, Klee, Dufy, and Matisse escaped into a world of fantasy and design. Modernism established itself by assuring itself of a transcendental view of things, a *pensée de survol* that would be indubitable, a meta-language about which multiplicity could be understood and explained. Modernism's optimism was combined with a deadly despair. Modernism's aspirations were mixed with the horror that the very idea of fascism, namely the dominance and overcoming of the whole world, could even be attempted.

In response to and corresponding with the development of fascism in Europe, modernism also elaborated an artform that sought to express the anguish, despair, frustration, and exaggerations of human experience at that time. German expressionism – as in Beckmann, Nolde, and Munch – showed that the powers of a transcendental view of things, where all could be put in order, where rules could replace human existence, where a plan could resolve all confusion and disharmony was exceptionally dangerous and horrifying. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* dramatizes the particular effects of such attempts to actualize a certain utopia, one whose effect was fundamentally dystopian. The Charlie Chaplin *Modern Times* film (from which Sartre *et al* devised an ironic title for their journal in 1945) depicts with humor the stultifying effects of over-technologization without thought and mechanization without humanization. The con-

text was one of supernationalism and political blackmail in the face of extreme economic threat and unemployment.

The philosophical response of a Heidegger was to reject the transcendental overview and to replace it with an account of our being-in-the-world as a relation of beings to Being. Interpretation, understanding, and authenticity were called for. To hear the call of Being was to situate oneself in a context in which despair and related emotions could be meaningful but not oppressive. Return to thinking, return to the fields and countrypaths, return to the Greek philosophers – these were effectively Heidegger's aspirations. Meanwhile Sartre picked up on the phenomenology, but in its existentialized version. While Sartre agreed with the basic response to a transcendental view of the self, of subjectivity, of knowledge, he also found something worrisome in it. Correspondingly he offered an account of consciousness that had no content, no rules, no form, no ordering of the world. In consciousness was freedom. In consciousness was negation. In consciousness was the constitution of self as other. Not that Rimbaud did not already say "*je est un autre*," but Sartre made philosophical sense of the claim. In the face of oppression, occupation, and human destruction everywhere, he offered an account of freedom. We are free. To be free meant to be able to choose even when it looked as though no choice were possible anywhere, where it seemed that constraint was the only possible interpretation of things. Sartre was not alone in this view. Malraux, Camus, and many others also called for political action, resistance, refusal to follow orders, to mould to the modernist view offered to them. With this refusal and theoretical account of freedom, it became possible to think of a philosophical, theoretical, and political practice based on rebellion, anti-self-reification, and ultimately choice and reaction. These were the signs of modernism in crisis.

What Merleau-Ponty offered and what the others were unable to develop effectively was a theory of embodiment. From the end of the Second World War in 1945, the modernism of the interbellum period, of despair, of anguish, of escape into fantasy or off to America, of anti-authoritarian consciousness and yet an obsession with the existentialization of consciousness as the only resource now took on new shape. Experience was not just projectively free, unconstrained, and unbounded as Sartre had been proposing. With Merleau-Ponty, it was clear that experience is embodied, lived, and imbued with signification. It was not until after Merleau-Ponty produced his first major work – the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) – that he realized how important a theory of language was for his account of the lived body.

His reading of Saussure and the linking up of phenomenology with semiology was the first indication of a new way of thinking about modernism. Wittgenstein was right: language is important. For a long time, the European phenomenologists could not see it, — not that Merleau-Ponty learned it from Wittgenstein any more than did Heidegger who also turned to language in the post-war period. Similarly the early American commentators on phenomenology and existentialism in the 1950s did not grasp the importance of language. For them, the existential, experiential, consciousness-based epistemology along with a theory of perception and a way to read literature intelligently were the primary interests. Even Merleau-Ponty's own accounts of a phenomenology of language were largely ignored until the 1970s. The growth of structuralism in the 1960s, however, made such negative attitudes toward language effectively impossible in the succeeding decade.

In the 1950s, signs of the breakdown of modernism could be seen in the theatre of the absurd, in the new French novel of surface presentations, in the very idea that science might not be cumulative, and in the appeal to language in philosophical thinking. Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Simon, Duras, Butor — the list seems almost unending — were the marks of a new way of thinking about human experience. Officially "absurd," effectively "realistic," these writers sought to express the decline of modernism by offering something radically other — a sense of repetition, conformity, accumulation, meaninglessness, aimlessness, enigma, complexity, ambiguity, dramatic intensity, and perceptiveness. To be modern was fundamentally to be new, *à la mode*, excitingly different. In this sense, the 1950s were not devoid of modernism. One might even say that there was new hope in novelty. But the character of novelty had changed. As Beckett's character in *Malone Dies* reports: "I must go on, I can't go on, I will go on . . ." The end of modernism would not mean that everything stops and the world comes to an end. Yet the fear of such a cataclysmic destruction was paramount in the 1960s. By contrast, however, there was as yet no way to think apocalypse without the postmodernist incision.

