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Literature and Politics/Literary Politics

“Literature and Politics/Literary Politics,” our topic this morning, invites us to a site that has in recent years become hotly disputed territory within the literary academy. The stabilization between two independent provinces effected by the seemingly innocent coordinate conjunction “and” in “literature and politics,” like the ambivalent assimilations suggested by the polyvalent adjectival form of “literary politics,” as well as the spatializing dynamism of the disjunctive slash — all figure as selections from a contested cultural inventory of linguistic variations on the binary combination literature-politics. It may be fair to say that perhaps the chief contemporary novelty and virtue of the set of solicitations implied in our topic rest on the invitation to situate literature in its network of wordly affiliations, contrary to the dominant traditions of the modern literary academy.

We are compelled to recognize today that even the most elementary moves of deconstruction are bound to disturb the seemingly natural independence of the two poles of literature and politics, and thereby to remind us that these polarities have been historically and conceptually carved out of a continuum, that their separation and binary opposition have been institutionalized and sustained through the deployment of massive historical forces, and that the primacy of literature, as it figures in the conventions of the literary institution, itself rests on fundamental political moves of exclusion and inclusion. Such moves have defined the boundaries and categories that constitute what is to be intelligible as literature, generally, as it happens, through the exclusion of politics, in the narrow sense, and its hypostatization as a separate province. Conversely, of course, far from being an independent variable, politics can be seen to rest, not only on general literary and documentary mediations, but more deeply on narrative forms, rhetorical types, and broadly literary conventions.

The literature-politics interpenetration is thus always a two way affair, and as profoundly and inexorably in play as the literature-poli-

tics differentiation itself. The specific constitution and structure of the entire complex of pertinent relationships, including both the specialization of the categories "literature" and "politics," with their mutable contents, and also the criteria of pertinence, are evidently matters of dense, tangled, quasi-geological sedimentations in social and cultural history. I have dwelt on this in an introductory way in order to underscore the observation that stressed interventions along any of the fault-lines that mark the terrain of this topic — such as the interventions currently reshaping the field of literary criticism — are likely to be accompanied by seismic disturbances in the historical ecology of the whole complex of relationships. It should not surprise us that many battles have been and continue to be fought over this territory, particularly during periods of rapid disciplinary transformation, as in the past two decades.

In the body of my talk this morning, I plan to probe selectively, but with a skeletal sense of overview, into this complex of issues and to touch, at least, on interpretations of the politics of literature, the politics of interpretation, the politics of disciplinarization, and the politics of culture. As a colleague addressing other colleagues, I will be seeking inevitably to place my own discourse within, or at least in clear relation to, the literary institution. I will be problematizing the concerns of the profession. In advancing the claims of politics, however, lest they pass unobserved in the course of a necessarily somewhat unrigorous construction of the ineluctable modalities of literature's politics, I cannot avoid registering, right at the outset, three major caveats about political reason.

In the first place, the scope and reach of the political is a matter of much dispute and great moment. If right wing fundamentalism tends to reject political constitution altogether, the ultra left position, 1960's North American Maoism, for example, tends to interpret everything as political, as did the early Roland Barthes, who understood the political "as describing the whole of human relation . . . in their power of making the world" (143). Hannah Arendt's critiques a generation ago of the interpenetration of public and private adopted intermediate standpoints based on an account that included private relationships, such as sexual and domestic, within the categories of the social, but differentiated them within the social frame from political activities in the sense of public activities (213-15). She had hoped to resist both the totalitarian invasion of personal life by public imperatives and the contamination of the public sphere by purely personal goals.

Since then, the New Left of the 1960s, and feminists in particular among other active groups, have ineradicably placed the issues of the politics of sexuality, of the family, and of culture before us, even if they

have probably succeeded more in politicizing the personal than personalizing the political. The counter-tendency has been most visible recently in the neoconservative moves to exempt even the bureaucratic state itself from accountability to political criteria and processes in the sense of an authentic public life.

The real issue, I think, is the extent to which the political is coextensive with the full range of the social, as a matter of conjunctural fact, and as a matter of desirability. This remains open, and vigorously contested by the whole conflicted legacy of the 1960s — by followers of the Frankfurt School and by the school of Foucault (both of which are neo-Weberian scenarists of a society of total domination where psyche and culture are swallowed in politics and the social is tendentially absorbed altogether within the iron cage of an omnipresent system of control), as much as by their various utopian or more radically skeptical adversaries.

Secondly, as we consider the rapprochement of literature and politics, we need to be reminded of the dramatic corruption of political reason in our century. The obvious examples include the mad redemptivist rationalism of concentration camp politics associated with the experiments of Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, and the like; the exceptional power abuse of South African apartheid; and the colonels, generals, and dictators in Greece, in Chile, in Uganda, in Iran, in Afghanistan, in the Philippines, and throughout the third and fourth worlds, along with the tragic horrors of Arab resistance and self-destruction. But equally diseased are the banal degradations and atrocities of daily life in the bureaucratically institutionalized and administered so called first and second worlds, the political structures with which these ruthlessly hold together the global economic and military systems that divide and threaten the planet, and the steering mechanisms of their own internal systems of legitimation, benefit, and control. In societies both East and West, North and South, political discourse tends today to speak for the unspeakable, to promote untruth, irreality, and ugliness.

Thirdly, and with final irony, it is possible that, far from becoming coextensive with the social, the political, as we have classically conceived it, is being rapidly destroyed. The traditional conception rests on sovereign subjects with the rational capacity to represent their wills and opinions on the scene of politics in public space. But recent analyses, from Adorno to Lasch, of the decline of the autonomous individual; from Mill to Sennett, Bookchin, Habermas and Baudrillard, of the decline of the public sphere, the destabilization of the real, and the disappearance of public opinion as representation and will in mass media culture; and from Lévi-Strauss to Lacan, Derrida, Alt-

husser, and Foucault, of the subject as a mere effect of the play of structural causations — all these interpretations undermine the traditional conception.

They suggest a transition from a political conception based on some reasonable certainty as to desire, will, choice and opinion, and on a distributive notion of power as an unevenly available object that some have and others want, to a political conception that develops from categories of structural bias, ideological effect, functional consequence and a configurational notion of power as a network of strategic relations that puts effective human agency radically into question. Neither the expressive nor the structural conception seems capable of offering us today an unproblematical version of the political.

A directly implicated phenomenon, on which I will not dwell today, is the steady erosion since the 1960s of the authority of the central institutions of society, especially the political system. I want only to stress that the accompanying cultural crisis of the subsystems of beliefs, manners, morals, expectations, legitimations, obediences, orientations, meanings, and values bears marks of an analogous loss of authority and displays analogous signs of indeterminacy — or, put differently, signs of variable, decentralized, drifting, or dispersed determinations and determinability.

That these same crises have recently come to the very forefront of debates about literary criticism and interpretation highlights for us the irreducible relations between the different (political, cultural, literary) discourses at play in the processes of social reproduction. That these debates have pitched the literary institution into political turmoil is neither surprising nor unambiguous in its consequences, and I shall look at this ambivalent politicization of the literary academy shortly, in the portion of my talk concerned with politics in the interpretation of interpretation. First, I would like to turn to the question of politics in the interpretation of literature.

1. Politics in the interpretation of literature

Literature and politics are no strangers to one another, and their intimacy embraces a variety of forms in a long history of relationships. Writers had run afoul of the State as early as Plato's hypothetical Republic, betrayed there by the author's speculative imagination and commitments. And in 1985, during the gathering of writers at the New York PEN congress, writers still disagreed politically with each other over the issues of imagination and the State. In the English tradition, William Hazlitt wrote in 1816 that "the language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power" (quoted in Welles 5). Conversely,

writers have figured equally prominently in subversive roles, from William Blake and the writers who inspired waves of 19th century European revolutions to the anti-Tsarist writers of pre-revolutionary Russia, the Petöfi Circle of the 1950s in Budapest, and the writers of the Prague Spring in 1968.

It is interesting in this respect that high modernism was claimed as much from the political right, by the New Critics who valued its elitist formal virtuositities, as from the political left, by *Partisan Review* which valued its radical transformative energies. The relationship between writers and politics appears to defy any facile characterization or prediction. Surrealists attacked modernism politically for its formal independence from the immediacies of everyday life; Lukacs attacked modernism politically for its ideological dependence on the immediacies of everyday life. Ernst Bloch, while defending Expressionism from Communist critiques, volunteered endorsements of the Moscow trials, much as Bertolt Brecht, whose political theatre matched advanced form to popular intent, condemned the popular uprising in Berlin (1953) as "capitalist-fascist." Georg Lukacs, meanwhile, though often sounding like a commissar of Comintern cultural policy, nevertheless supported the Hungarian insurgency in 1956 and was repeatedly interned and victimized by police repression in the 1950s and 1960s.

Censorship of literature, the persecution of writers, class alignment in interpretation, the presumption of literature's intimacy with political vision, politically motivated writing, ideological critique or ideological prescription for literature — all these are elements of the network of *external* relations between literature and politics. What one can say is that it seems no more feasible to abstract literature from such external political relations than it is to divine an independent and permanent political pattern in them.

It is equally difficult to characterize with any consistency the *internal* political relations of literature, although these too are an ineluctable modality of its existence. George Orwell argued that all books had a political bias — in his own case, that of writing against totalitarianism. The desire to push the world in a certain direction is thus proposed as implicit in writing (10-11). Jean-Paul Sartre, in the same post-war moment, likewise described prose writing as utilitarian, "a moment of action" (13) that is capable, if the writer (and later the reader) undertakes the responsibility of suitable engagement, of imaging the world insofar as it demands human freedom, and of serving as a communicative imperative of reciprocal appeal between two freedoms, the author's and the reader's (42-45, 57), both situated in the world (144) and choosing themselves within their age (233).

Orwell and Sartre set forth the classical expressionist view of political literature as the representation of the author's political will and public commitments. The model of such political writing might be the texts of Silone, Malraux, Serge, and Koestler, for example, offering counter-images of political events to brush against the grain of official history (Orwell 274-75). These texts rest on a sense of politics as a transcendent dimension of political subjects, a sense that has given way since the 1960s in both Marxist and structuralist/post-structuralist circles to a sense of politics as an immanent dimension of texts. This dimension may be characterized, for instance, as the effect of a sociological logic (for example, Foucault's rules of discourse or Jameson's semantic circles) or the effect of affective forces (for example, Williams's "structure of feelings" or Kristeva's romanticization of Freud's instincts).

The English account tends to be closer to the phenomenological life-world, even if sociologized in relation to the paradigms of production; the French account tends to aspire to scientized versions that strive for objective, manipulable, formalizable status, for example by way of the Lacanian code. But both signal a shift from surface political intention and public situation to a whole radical complex, in which the political reaches deeply into (and sometimes beyond) the sociological, the semiological, and the psychoanalytical regions of articulation.

Orwell, interestingly enough, partly anticipated this move when he puzzled over the importance of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*:

When *Tropic of Cancer* was published [in 1935] the Italians were marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging. The intellectual "foci" of the world were Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. It did not seem to be a moment at which a novel of outstanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats cadging drinks in the Latin Quarter. Of course, a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major political events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot. . . . Actually, nearly everyone who read it saw at once that it was . . . a very remarkable book. (108)

Now, Orwell did not like Miller or his kind of politics, and described him as a "completely negative, amoral writer, a mere Jonah [inside the whale], a passive acceptor of evil, a sort of Whitman among the corpses" (138). But he also recognized the emergent politics of Miller's struggles against conventional literary discourse, in as much as Miller's text owned up to "everyday facts and emotions" and dropped "the [diplomatic] Geneva language of the ordinary novel and drag[ged] the *real-politik* of the inner mind into the open" (110).

In a related vein, Raymond Williams has pointed to the politics of Thomas Hardy's interweaving of diverse levels of discourse in order to

achieve a wider range of social address in defense of the representation of valid impulses defeated by the social order (*Politics* 222, 264). On this account, it would be possible, by such shifts in attention, to construct a political tradition in English fiction that would obviously include D.H. Lawrence, but also perhaps Henry James (for his portraits of money and the readjustments of metropolitan capital) (*Politics* 257) and probably even Jane Austen (for her history of the land-owning class from the perspective of her doubly marginalized position as a female and a dependent) (*Politics* 251).

The question to which there appears no ready answer is that of whether there are any limits to the play of what can be described as politics within the internal relations of texts or, put differently, to the scope of the political interpretation of the internal relations of texts. So deeply can the literary be shaped into identity with the political, and so fully can the political be dispersed into the literary, that in the light especially of the new conventions of interpretation, literature *per se* appears to provide no identifiably literary resistance to or constraints on the inscription of the political, either as a contextual frame around the text or as a discourse within the text itself.

Robert Boyers, in his sensationally titled book, *Atrocity and Amnesia*, offers the most recent attempt to construct a tradition of the political novel since 1945, on the argument that the fiction of Orwell and Koestler and the critical work of Irving Howe, in *Politics and the Novel*, with their fixation on political ideas and the experience of characters who take hold of them — in other words, what I have called the expressive conception of politics — are not representative of contemporary political writing. This latter is said to activate ideas about community, collective action, and the distribution of forces within the forcefully projected situations of a common world in order to treat Being as problematical and to test the viability of the present against future hopes (5-9, 16-18).

On this account, writers and readers again and again confront systems of structural causality, “absent causes” on the model of Althusser and Jameson, and approach the effects of finally indescribable systems of social relations through the mediation of overlapping narrative codes and paradigms. Such an encounter is expected to occur in both the production and the reading of texts. The texts, meanwhile, directly thematize their own structural sense of politics (20-25). Accordingly, politics in Saul Bellow is describable as the attempt to engage necessity (20); politics in V.S. Naipaul and Graham Greene is articulated as an ethic of limits, of constraints on the will (54, 69-70); the Latin American novel of Marquez or Carpentier shows the will to change pitted against a view of reality as Necessity (72); Sholzenitsyn’s radical report-

age experiments with a complete social and political scale of power inscribed within a horizon of intractable facticity (93, 100); Nadine Gordimer's politics rests on a Pascalian wager of intercession: taking a chance on doing good in a situation of cognitive indeterminacy (144); the political is articulated as discourse and way of seeing in Jorge Semprun (151), and as the power of transvaluation in George Steiner (170). Milan Kundera links the deep structures of political corruption and cultural disorder (226), while politics in Günter Grass amounts to a deconstructive refusal of the given paradigms in an anti-redemptivist negative dialectics (183, 195-98). In the latter, especially, the political is presented as theory rather than as action, that is, as a theoretical practice and thus, finally, as a literary practice.

Although, or perhaps because, his work is sustained at a superior level of literary interpretation, Boyers in the end himself admits that the term "political novel" is "a fiction intended to school or direct readings of particular texts" (213). In other words, the reading of political fiction translates in effect into a political reading of fiction, with the result that the dominant interpretive trope shifts from the representation of collisions with structural causality (as the specific property of political fiction) to the textual enactment and thematization of some particular interpretation of politics (as a general property of fiction accessible to political interpretation).

Boyers's readings are interesting and justify their claims to attention, but they falsify rather than validate the interpretive claim, made in his subtitle, to have identified "The Political Novel Since 1945." The subtitle proposes a difference between two periods of political fiction and between the political and the non-political novel; the text delivers a repetition of the same, so deeply is the literary shaped into identity with the political and, conversely, so fully is the political dispersed into the literary. Certainly, the literary text is not seen to offer any identifiably literary or aesthetic resistance to the intratextual inscription of other discourses.

We are touching here not only on the sociability of language forms, but also on the conditions of reading and writing. Raymond Williams has noted a major change in the subjective situation of writers and readers since the 19th century, namely a compelling new awareness of alternative modes of information and analysis, for example, the statistical, as representations of certain social relations and processes (*Politics* 267). In other words, new kinds of evidence, often in apparently abstract or theoretical form, come to find both representation in fiction and foregrounding in interpretation, which entails an intermixing of conventionally literary and previously non-literary discourses — an intermixing that is in principle without natural limit, though, to

be sure, encountering aesthetic problems, and, indeed, having to reformulate the operative concepts of literariness. One effect of such interpenetration of discourses has been to put in question the cherished achievement of 19th century literary theory and practice: the autonomy of literary discourse. It is to this problem that I now turn, before looking frontally at the ingression of politics into the interpretation of interpretation within the contemporary literary profession.

2. The question of the autonomy of literary discourse

The autonomy theme is perhaps the dominant theme in the history of literary and art criticism since the late 18th century. It is entailed in the rise of a separated domain of artistic practice and in the corresponding rise of a universal concept of art, a philosophical aesthetics, and a mode of thought whose function it is to demarcate the system of the arts clearly from the sciences and crafts on one side, and from myth, religion, and morality on the other, in a way that they had not been set off in pre-capitalist epochs. However aesthetic objectifications are distinguished thematically or formally, they share a placement in Western culture of the past two centuries *as aesthetic*, autonomous, independent, *sui generis*. The narrowing specialization in the concept of literature from anything in print to high quality writing and finally to imaginative literature is as much associated with this process as are the integrationist counter-moves that put in question the factuality and/or the desirability of aesthetic autonomy and not infrequently attach themselves to such slogans as "the death of literature," "the end of art," or "the anti-aesthetic."

In the history of aesthetic disputes, of course, "autonomy" resonates very differently according to whether it is translated as art-for-art's-sake, or as art-for-life's-sake; as private resistance to market temptations and the vulgarities of daily life, or as intersubjective refusal of the standards of hegemonic capitalist cultural relations, including instrumentalism, utilitarianism, social atomization, and particularism; as freedom from non-aesthetic authority, or as criticism of life, of alienation and degradation; as an escape from economic, morally responsible, or class conflicted reality, or as defamiliarization, defetishization, and demystification of reality; as a self-invalidating, self-cancelling, self-trivializing exile and ghettoization, or as a reservoir of endangered memories, semantic energies, motives, and species values; as a promise of happiness, or as a social utopia.

In the broadest terms, the autonomy issue is very differently contextualized if it is seen as an expression and description of negative culture, that is, an early-romantic adversarial practice against the pres-

asures of the institutions of emergent domination; or as an expression of affirmative culture, that is, a late-romantic segregated compensatory spiritual realm of value accessible without transformation of the state of fact; or as an expression simply of rational symbolic culture, that is, of the structural differentiation of an aesthetic subsystem of cultural rationality as a function of the decentering structural rationalization of modernity, on the line of argument from Kant and the neo-Kantians to Weber and Habermas. On the whole, it is noteworthy that the German traditions, with their metaphysical or historiographical biases, have tended to be more hospitable to the autonomist claims than the French or Anglo-American traditions, with their more political, economic, empiricist-pragmatist skepticism.

Autonomy can be interpreted as the prized victory of the romantic tradition, or the great achievement of modernity, or the defensive fortification and self-incarceration of an adversarial culture. As a claim, it can be assimilated to any point in the entire range of standpoints between the one pole of an aesthetic distancing from an everyday life governed by the fetish of scarcity, utility and exchange and the other pole of an aesthetic prefiguration of an expanding realm of social and historical abundance and freedom from necessity. Whatever the variations, the point remains that in every case the autonomy claim associated with the general concept of art and with the socially distinct practices of aesthetic objectification and communication is politically situated with respect to the other forms of social activity, the wider contexts of motives and values beyond those immanent in the actual instances of literary practice, and the partialities, reductions, or imperialisms of the competing structures both of religious or otherworldly and also of secular, calculative, and instrumental rationality.