The confluence of structuralism, phenomenology, marxism, and psychoanalysis in the 1960s brought about the phenomenon known as post-structuralism. In America, structuralism can be dated from the time of the famous *Structuralist Controversy* conference at Johns Hopkins in 1967. Shocking to literary scholars in the United States, the aftershocks of the controversy about structuralism did not hit philosophers until much later. Many phenomenologists were at first

quite hostile. While Merleau-Ponty was close friends with Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, American phenomenologists were loath to accept the affinities between phenomenology and structuralism despite their many differences. With the *Schizo-Culture* conference at Columbia University in 1974, new light was shed on this conflict. Post-structuralism began to take shape in America. While Lacan and various Lévi-Straussians had been speakers at the 1966 Hopkins event (and Derrida, who was effectively unknown in the United States, presented his now celebrated "Structure, Sign and Play in the Human Sciences" and concerned primarily the writings of Lévi-Strauss), the principal names at the 1974 Columbia conference included Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, R. D. Laing, and Arthur Danto. With the *Schizo-Culture* conference, poststructuralism in America was born.

This history of landmark conferences in America has itself become an item of notice, at once a spectator sport and a colosseum. The 1976 Stony Brook conference on "The Post-Structuralist Enterprise: Reading(s) of Jacques Derrida" was the first in America to both incorporate Derrida and concentrate on his writings. Perhaps the particular confluence of some Stony Brook philosophers and literary scholars with "continental" tendencies (including Jan Kott, who had been a participant at the Johns Hopkins conference a decade earlier) made such an event possible. Here figures such as Gasché, Garver, Hillis Miller, *et al.* showed that structuralism had entered a new phase – and most importantly this new phase included a rapprochement with phenomenology on the one hand and analytic philosophy on the other. The interest in post-structuralism gradually became a preoccupation with the significance and practice of deconstruction. Here the Derridean mark had become unmistakable. And the International Association for Philosophy and Literature (IAPL) conference on "Deconstruction and its Alternatives" in 1983 (again at Stony Brook) was one of its dominant expressions. The dimensions of the debate around deconstruction had become enormous. Advocates of Derridean readings of texts, differences between Derrida and De Man, and the impact of Heidegger on Derridean practice were juxtaposed with debates about the differences between deconstruction and Frankfurt-style critical theory, pragmatism, Althusserian marxism, and post-structuralism in general. Here the voices of Donato, Spivak, Allison, Gasché, Wood, and De Man *in absentia* were the most marked. But finally with the Loyola (Chicago) conference on "Deconstruction and Philosophy" in 1985, the question of the role of deconstruction in

philosophy *per se* was thematized and given explicit consideration. Throughout the conference, Derrida's own questioning and responding to interpretations and accounts of deconstruction in philosophical study made it an important event. Finally the IAPL conference on "Postmodernism" at the University of Kansas in May 1987 brought the traditions of continental philosophy into full debate with themes in postmodernism *per se*. Not only were the figures of Jameson, Spivak, Casey, Margolis, Bernstein, and Framton brought into juxtaposition but also important issues in architectural theory, feminism, theory of language, political theory, and poetics were intensely debated within a postmodernist framework.

The present volume entitled *POSTMODERNISM AND CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY* can hardly be abstracted from this sequence of events on the American scene in the 1980s. Resulting directly from two conferences of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in 1984 and 1985, these essays must necessarily be situated in the context of other research activities taking place during that "time-frame." While none of the contributors to this volume would have been present at the 1966 Johns Hopkins or the 1974 Columbia events, only a couple participated (and not as speakers) at the 1976 Stony Brook conference on Derrida and post-structuralism. However many of the authors of essays here either attended or offered papers at the 1983 "Deconstruction and its Alternatives" conference and again in a major way at the 1987 Kansas "Postmodernism" event. Some of the contributors to this volume are seasoned continental philosophers. Lingis, O'Neill, Dillon, Gillan, Wurzer, Krell and Young are recognized figures on the North American continental philosophical scene. Although McDonald, McKenna, and Judovitz all come officially from French studies, their work is eminently philosophical. Furthermore, a range of younger scholars (including Chaffin, Olkowski, White, Taft, Vasey, Freeman, and Schrift) are already bringing eminence to newer tendencies in continental philosophical research.