The autonomy question can be seen therefore as a central question of the political ontology of the text, or more precisely, of the social ecological role of aesthetic textuality. In other words, within the conflicted ecology of capitalist social reproduction, to the extent that rationality conflicts have a political character, literary art as a network of cultural relations and practices is always already placed in a larger political process and at a different level from the immanent motives of the actual instances of literary practice. At the same time, its political character is never yet fixed, except provisionally through these actual instances where the conjunctural effects of literary power take on strategic articulation.

There are four major aspects of the traditional disputes about autonomy to which it seems pertinent to refer briefly in this context: 1. the dispute about truth in representation, hinging on the cognitive relation between the autonomous aesthetic sphere (objectification, action, or

rationality structure) and the extra-aesthetic or *otherwise* articulable reality; 2. the dispute about social effect and influence, hinging on the rhetorical relation between the aesthetic sphere and its recipients or its communicative situation; 3. the dispute about cultural integration, hinging on the ontic relation between the aesthetic sphere and the world of everyday life; and 4. the antinomic relation between the aesthetic sphere (in the sense of a special region of high culture) and the complex of practices identified by contrast as low, popular, mass, or commercial culture.

Georg Lukacs is perhaps the key figure of the first debate about art as representation. With his life-long project of elaborating the formal-substantial properties of a critical realism that would keep faith with epistemological and historiographical commitments to a particular narrative of the real as social development, Lukacs was led in the 1930s, in the context of Popular Front politics, to a debate in the pages of the emigré journal *Das Wort* about Expressionism, the first German version of modern art. In brief, he attacked the “expressive” as opposed to the referential use of language, including fragmentation, montage, and abstraction, as an obfuscation of the connections between ideology and political economy, and a mystifying obstacle to a critique of class-bound imperialist society — that is, a misrepresentation of the social totality, resting on a repudiation of the reflection of the real.

Ernst Bloch, in response, stressed the legitimacy of the Expressionist subjective experience of capitalist fragmentation in the context of a transitional period of the disintegration of bourgeois culture. In other words, against Lukacs’s critique of the (lacking) cognitive value of the Expressionist portrayal of reality, Bloch emphasized the historical authenticity of Expressionist experience (Bloch et al. 12ff). It is noteworthy that, in a conflict which Lukacs was to wage many times over against various aspects and stages of literary modernism and its advocates, what is at issue is the kind of validity claim that properly pertains — the aestheticist-psychological one of sincere truthfulness or the cognitivist one of truth.

The Lukacsian call for aesthetic reform in a realist direction — this is really the salient point — is at the same time a challenge to aesthetic autonomy, underwritten by the subordination of the aesthetic to the epistemological, and advanced through a retranslation of formal properties of aesthetic objects into political and ideological positions. In this respect, it is fair to say that Lukacs has prepared the ground for Burkean, Althusserian, Jamesonian, psychoanalytic, and semiotic models of the literary text as a complex ideological act (cf. Jameson, “Reflections” 200). The Blochian position, meanwhile, has been

picked up by Habermas, and it has been just as attractive to pragmatists and other anti-realist cultural currents as the Lukacsian position has been appealing to prospective realists.

The debate remains unresolved, all the more because the positions readily exchange valences. The epistemological position has lately become the chief defender of the objectivity of textuality, and of objective cultural canons, these latter comprising the standard presuppositions of the autonomy argument. In contrast, in post-modernist ideological and semiological dispersions of textuality, the anti-epistemological position has become a strategic critique of the autonomy claims of any circulating cultural discourse.

The most interesting of the autonomy disputes over the rhetorical relation of art to its audience is perhaps that between Theodor Adorno, in defense of autonomy and indirect address, and the advocates of various modes of more direct didacticism, Lukacs, Brecht, and Sartre. Adorno's moves are generally directed against the pretensions of ideology to correspond to reality, and especially against the premature reconciliation in art and criticism of unreconciled social conflicts. In general, he would include here the premature reconciliation in Lukacs's concept of realist reflection, with its implicit suggestion of a unitary and unconflicted reality frame within which local conflicts might be contemplated. But more specifically, Adorno is skeptical of declared political militancy, and of its prescriptive intrusions into literary criticism through Lukacs and Sartre, and into literary practice through both Sartre and Brecht.

On his argument, aspects of which he shares with the modernist avant-garde, direct conceptual or thematic political relevance is inferior in its political effects to a textuality which challenges signification itself, and which disrupts authoritarian personalities through the communicative shock of the unintelligible, the defiance of conventional meaning, and the violent renewal of perception, as for example in Kafka or Beckett. Any "message," by contrast, entails an accommodation to the world, the stance of the lecturer concealing an entente or complicity with the listeners.

Adorno's sense is that in the exterminist epoch of Auschwitz and of the systematic liquidation of all opposition, art has "the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics" (Bloch et al. 193). This sense rests on a conjunctural interpretation: the refusal of direct politics and the distance from ready meaning offer resistance in advance to the administrative capture of politics and the positivist subordination of meaning in what the Frankfurt School viewed as an epoch, at least in dominant tendency, of one-dimensionality and total administration.

This issue, too, remains unresolved. On one hand, there is the possibility that the liquidationist one-dimensional inter-war period was merely transitional to a succeeding period of artificial negativity. In the new era, it is arguably the case that critical subjectivity is systematically reconstituted and (though tendentially reinstrumentalized) encouraged to serve as a regulative mechanism to provide dynamic subsidies (and potentially organic opposition) to the obsolescent commodification and hollow bureaucratization mechanisms (Piccone; Fekete, "Telos" 166-67). In such a period, the political assumptions of Marxist militancy or of libertarian existentialism, for example, might acquire new functions as residual values, capable of being critically accessed just as plausibly as the negative dialectic of Frankfurt Critical Theory. Conversely, on the other hand, the Adornian defensive resistance also finds new supports and justifications. The Foucauldian analysis of formations of discourse and power, of total domination through the microtechniques of control and the knowledge/ power bio-nexus, readily converges with the Frankfurt critique of instrumental reason in a confirming Weberian image of affirmative incarceration.

Two observations in a critical vein may be in order here. First, if domination is more selective than total and our period is even marginally more polyvalent and fluid toward spontaneity than he assumed, then ironically Adorno's uncompromisingly autonomist theoretical commitments, like Foucault's structural descriptions, are politically rather vitiated by their elitist disengagements, overestimations of expertise, and anti-populist insensitivities to emergent new needs and convergent new creative efforts. Second, equally ironically, Adorno's legacy of resistance to closure, commodification, and ease of consumption, by way of the refusal of stable meaning, has in time also come to fuel the anti-autonomist and anti-modernist "end of art" arguments of post-modernist aesthetic culture, contrary to the Frankfurt commitment to a continuing radicalization of the Enlightenment's rational cultural projects.

The avant-garde artistic movements, Surrealism especially, have been the key players in the third form of autonomy dispute, the radical demand for the dissolution of autonomous art and its reintegration in everyday life. What is urged as a position of cultural revolution and permanent provocation is in effect a replay of early-Romantic radicalism. But this time it is directed first and foremost neither against constricted feudal relations nor against incipient market relations but rather against the sedimented canon of objectified art, the avant-garde's own pre-history. In this optic, that pre-history appears as the institution of autonomous art (Burger; Feher), a socially mobilized net-

work of power relations deployed to service aesthetic monuments segregated from the radical creative energies of daily life.

The anti-autonomist program, then, is to put an end to art, to destroy its detached institutionalization, and to establish a direct two-way flow between life and art as an emancipatory action, that is, a direct transformation of non-institutionalized art into non-artistic life and, vice versa, of life into art. Historically, Stalinism, fascism, the rise of the democratic corporate state, the recomposition of class relations, and the reconstitution of cultural relations in daily life through the development of mass media and mass culture effectively put an end to the historical avant-garde. On the philosophical plane, most recently, both the Habermasians and the neo-Lukacsian Budapest School have offered effective critiques of the surrealist moves (Habermas, "Questions" 199-203, 206-07; Jay 132; Feher 62-67).

On the Habermasian reading, cultural modernization since the Enlightenment has taken the form of the differentiation of science, law, and art as three distinct subsystems of cultural rationality, each with its distinct inner logic in terms of its traditions and corresponding discursive and institutional action systems. This differentiation of value spheres is entailed in a decentered modern secular understanding of the world, and it involves certain abstractions from the immediate complexity of the life-world contexts. It is neither possible nor desirable to reverse this differentiation by dissolution into a new organic unity. The destruction of aesthetic autonomy could only disperse artistic contexts without revolutionizing everyday consciousness. It could not on its own produce the changed constellation of art and life-world that might be desirable. On this hypothesis, the attack on one abstraction alone can neither produce the unconstrained interaction of all the specialized rationalities, that is, cognitive, moral-political, and aesthetic-expressive, nor rectify the unbalanced relations among the subsystems of differentiated rationality. In other words, the avant-garde attack on art is no solution to the basic imbalance promoted under the selective emphases of capitalist modernization, notably the colonization of the Western mind and culture by functional, cognitive-instrumental rationality.

On the Budapest school reading, meanwhile, autonomous art, in emerging from inwardness in the form of objectifications that are in harmony with certain intersubjective norms and expectations, is nevertheless not fully nor evenly institutionalized. This is to say that it is not fully or evenly steered by social utility or constituted of teachable, impersonal behaviour functioning according to the strict application of rules. The social channels that provide for its distribution are the most institutionalized aspect of art, followed by certain elements of

reception, with the production of artistic form being the least institutionalized outcome of the play of rules.

In the light of the varied intersections of institutionalized and non-institutionalized constituents in aesthetic objectifications, the spontaneist cultural revolutionary rebellion against institution misleads into the aestheticization of life, entailing the risk of artistic experimentation on people and of daily life becoming an unbroken series of provocations, alongside the abolition of the paradigmatic work of art, that is, the autonomous great work whose task it was to propose the new aesthetic norms and worlds of sensing, feeling, and experiencing through which local and generalizable communities of taste could be constituted. The obvious danger is that the loss of such paradigmatic works (which, like paradigmatic personalities, should be properly conceived as signposts, not blueprints for imitation or devotion) would impoverish life, not improve it.

These issues too remain unresolved, because the root problem on which they touch — the distorted, hence ambivalent, development of cultural modernization in the capitalist social formation — remains unresolved. It is at least arguable that the Enlightenment project was not only to differentiate the specialized cultural value spheres but also to de-esotericize their forms in order to enrich everyday life. Yet, on one hand, this democratic dimension, to which the avant-garde position adhered, still begs fulfillment. And, on the other hand, this democratic dimension is easily confounded with the logic of equivalence, the basic code on which capitalist exchange relations are founded and which plays through both the political and the cultural history of the social formation. Accordingly, a significant constituent of the post-modern hostility to paradigmatic works can be perhaps plausibly described as

a Babuvian-egalitarian zeal, the desire for absolute equality that militates against autonomous works of art, and thereby indirectly against the possibilities for an autonomous human personality in these art works. And given that the paradigmatic work is the utmost concentration of autonomy, the hatred can be accounted for anthropologically rather than aesthetically. But it is precisely this tyrannical (anthropological and moral) streak that makes the radical theories of post-modernity highly questionable. (Feher 67)

The problem and the crux of ambivalence here lies in this: that in the skeptically nuanced post-modern recycling of the earlier avant-garde utopianism, the radical and legitimate need for universal access to the world of culture and for equal entitlement to self-creativity is too readily mistranslated into a pseudodemocratic, anti-hierarchical trend. The intention to abolish the cultural barriers created by cultural

conservatism is just identified with acceptance of all acts of self-creativity as acts of equal value, in suppression of the equally persistent need for qualitative evaluative judgements (Feher 72-73).

This problem shades into the fourth and most topical of the autonomy disputes, the relationship between high and low culture. Democratic culture, particularly once technological reproduction provides for mass access to information, tends to subvert the traditional value distinctions between high and low, significant and trivial, autonomous and utilitarian. In 1935, Walter Benjamin, in his most populist essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," welcomed the liquidation of autonomous or auratic art by the new mass media, especially cinema, on the model of the left avant-garde standpoint, denouncing individually produced autonomy as reactionary and proclaiming the radical collective virtues of mass media and culture. Not only did mass media such as the radio, contrary to Walter Benjamin's hopes, serve Hitler better than they served the progressive revolutionization of the proletariat, but the emergent culture industry dramatically altered the place of artistic culture in everyday life, including the relation between elite and popular artistic practices, in a way Benjamin and the avant-garde did not anticipate.

In debate with Benjamin's overconfidence in mass media, Adorno similarly overestimated the progressive destinies of the elite arts. Many of their most adversarial products have since been effectively recontextualized as cultural consumer commodities. Adorno argued against Benjamin that the culture industry could coopt political acts; but the arts too have come to share that fate. It is not unusual to find high culture domesticated and pacified through insertion into mass culture, with elite compositions pressed into service as background TV scores, paintings reduced to the function of office decorations, and literature translated into multi-media popularizations. The esoteric is now effectively being exotericized, without the salutary efforts forecast by earlier avant-gardes, and without much apparent resistance capability on the part of the high arts, or, what amounts to much the same thing, the ability to sustain their aesthetic differentiation from industrial culture.

Put differently, the elite arts are increasingly unable and hence unwilling to anticipate and guide their own contexts of reception and consequently to exercise sufficient authority to guarantee their meanings and their other effects. Another version of this in the contemporary information environment, where freedom of reception, including freedom of non-reception, is a given, is that the elite arts lose their universalistic claims to superior status at the peak of cultural experience and retain their standing only for more localized communities

of recipients whose will to art remains oriented toward the formal protocols of the classical aesthetic models of paradigmatic works.

It is appropriate to see here an advanced stage in the long process of modernization in which the differentiation of a sphere of aesthetic autonomy simultaneously means an attenuation of the self-evident character of artistic activity and an increasing indeterminacy, or variable determinacy, of the aesthetic function in life, subject to the ongoing pluralization of universes of discourse, perceptual modes, and communities of recipients. As it became detached from direct life relations, art has developed its own legitimating concept, dynamized it so that universal concepts of art could compete with and succeed one another, and articulated its defining conceptuality through the contrast between the new and the old and between the high and the low in culture. I am following here closely the narrative and the arguments advanced by Sándor Radnóti (90-98).

In this process, artistic culture has found that it needed to confront the industrialized low culture aiming at mass production. In sacred and courtly cultures, where only the high arts were recognized as properly cultural values and attitudes, the low or popular practices were nevertheless considered legitimate in their own place. There was simply no common generic concept of art comprising all the arts and only the arts. In bourgeois modernity for the first time both high and low were admitted into the realm of culture, and for the first time confronted each other with hostility as independent yet interrelated fragments of a conceptual unity, each of which is disposed to annihilate the other. The participants in high culture traditionally want to purge the culture of poisonous contaminants like paraliteratures, tabloids, discos, and mass media (Feher 71); conversely, the participants in the culture industry repeatedly move to eliminate or industrialize the autonomous contexts and support systems of the elite arts.

Meanwhile, within this recurring antinomy, the homogeneous concept of mass culture is itself an ideological dystopian construction, a negative counter image created by and needed for the political self-definition of the concept of art, especially since the public committed to high art has no way to define itself other than negatively and exclusively, by its rejection of mass culture. The universal concept of art, accordingly, is a positive utopian counter-concept opposed to the culture industry.

It is not clear why, apart from the self-interpretations of art, there should be any universal criteria for dividing the realm of art or culture into two parts. Indeed, even to substitute for the absolute high-low polarity a hierarchical continuum with a high end and a low end is still to take high art at face value. In Anglo-American criticism, it was

Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan who began to open out from the discourses of high art to mass culture, thus puncturing their radical dichotomy (Fekete, *Critical Twilight* 107-84). Frye's notion of a verbal universe, everywhere mythomorphic and animated by the same mechanisms (if different contents) of the structural displacement of mythic typology, and McLuhan's view of a pan-cultural field in which the objects and procedures of non-aesthetic culture are subject to the same technological hermeneutic as the reserved areas of high art — both have prepared Anglo-American interpretive communities for the anti-aestheticist bias in the procedures of radical French semiology and discourse-theoretical communicative pragmatics. Frye and McLuhan still write as modernists, but their strategies for permanently deferring the evaluative barriers between the high arts and low culture segue into the post-modernist refusal of modernist utopianism, and into the consequent homogenization whose result is a rejection of the autonomy claims of aesthetic discourse.

The cultural situation may admit of more than one direction from here, subject to the outcome of the autonomy disputes, of which this last one, pertaining to the high-low opposition, is so far the most disruptive of the universality of the concept of art on which its autonomy claim has been based. On Radnóti's account (95-99), it is implied by the political balance of interpretive forces in democratic modernity that autonomous art may be in danger of being altogether renounced or displaced from attention unless some reform eliminates the entrenched but shaky antinomy of art and mass culture, that is, the construction and construal of culture as antinomically bifurcated.

These options are clearly not yet resolved. A reform plan would presuppose some recontextualization and reconceptualization of mass culture to allow the critical and utopian features of its products to be openly accessed. It would further presuppose, as Radnóti has projected, some scaling down of the claims of artistic universality, in order to take account of the diminished generality of reception, the finiteness of each act of reception, and the contingency of the aesthetic elements, and in order to arrive at a peaceful coexistence with both the non-universal arts (whether non-objectified, regional, didactic, decorative, or predominantly entertaining) and also the variety of newly emerging quasi-aesthetic forms (such as symbolic games, experiments, happenings, puzzles, technological play, different types of narrative and role simulation, and other comparable semiotic practices). The wager here (Radnóti 98) is that such reform might have the virtue, not of falsely transcending, but of further fragmenting the break between elite and mass culture to the point where antinomic dichotomization is no longer at issue, and all manner of cultural productions can be individ-

ualized, opened out in their affiliations, and enjoyed practically on the common ground of cultural reproduction.

In general, the traditional autonomy discussions, including the four significant types of attack on autonomy that I have just cited, struggle over a shared territory that accepts the achieved category "literature" as this category has developed from the freedom struggles of art within the frame of cultural modernization. In the past two decades, the theoretical temper in the literary academy has found pleasure in subverting the category of "literature" by looking into its constitution and its relations, particularly with the sense that these comprise a political complex on which the fate of the literary institution depends in a number of ways. Intervening in the long line of Ivor Richards, where the problems and contents of composition were already displaced in favour of the problems and contexts of reading and textuality, but now more decisively shifting interest and attention away from the interpretation of literary objects, even from the interpretation of politics in literature or the politics of literature, the new literary theory has been preoccupied with the political economy of commentary, that is, no longer with the political ontology of texts but rather with the political ontology (which is often an anti-epistemology) of productive criticism.