Julia Kristeva opens the discussion with an essay on the role of imagination in melancholic discourse. With the exception of the 1985 SPEP meetings in which she gave this lecture, Julia Kristeva has not attended previous conferences of the Society. Nevertheless Kristeva, who teaches in the department of "Texts and Documents" at the University of Paris-VII, is a significant figure in the development of postmodernism and continental philosophy in North America. She signals the particular confluence of phenomenology, structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and feminism. That her

writings incorporate interpretations and aspects of all of these tendencies in continental philosophy is an important feature of current directions in postmodernism as well.

The themes that prevail in this volume arise out of and mark the vanguard of research in the continental tradition as it has been practiced in North America for at least three decades. The Merleau-Pontean concern with embodiment is here linked up not only with the importance of language but also with desire. Desire as one of Lyotard's major concerns in *Discours, Figure* (1971) and *Economie libidinale* (1974) is also an indispensable feature of Deleuze's writings of the 1970s. The debate among Lingis, Dillon, and Krell arises out of a Merleau-Pontean perspective but is linked implicitly with the problem of desire in postmodernism. In short, a key problem for postmodernism – as is particularly evident in Kristeva's essay – is what to do with desire.

One way to answer the question about desire is to raise again the issue of representation. As Foucault presents it in *The Order of Things* (1966), representation as a way of thinking, as an epistemological framework, arose sometime at the end of the Renaissance and continued up to about the time of Kant's anthropology in the late eighteenth century. In this sense, Descartes would be one of the classic models for the notion of representation. Judovitz examines this possibility and shows how representation operates in the cartesian formulation. With Hegel, the problem of representation has become acute, for in the end the logic leaves no room for representation. Dialectic makes representation ultimately impossible. And with Heidegger, interpretation has replaced representation. A hermeneutics of being removes any position from which representation could take place.

In this respect, metaphysics is no longer possible in anything like a traditional sense. The end of metaphysics could quite naturally be the achievement of metaphysics. This would have been the Hegelian hope. But if metaphysics is no longer viable, what is the place of values? The Nietzschean problematic is to continually revalue all values. Yet when Heidegger reads Nietzsche, as White shows, another consideration appears. European nihilism implies the interpretation of being as nothing. For Heidegger, however, the nothing that affirms itself in the understanding of what is (i.e. beings) brings out the very space in which truth can appear. The difficulty is that with the appearance of truth comes a set of values. This is where Gillan's account of value is linked up with power, discourses of power, and the role of desire or affectivity in the articulation of power. Values are con-

stituted in discourse, and the domination of certain discourses determine the prevalence of certain values. The insistence of certain discourses establish therefore the values that are to be preferred. The effect is that as the line from Nietzsche through Heidegger to Foucault shows, there are no ultimate values, – at best values are to be reformulated – revalued for oneself, but the limits of such revaluation are set by the limits of possible discourses at any particular time.

The concern of philosophical feminism has been that male discourse predominates, establishes values, and asserts them without regard to gender difference. Male discourse – especially in philosophy – offers patriarchal texts as the model for human sexuality, desire, and even fashion. One of the tasks of a philosophical feminism is to re-write this discursive (male) dominance through the reinterpretation and re-reading of traditional texts, traditional forms of logic, traditional presentations – even of clothing.

Within the framework of postmodernist discourse, deconstruction has come to play an important role. Christie McDonald offers a reading of the status of deconstruction in the 1980s, while Schrift traces some of its history back through Nietzsche to Derrida. O'Neill (in his own inimitable style) takes up the very context in which the essays, texts, and discourses in this volume were proffered. Here then the whole question of the professional conference, its formations and formulations are brought under scrutiny. Taking the conference itself as a text, reading it deconstructively, brings together the whole history of continental philosophy as it has been articulated in North America through a reading of the invitational and presentational structure of the conference itself.

If this array from the problem of desire and language, the limits of representation as a philosophical preference, the ends of metaphysics as a traditional philosophical commitment, the rewriting of patriarchal discourse as gender dominance, and the assessment of deconstruction itself in its present forms and practices can offer a viable account of where postmodernism links up with continental philosophy, then the project of this volume will have achieved its aim. However, to thematize the issue even more precisely, two essays – one by McKenna, the other by Wurzer – provide an account of postmodernism itself, its articulation, its verbal play, and its relation to tradition *per se*. The philosophical reading of culture will presume a theoretical formulation not only of its traditions, but also of its contemporary assessments and activities. This volume acts in aid of such an end.

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