We may see in this a fifth kind of challenge to aesthetic autonomy, one far more subversive and far-reaching than the others. It culminates in an unprecedented displacement of the aesthetic complex in favour of the institution of criticism itself. Not since the Alexandrian Platonists in the third century, whose extrinsic allegorizations shifted texts into their own conceptual framework, has criticism claimed and exercised such power (Fekete, "On Interpretation" 3-4). By contrast even with the ancient quarrel in which the Alexandrians opted for advancing the claims of the spiritual sense of texts against the Antioch defense of their literal sense (Szondi 17-28), the contemporary struggle to ground the literary institution claims constitutive dominion over the *sensus litteralis* as well.

The cultural politics promoted in such a fundamental move of emergent professionalization are perhaps most intelligible as an articulation of the freedom struggle of literary criticism from foundational constraints. Such constraints are no longer necessarily attributed to sociology, biography, psychology and so forth, against which the New Critics fought the first stage of the institution-founding battles of critical emancipation. Now the constraints being refused are those traditionally said to originate in the sovereign work of art, in relation to which criticism is inevitably placed in a secondary position.

In a paradoxical, but historically novel manoeuvre, the literary institution has advanced its own autonomy claims at the expense of the

independence of literature itself. This may be seen as an original transformation of the avant-garde program to de-autonomize literature and reduce the distance between art and life, or rather, high art and the wider culture. On its account, literature is rendered dependent on criticism. Thus freed of its earlier hermeneutic parasitism on high art, critical practice can become productive across the pan-cultural horizon.

This reversal is fueled by a double dynamic, both politicizing and depoliticizing. At the pragmatic microlevels, critical metacommentaries become sharply politicized to account for the constitutive character of critical procedures, and critical discourse, liberated from aestheticist confinement, opens to polyvalent, polydiscursive elaboration and enrichment. At the same time, at the legitimating sociological macrolevels, stopping short of the avant-garde challenge to rationality differentiation in cultural modernity, the new critical theory guarantees its own status by taking over the autonomy claims of the literary institution, now meaning primarily criticism, not literary art, and promoting this claim ever more triumphally, in the political boundary forms of professional disciplinarization.

I shall now turn directly to this discussion in order to sketch in some of its prominent politically inflected dimensions. As a caveat, I should add that it will serve us to remember what the sweep of analytic language may sometimes betray, that I shall be schematizing emergent tendencies in current critical practices rather than congealed conventions, much less universalized hegemonic forms.

3. Politics in the interpretation of interpretation

The new theoretical practices of Anglo-American criticism suggest a deep political turmoil in the literary academy. This turbulence, which has been received with exasperated commentary in many of the publications that service the academy, is as much a consequence of the strength of the empiricist resistance to the theoretical redirection of literary study as it is an outcome of the mixed economy of discourse that a radically new opening to continental European philosophy, psychoanalysis, semiology, and the social sciences has recently brought to the humanities.

The first evidence of the politicization of what I shall provisionally call the new theoretical subsystem of the literary discipline is readily displayed in a self-consciously political diction that includes the use of political metaphors for describing the realignment of intellectual affiliations. If such a diction was prefigured in the early formative conflicts of the discipline, when Allen Tate and his colleagues chose to pro-

claim themselves “reactionaries,” it has long since been repressed in the purified programs of formalism. To the extent that such journals as *Partisan Review* regularly foregrounded a politicized sense of society and culture, they were also entirely marginal to the formation of academic literary discourse.

In a new period of institutional recognition, where not only previously excluded discourses but also previously excluded social groups have been able to make some mark on the discipline — more so in the U.S., to be sure, than elsewhere — the required socio-political stance that has always played at least a subterranean role in shaping cultural articulation has announced its return upon the scene of literary study with a political vocabulary and identity that both partisans (like Stanley Fish) and opponents (like Gerald Graff) have agreed to describe as an “intellectual left” (Fish, “Anti-Professionalism” 97) or “textual left” (Graff, “Textual Leftism” 56).

By this literary new left (which tends to homogenize its own opposition as the Right) is meant some broad, eclectic or ecumenical, cultural constellation of Marxists, pragmatists, anarchists, and various types of marginals, all linked by their contributions to some kind of deconstructive or anti-foundationalist activism. On Stanley Fish’s account, the intellectual left promotes the argument,

from a variety of directions and with differing purposes, that the present arrangement of things, including, in addition to the lines of power and influence, the categories of knowledge with their attendant specification of factuality or truth, is not natural or given but is conventional and has been instituted by the operation of historical and political (in the sense of interested) forces, even though it now wears the face of “common sense.” (“Anti-Professionalism” 97-98)

I will return to this opposition between the natural and the conventional and to the identification of politics with interest. Fish continues by offering a partial list (to which we can obviously add his own name as well as many others) of the members of this intellectual left, in which he includes, “among others, followers and readers of Marx, Vico, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Althusser, Gramsci, Jameson, Weber, Durkheim, Schutz, Kuhn, Hanson, Goffman, Rorty, Putnam, and Wittgenstein.” He notes that “their common rallying cry would be ‘back (or forward) to history’” (98).

It seems to me that to embrace such a distinguished configuration of modern philosophers of history, society, culture, and science is to make an important ecumenical move which is most readily intelligible in the context of a disciplinary transformation. At the same time, I would want to add that, to account for the acute politicization and self-consciously political diction of contemporary critical discourse,

we need a conjunctural supplement, to which I can only point here: namely, an account of the transfer effected in the dramatic repression, first, of the political and verbal radicalism of the political culture of the 1960s, and then, the equally dramatic rhetorical surfacing of that radicalism in the cultural politics of the 1970s and 1980s. I would say that the broad but conjuncturally precise issue of authority and anti-authoritarian politics remains one decisive and readily recognizable thread providing continuity between the two domains.

This transfer underwrites the extreme sharpness of contemporary critical propositions. Barthes' declaration that all language is "quite simply fascist"; Derrida's anxiety vision of "a police and a tribunal ready to intervene" to deal with deviant behaviour relative to the rules and conventions of language and interpretation (quoted in Graff, "Textual Leftism" 564-65); Fish's allegation that a police state rules in the work of a highly regarded colleague (Fish, *Is There a Text* 337) and that literary discourse is "a field of pitched battle" between rival textual strategies (Fish, "Why No One's Afraid" 2) — these are only three examples, which we could all multiply at will (cf. Graff, "Pseudo-Politics" 597), of a political hermeneutic of power which draws on metaphors and analogies of the apparatus of social prohibition and organized violence (police, law, military, state) in order to characterize the social dimensions of literary critical practice, and which urges, on the model of the Clausewitz dictum, that interpretation is merely the continuation of politics by other means (cf. Mitchell iii).

In their extreme formulations, and because they overstate so grandly, Fredric Jameson's sociologistic view that "everything is in the last analysis political" (*Political Unconscious* 20), and Fish's anti-epistemologistic view that every knowledge convention is a result of the political forces of interest ("Anti-Professionalism" 98), combine to provide a seamlessly inclusive political-economic anthropology to underpin, really without much changing, the scholarly *stance* of a continuing critical preoccupation with knowledge claims. Simultaneously, interpretive *thematizations* are redirected to new conflicted contexts of inquiry and dispute. The politicized diction, however, also carries a surplus radicalism that may yet serve to legitimize sharp practical conflict within the academy and to destabilize the epistemological objectivism and ethical neutrality that have come to inhere in the self-confident stance of scholarship which is in turn related to the presumption of stable, identitarian objects of research (S. Weber 18). Whether such political radicalism may be itself a socially ambiguous process with a strategically positioned desirability is a question to which I shall return in the concluding parts of my argument.

I would like, first, to offer a selective overview of the political architecture of the institution of critical practice, with a stress on the salient disputes that figure in the emergent disciplinary subsystem whose features I have been sketching. I want to touch very briefly on aspects of the question of authority in procedural politics, political pragmatics, the politics of productions, the political content of the disciplinary frame, the political function of disciplinarization, and the political forms of disciplinary specialization. Then I shall be able to comment on the dual character of the discourse of the new literary left, before concluding with some programmatic considerations.

Hayden White has noted that there is a politics endemic to the pursuit of truth and knowledge in the academy, notably in the endeavour to share power among rival interpreters (114). Whenever an interpretation claims authority over its rivals, it becomes political in at least a metaphorical sense, becoming directly political whenever interpretation is instituted as orthodoxy, whenever conformity of belief is forced, that is, whenever interpretation is compelled by political authority. In a certain sense, the paradigm-bound normativity of most disciplinary rationality as it is institutionally sustained oscillates around the borders between direct and metaphorical politics.

It is important to note that the directly political issues to which we all need to be sensitive — censorship, academic freedom from prescription in doctrine or practice, including all the political dimensions of pedagogic experiment and organization, and the premises of paradigm-comformity — all these belong to this procedural realm. So too does the complex of academic appointments, tenure, promotion, dismissal, and access to research funding and the organs of publication, that is, the entire procedural complex that regulates the institutional practice of literary criticism.

The political pragmatics of criticism as an activity *per se* revolve around questions of the authority of writers, texts, and readers. If the early tradition from the middle ages to Shelley stressed the authority of the writers, the “unacknowledged legislators,” the romantic-modernist turn placed the emphasis on the autonomy of texts to whose authority readers had to be accountable. These texts were accordingly separated as a reserved area of the aesthetic imagination not only from the non-written, in the literature-reality opposition, but also from non-imaginative writing, in the fiction-fact opposition. The debates over literary autonomy and authority, from the standpoint of the political orientation of the literary institution, have been debates over texts as agencies of force and power versus texts as objects of knowledge. This latter was, of course, the keystone of the house of interpretation that formalism built.

The radical contemporary turn in critical theory has been to shift the focus of authority forward once again from texts to readers and, in effect, from self-sufficient individual readers to the reading conventions that are both conditions and effects of communities of readers. Whether the theoretical transfer of autonomy as a programmatic claim from the practice of artists to the practice of critics is in bad faith, and an expression of “autistic violence” as George Steiner (among others) has charged (437), remains to some extent an open question.

What is pertinent to stress here is that this critical turn is advanced as an attack on objectivity. Its cultural politics amount to a realignment of loyalties from the cultural hegemony of established, achieved, and instituted objects as sources of authority to the institutional activities of critics. The shift is from texts as epistemological objects and cognitive domains to texts as strategic sites and fields of dispersion, in the senses of Foucault and Derrida, and from the ontology of texts as objective sources of authority to the stipulative authority of criticism over the semiological features, the boundaries, and the status of texts, in the sense of Stanley Fish. The move here at every level is anti-empiricist with respect to objects. It is subversive of the positivist fact-value or description-evaluation oppositions, in that it undermines their basic perception of some level of uninterpreted or unintentional (and, it would be said, disinterested) and hence pre-political objectivity. The anti-foundationalist institutional argument would add moreover that, since interpretation and intentionality are always enterprise-specific, therefore the political pragmatics of critical practice are also always enterprise-specific.

The general anti-foundationalist tenor that has been said to characterize the program of the literary new left — including its periodic anti-theoretical declarations which are themselves awkward attacks on foundational claims of theoretical neutrality or essentialism — is deconstructive and historicizing. It is concerned to translate the apparent objectivity of texts, concepts, and social forms back into their constitution as conventional practices, neither natural nor necessary in any elementary sense. This broad program emerges in fits and starts, and in wildly inconsistent and competing formulations — a phenomenon which speaks among other things of the new interpretive openness of textual culture. Yet it is nevertheless useful to distinguish four distinct moments that pertain to the political transformation of critical pragmatics in the process of connecting and juxtaposing the practices of textuality and commentary to one another as well as to a range of other, non-literary, practices.

At a first approximation, critical activity breaks with the organicist and continuist view of textual wholeness and integrity and discovers

structural fissures in textual form. Such construal permits texts to be read as archival facts, their ideological and historical contexts readable over their entire surfaces, or as transgressions of their own explicit semantic horizons, by way of the power of linguistic dispersion.

At a second approximation, critical activity breaks with the empiricist notion of a relationship between an independent text and an independent reader, stressing instead the contingent constitution of texts by interpretations that answer not to any constraints originating in the texts but to the constraints of interpretive conventions sustained by interpretive communities in interpretive institutions which account for our ways of producing, seeing, and understanding texts. Such a transposition, which amounts to a strategic institutional move to settle the score with all allegations of critical parasitism on the literary body, is actually supported by the conjunctural change in the practical relations between texts and commentaries: it is not hard to observe that the vastly expanded volume of contemporary criticism and its professional supports materially attenuates the independence and priority of literary texts, not only in concept, but also in their practical incorporation into a larger verbal-critical culture.

At a third approximation, critical activity breaks with the methodological strait-jacket of readings and interpretations which has been the hegemonic legacy of formalism and which has bound criticism to texts in an ultimately secondary service role. In the articulation of a polytopic critical culture, language as a form of power is to be restored to all the contexts that operate it — semiological, aesthetic, critical, historical. In some radically deconstructive versions, it is to be restored to the unconstrained dispersive play proper to the alleged atopia of language. Writing, reading, and criticism are all expected to break with a debased Platonism that would place them as copies of some prior grounding reality (whether “world” or “text”) and all are expected to become productive for their own ends. It is worth remarking that it has been noted and in some quarters also lamented that the theories proposed at this level against the method of interpretation have had so far little impact in weaning critical energies from the endless repetitions of the methodological practice of interpreting texts (Tompkins 224-25).

Finally, at a fourth approximation, once close verbal analysis has been expanded to the wider literary history of technical devices, rhetorical figures, and doctrinal influences, and once these have been restored further to the conventions that make up their deeper historical forms, and once these have been moreover deconstructed and placed in a wider history, they are then still to be judged, not simply as records of experience and the organization of experience, but precisely

as active practices that produce actions and relationships (Williams, *Politics* 304-06, 325-26). The point here is to confirm that the writing of literature and of criticism, not dichotomized and separated by a Chinese wall of generic difference but conceived as a range of writing, are to be restored not only to their conditions and contexts of production, reception, and circulation, but also, beyond this, to renewed contexts of evaluation.

Unless critical activity breaks with its own asituational stance of disengagement, unless it evaluates not only the forms and conventions of literary practice but also the forms and conventions of composition, focus, stance, and intelligibility in critical practice itself, unless it reinscribes itself as a participant in the context of social practices, as a specific, conflicted practice about the process of which there are debates and judgements rather than in the traditional way as an activity above the fray only the products of which can be disputed — unless, in other words, criticism recaptures the dimension of value as a constitutive feature of its operability — it has no way to break out of the order of second, third and higher degrees of formalism, in continuing regress. It is worth lamenting here, partly as an index of my own commitments, that today the literary institution is still far from confronting the broadly disabling consequences of the will to formalization and from revoking the long exile of evaluation.

The political pragmatics of criticism entail the political character of the productions of that criticism. These products take the shape of inclusions and exclusions from the achieved canons of literature (and criticism). The construction of these canons has been the great work of institutional politics and the most objectified expression of its structure of authority. Critical currents, at Yale for instance, that refuse the traditional politics of service to texts, nevertheless have remained conservers of the established canon. By contrast, the entry of non-canonical currents into the academy, feminist or Marxist, for instance, has brought with it non-canonical critical orientations and demands for deconstruction, revision, or destruction of the canon — each to be distinguished as a different strategy. It has been suggested that canons owe their very existence more to “the order of dominance within a guild,” than to the methodological requirements of literary history (Said, “Opponents” 16). This is the sociological aspect of the institutional politics that are simultaneously embedded in sedimentations of ideological elements which are themselves sustained by the power of institutional formations that legitimate the authority of nation, state, class, race, gender and so forth. The canon disputes are thus a decisively important region of politicized literary discussion.

The nation-literature relationship, to take one example, rests on specific political and social ideologies and conjunctural cultural politics, just as much, for instance, in the post-Arnoldian institutionalization of English studies early in the twentieth century in the service of colonialism and multi-class social cohesion (cf. Baldick) as in the erosion of the place of English studies in the past two decades. Such factors are at work, though differently, just as much in the reduced critical distance between the oppositional and the elite national cultures in the U.S. as in the greater critical distance between the European counter-hegemonic and national cultures (Jameson, "Interviews" 74). As a last example, political elements figure just as much in the state-culture alliance forged in the name of anti-American Canadian nationalism as in the anti-nationalist regionalism promoted by literary strategies in Quebec or the Maritimes. If it is true that literature, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion that support or contest literary canons, are finally inseparable from concepts of nation, gender, and so on, it is equally true that the consciousness of these categories can be deployed in the service of a variety of political functions, contextually repressive or liberating, and operative of either openings or closures relative to object groups and subject groups.

The anti-foundationalist stance entails recognition that there is finally no homogeneous nation or homogeneous woman or homogeneous state, class, or race in the unified voice of which critical activity could revalue its practices or categories. If it is urgently the case that the politics of canons and critical productions must open to the elaboration of suitably nuanced categories to address the contingent traces in every voice of the differentials of sex, race, class, nation-state and the like, and if it is not at all clear from past practice how to operate such categories together (Spivak 277), it is patently also the case that the imminent elaboration of such categories and their employment will be inescapably the work of politically conflicted critical productions.

The entire network of critical micropolitics on which I have been commenting is overdetermined by the macropolitical profession of criticism as an academic discipline. The institutional override that has arisen from disciplinarization may be conceived as distributed into three related political commitments that have taken on paradoxically the character of depoliticization: arguably the repression of politics in the classical sense of practical rational agency has become the very content of disciplinary formalization, the very function of disciplinary expertise, and the very form of disciplinary specialization.

I have already touched on the shape of disciplinary content. The issue here concerns the authority of texts and the authority, above all, of

textual exegesis and other textual housekeeping and service work as the primary instituted methodology in terms of which critical practice is conceived and outside of which it is difficult to support the claim of practising the discipline. I am referring in general to the formalist reduction over the past three generations of the various dimensions of pre-disciplinary philological, ethical, and historical scholarship and criticism to the status of a strictly parenthetical, preparatory, or background discourse against which the domesticated textual objects conceived in formal terms can be brought into foreground focus, and only in that depoliticized condition, as a displacement and repetition of canonical forms, brought into relation with an equally depoliticized inventory of the repeating forms of something projected as the human condition or, sometimes, as the historical condition.

What is ruptured in this procedure is the dense web of ties binding texts and critics into a world of social practices through mechanisms of filiation, affiliation, and affinity. This rupture has its source partly in the romantic-modern intellectual division of labour that has segregated the culture of literary writing from other discourses, partly in the organisation of the culture of literary writing around the retrospective stance of the recollection and recording of experience, and partly, perhaps most importantly, in the institutional incorporation of these two romantic-modern complexes into a system of intellectual order through the epistemologicist stance of critical practice in a professional disciplinary setting. The separation of a knowing subject from an object to be known is simultaneously an abstraction of writers, texts, and critics from their connections in the world of practical motives and consequences. It rests on the repression not only of politics, but also, more broadly, of value.

Although modern literary study has been more resistant than many other disciplines to a strict epistemological subordination, and more resistant in some cultures, the Canadian for example, than in others, by virtue of retaining to some extent, for all its problematic character, the Arnoldian view of literature as a criticism of life, nevertheless critical practice too has become increasingly depoliticized and separated not only from social but even from existential implication. The Horatian duality of literature, *dulce et utile*, is still with the modern knowledge project, but in the stage of technical apprehensions of literary form as pleasure or as repetition of recurring pattern, it is employed to formalize alternately hedonic and archival reductions of the historically effective imaginary of writing.

So strong was the cognitivist formalism of the New Critical legacy, and so representative of this development was Northrop Frye's programmatic exile of value from his proposed critical knowledge system

of displacement and repetitions, that even a McLuhan, who moved to return the literary hermeneutic to the world, found himself the heir of a tradition whose hermeneutic tool chest contained only devices that would carve that world up into objects and interpreters, into regularities of form and recognitions of those regularities in what amounts to a secondary process of submission or subjection. The very formation of subjectivity, on this account, is situated as the unevaluated otherness of reification, both its effect and condition.

In the formalist traditions, the segregation of literary discourse from historiography, supported by the old Aristotelian separation of history and fiction as the scenes of the actual and the probable, not only repressed the fictionality of historiography, which is Hayden White's topic (120ff), but also repressed the historicity of writing and criticism. Moreover, the segregation of literary discourse from philosophy repressed the ideological networks of beliefs and interests in which the identities of individuals and groups, objects and subjects, backgrounds and foregrounds are articulated, and its segregation from sociology, economics, and politics repressed the material relationships between the practices of literary culture and other structures of practices. It is in some measure against these repressions that the literary new left has directed its insurrection, with a professed determination to recontextualize what has been abstractly isolated.

There is little reason to doubt that this represents a political response to the dominant methodological tradition of decontextualization. Whether, as a practice, it will become politically substantial and break with the limits of formalization by pragmatically and self-consciously restoring the presence of value to criticism is more an open question. I do not refer here particularly to the habits of praise and censure, which are largely effects of taste, but more to the circuit of value in which critical practice finds its orientations and the writer finds his or her productivity placed relative to wider ranges of cultural productivity, that is, within which the critic, willy-nilly, operates as participant.

Such questions of the politics of disciplinary content and the intellectual domain of labour interlock with the cult of expertise to which critical practice in the modern tradition has sought to associate itself. Many writers from Bacon to Foucault have convincingly plotted the often disguised relationships between knowledge and power and between the pretension to knowledge and the acquisition of power. The conjunctural evidence seems to suggest that the transition from a culture based on prohibitions to an affirmative culture depends for its pervasive normalizations on the rhetorical activity of cognitive expertise. The political function of the literary humanities rests on this norm-conformative role of expert cultural regulation.

Indeed, the notion of hegemony or cultural dominance has been used successfully by Antonio Gramsci, and more recently, by cultural philosophers like Raymond Williams (*Marxism* 108-25) and Edward Said (*World, passim*), to link the social practice of intellectuals directly to a cultural politics in support of, or in opposition to, the hegemonic systems. I would only add that this discussion may benefit from modification in the light of contemporary skepticism about the kinds of identitarian, sociological, and political closures on which the traditional articulations of hegemony have tended to rely. This parameter of literary intelligence can be refocussed politically by juxtaposing the rationalization discourses on the model of Weber, Parsons, or Foucault with the specificities of the political contexts of literary expertise, as I have tried to outline them, in the context of a much needed critique of the disabling assumptions underpinning the total administration thesis.

I will not dwell further on this point except to note, with regard to Max Weber's "specialists without spirit" (181-83) and the 12th century "trahison des clercs" whose skills at reading and writing were reserved technical operations of the spiritual institution of privilege (Sartre 78), that once these are transposed into the conjunctural frame of technological mass society, where the scope of expert power to simulate and dominate reality is immensely increased, then they acquire the greatest political urgency as multidisciplinary problems for any democratic utopian political or cultural theory to confront.

At a broad institutional level, this is really the terrain of a political dispute about the form of disciplinarization itself, that is, about the professionalization, in our case, of literary studies. The central protagonists of the key debates around this issue in the literary new left have been Stanley Fish ("Profession"; "Anti-Professionalism") and Edward Said ("Opponents"; "Response"; *World*), the first proposing the institutional frame of the profession as the indispensable political condition of the intelligibility of critical practices, and the latter attacking the whole complex of the division of knowledge, the segregation of fields, and the specialization of audiences as a careerist development that is premised on keeping literary criticism irrelevant to the transactions of modern powers in the non-academic world.

In the most important new theoretical formulation in recent years, Fish renews the classic avant-garde assault on the alleged autonomy conception of the romantic-modernist account of literature as an order of words and forms that can put us in touch with essential and irreducible reality precisely by virtue of its independence from everyday utilitarian concerns and hence its authority over pragmatic interests. On this argument — which I have touched on before but which is

worth restating in this particular context — if the literary work were complete and its values autonomous, literary criticism would be parasitic and superfluous, or even dangerous in the measure that it obscured, misrepresented, or obliterated the literary work. Fish's novelty is to reverse this argument into a defence of the autonomy and authority of the critical profession itself, meanwhile recognizing that the classical notion of literary autonomy, and concomitant critical dependency, which was among the founding gestures of the institution of formalism as modern criticism, has served as a sustained motif of antiprofessionalism within the profession itself, partly as a self-critical element, partly as an inhibiting element, and always as a centralizing element whose function was to concentrate power among the guardian groups of authorised methodologies.

Fish always stresses that there are no free selves, no extra-institutional values to be chosen by them, and no independent criteria of choice. On his account, literature is a conventional category, with changing content, scope, and function, always inserted in a process of historically conditioned debate and adjudication operated through critical activities that, far from being secondary, continually change the very objects of attention in the light of their unavoidable involvement with the enabling network of assumptions embodied in current professional practices.

Accordingly, in this relatively Heraclitean view of the mutability of the literary profession. Fish argues, not for a crisis in English studies as a result of the fluid openings in the discipline and in the theoretical subsystem, but rather for the health of the profession — a multitude of researchers, active in new territories, is to be regarded as a sign of continual change, “an ever expanding horizon of new projects, new distinctions, new specializations and, in Edmund Spenser's words, ‘endlesse worke . . .’” (“Profession” 355). The chief claim is that in dispersing the power and authority of literary autonomy and its defenders, the profession is expanding its base of authority and democratising itself.

Not only are there too many practitioners finding too many things to do, but these practitioners seem unwilling to confine themselves to the great tradition of supposedly apolitical art (“the best that has been thought and said”) and insist, instead, on bringing into the canon (no longer *the* canon) texts produced by hitherto excluded groups — gays, Chicanos, women (even women who are not named George or safely tucked away in a bedroom for life), and filmmakers. And the inevitable consequence is that literary culture is no longer easily distinguishable from the social and political contexts that literature, at least in its high humanist definition, is supposed to transcend. (“Profession” 355)

It is important to remember that the other side of this professional redistribution of value is said to be the inevitability of professionalism — that is, that everything is turned into professionalism, and there is no place for a literary criticism that is not a form of professionalism. This includes the critiques of the profession, on the argument that “there are no goals and reasons that are not institutional, that do not follow from the already in-place assumptions, stipulated definitions, and categories of understanding of a socially organised activity,” including the self-correction of the profession through opposition to its conventions, in the normal process of “looking around (with institution-informed eyes) to see conditions (institutionally established) that are unjust or merely inefficient (with justice and efficiency institutionally defined) and proposing remedies and changes that will improve the situation” (“Anti-Professionalism” 104). The point here is to refuse the juxtaposition of the profession and some pure value, of careers and the self, of criticism and the independent text, and to show that the alternatives consist, rather, in different versions of criticism, careers, and the profession, each with its attendant values, organisations of the self, and productions of textuality.

By contrast to Fish’s political democratisation thesis, Said’s professional insularity thesis advances arguments directed against the intellectual division of labour and the cult of expertise, and against the bargain struck with the devil of political power (in the classical sense) that guarantees the security and comforts of the specialist humanities ghetto at the expense of any influence it might have in the social world of Reagan, militarised consumer culture, imperialism, global atrocities, and the politics of everyday struggles. The critique of the complacencies of guild professionalism invokes the pathos of the marginalisation and domestication of the humanist intellectual in a world of madness, and the shameful commodified debasement of the specialist abstentions from involvement with the issues and agencies of global politics (“Opponents” 17-24).

Fish, of course, replies to this left critique alleging depoliticization, as to the right critique alleging excessive politicization, that the attacks on professionalism as such for being too worldly or not worldly enough, too marginal or not marginal enough, spoiling literature or eroding social responsibility — all sidestep a more pragmatic formulation of the ineluctably professional question, necessarily addressed to the profession’s present shape and properly promising only to alter that shape: namely, how to arrange our professional life to serve preferred values and desired consequences in remaking the culture in whose constitution the professional interventions play out their shaping role? (“Profession” 362, 366-67)

Said is probably right that Fish's recuperation of all critical intelligibility into the profession begs the question of the profession as a concrete political, economic, and social formation playing defined roles ("Response" 372), particularly the role of non-interference in the affairs of the everyday world. But just as it is not clear how far Said would push the attack on the division of intellectual labour, it is not clear how far Fish would concede that the program of interference in discursive areas beyond the official competencies of specialist disciplines may be an option for redefining professional practice through novel interventions into the deployment of forces that sustains the current versions of political marginality. The debate remains both urgent and important because its larger scene is just that conflicted social recomposition of disciplinary boundaries and rationalization processes, including both intra-and inter-institutional conflict as well as conflict between institutional and non-institutional spheres, that has been the larger topic of this whole inquiry into the shifting parameters of literary discourse.

In general, it remains to be noted that the prevailing discourse of the literary new left is a double discourse in a number of ways. In speaking the language of conventionality and of institutional regulation, it is both historicizing and socializing. It is professedly a recovery, at least methodologically, of the historical against the natural or transcendent, and a recovery of the social against the traditions of the self-sufficient individual consciousness and will. It enunciates in a Heraclitean disordering deconstructive voice as well as an Eleatic ordering institutional voice. Its thematizations of identities and continuities as the effects of differences constitute a discourse on structural causality that is both anti-empiricist and neo-positivist. Its pragmatist stance on the ubiquity of mediating critical practices is both politicizing in its allergy to claims of neutrality, and also depoliticizing in its allergy to substantive comparative evaluation.

We would be remiss if we failed to note that there is an impressive range of connections between this deconstructive discourse of the literary new left and the discourse of the classical left. The chief areas of overlap appear to concern the shared emphasis on the historical, the social, and the ideological, and on the play of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, or in a different idiom, the forces of closure and dispersion. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature here is the turn toward a deliberate thematization of collective dimensions. This is how I would read the case against transcendence and self-sufficiency, and the promotion of the languages of conventionality, institution, differential configuration, structural causality, and historicism.

But the most contentious connection perhaps is given in the issue of causality, where the Marxist and the deconstructive model are placed in direct competition. The Marxist political hermeneutic, philosophy of history, and economic sociology are motivated by an irreducible stake in a particular reading of causality whose metaphysics a thorough-going anti-foundationalist is likely to find blindly bound to a limited series of dated conventions that continue to confront other equally dated conventions as well as emergent articulations with aggressive confidence. A Marxist, in turn, is likely to find what will seem to be "mere" deconstruction empty, and, worse, negatively characterisable as an ideology explicable within the meaning system of which Marxism disposes.

To the extent, moreover, that a positive reevaluation of conflict indeed takes hold of intellectual life — conflict not only as an object of study but as the medium in which thought itself operates (S. Weber 18) — the political tension between anti-foundationalism and Marxism may be sharply amplified over the next decade. It is not for me to adjudicate here a confrontation whose outlines have only begun to be sketched, in their different ways, by Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, Rorty, and others, as well as by Jameson, Williams, Habermas, and so forth. I will say only that both critiques, when sharply and peremptorily put, tend to reduce the conjunctural ambivalence of their opponents to caricatural oneness.

The deconstructive critique of Marxism represses the inability of its own methodological stance to evaluate (the conjunctural extent and quality of) the continuing productivity of the (metaphysical) conventions to which various forms of Marxism are devoted. At the same time, deconstruction seems to me right to put into question the transcendentalism of the Marxist imperative to totalize, which in effect makes the Marxist purview coextensive with the space of history and places it in serene exteriority to a whole that it has already delimited so that the events may be comprehended and the internal conflicts thematized but not permitted to disrupt or undermine the very process of synchronic representation or objectification that is being confidently operated by Marxism itself. (Jameson's self-legitimizing metanarrative claims — for example, that Marxism is an "untranscendable horizon," "an ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts" (*Political Unconscious* 10, 75) — offer representative examples of such paradigmatically de pragmatized and thus depoliticized foundationalist knowledge claims.)

Conversely, the Marxist critique of deconstruction, in the measure that it elides its own totalist foundational commitments even as it characteristically incorporates, delimits, and accounts for the radical-

ism of competing methods, represses its own inability to register the paradigm novelty of the structural allegory (Fekete, "Descent" xi-xxiv) and to evaluate the conjunctural significance of the post-structuralist subversions of synchronous identity, along with all the ideological supports of identity inscribed in the simulacra of the privileged terms of self-sufficiency (whether these be the desire, need, will, or reason of the subject, or the economy, sociology, politics, or culture of the system). At the same time, Marxism is right to challenge pragmatically the absence from the universe of methodical deconstructive formalization of any contingent ethical-political and evaluative commitment; it is right to highlight the depoliticized positivism of the deconstructionist disinclination to link up the theses of conventionality, dispersion, discontinuity, and the differentials of structural causality with a visionary critique of the specific dynamics of the institutional formations that stand as our hierarchical legacy of crystallized options and articulations, that is, to link up the anti-foundational deconstruction of absolutism with a civilizing mission.

4. Conclusion: programmatic considerations

This last issue, of a civilizing mission, would link the critique of civilization with the reform of civilization, and it confronts particularly sharply the double posture adopted by the literary new left from Derrida to Fish — namely, that of combining a historicist metacritical recognition of the cultural politics of contingency and conventionality with an erasure that cancels or neutralizes the force of this recognition by translating it into an affirmation of the continuing power of naturalism at the level of first-order critical practice, where the divergent privileged closures of socially regulated spontaneity are expected to operate unaltered. Put bluntly, the new metacritique of reification pessimistically pre-empts and forecloses the reform of reified culture and society.

The structural allegory promotes, as the only form of critical affirmation, a recognition both of the necessities of the process of reification and of the impossibility of escape from the latter's air-conditioned iron cage. Negative dialectics, deconstruction, the critique of instrumental reason, and the analysis of power relations in discursive formations all share in this neo-realist depoliticization. An example of such anti-utopianism at the level of literary discourse is found in the particularly flat construction that is given in the avant-gardist arguments of the literary new left to the thesis of literary autonomy. This latter is refused as though it represented mere transcendentalism relative to everyday pragmatism. The civilizing mission and utopian role of art, in terms of

which the autonomy thesis was historically articulated and contextualized in specific tension with the institutional realism of market society, are flatly occluded.

To be sure, the autonomy thesis needs new scrutiny in the light of the subsequent transition of market society to a consumerist, bureaucratized neo-capitalist formation in which the relations among economy, state, and culture are dramatically altered. But equally, such scrutiny, if it is to embrace the historical tension between literary culture and the dominant capitalist institutions, that is, if it is not to succumb to a disabling depoliticization, must amount to more than the move to trade in the disputed autonomy of literature for the new autonomy of a literary-critical professional specialty. I am pointing to the need to reconceptualize the utopian imaginary and its place within a network of social practices, with the dual aim of surrendering culture neither to the absolute realism of instrumentalization by the practical powers of domination, nor to the absolute idealism of rationalization by the specific ideological closures of totalistic utopian representations.

In a culture where it sometimes seems that we are fast losing the ability to reflect on and to reform our practices even when they place us in extreme danger, and where it sometimes feels as though the whole institution of literary studies were built on a suffocation of the spirit, it is particularly urgent to be occupied with restoring the utopian dimension in some active form to culture and to social life generally — in a form, moreover, which is neither coextensive with nor reducible to either sociology or politics. After all, we cannot fail to recall some of the miscarriages of the Enlightenment project of cultural differentiation, nor the modern problems entailed in efforts to rationalize everyday life by de-esotericizing the differentiated aesthetic, scientific, or legal forms. The reintegrationist alternative to autonomy, what I call the continuity thesis, remains problematical even in those radicalized versions of the Enlightenment that first support differentiation, then argue for the development of relations among the cultural spheres, and finally propose along with Habermas that such a relational network be re-anchored in a rebalanced ensemble of everyday life that would not then be colonized by instrumental rationality alone.

The continuity thesis endorses a programme of cultural intervention in everyday life and opens up new sites for the cultural politics of productive critical practice. Bracketing for a moment the costs associated with the loss of autonomous objectifications, a new cultural politics may serve as a corrective, although probably not as a long term solution, to the colonization of the mind by everyday instrumental pragmatism. However, a reform programme built chiefly around broadening the ecology of mental colonization to embrace diversified

rationality structures remains committed to a rationalism whose emancipatory optimism has been made problematical in post-Enlightenment history by the question of modern culture's ambivalent complicity with domination, meaning here the complicity not only of science, law, and morality, but of the socially processed arts as well.

This theme has been developed by the Frankfurt School. Adorno wrote that "culture itself, as form and order, is in complicity with blind domination" (71), and Benjamin, that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" ("Theses" 258; no.7). Fredric Jameson's Blochian inversion of the Benjaminian pessimism in his counter-proposition that "the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian" (*Political Unconscious* 286), which is to say that even the most barbaric forms of collective manipulation or ugliness are ultimately powered by universal emancipatory anticipations (286-89), juxtaposes the cultural underpinnings of the political to the political underpinnings of the cultural. In my view, whether it is accepted by way of Benjaminian pessimism or by way of Jameson's Blochian reversal, any display of the reciprocal supports and repressions operated by cultural and political elements and systems in their interplay can only serve to call into question the unproblematical identification of culture, politics, or cultural politics with emancipatory or utopian projects as such.

I would agree that it is important to delineate an intermediate space where a less compromised cultural politics might take conceptual and practical shape. But I am also inclined to feel my way in another direction as well. It may be proper to consider that we need also to face up to something *else* that can resist or enter into a dialectical relationship with emancipatory political and cultural elements — something *else* that remains unarticulated in the forms of cultural or political rationality. Although this is difficult to formulate, yet alongside the practices and imperatives of cultural reason and political reason we may also need to entertain the practices that resist the construction of meaning and the exercise of will, that is, to allow a space for the actions of the body and of the mass in a commotion that is not totally assimilated to unremitting rational subordination, not even to polyvalent rationalization or regulation.

The American transcendentalists, on Stanley Cavell's account (172-74), offer us one set of examples of an emancipatory withdrawal from participation on the scenes of political reason. The psychoanalytic intervention in Western knowledge would be the other example of a determined antidote to political discourse (which, on Julia Kristeva's account, threatens to become our modern religion, promising ultimate meaning and final explanation — political interpretation being the

“apogee of the obsessive quest for A Meaning,” not innocently, but rather in order to confirm subject-identity in the face of an object and as “perhaps the ultimate consequence of the epistemological attitude which consists, simply, of the desire to *give meaning*,” to explain, to provide an answer, to interpret something that is an enigma, a meaningless entity) (78).

We need not follow Kristeva in blaming fascism and Stalinism on the logic of the authoritarian attitude that she says is intrinsic to political interpretation *per se* in order to recognize that the very possibility of linking such evil historical results to the inexorable logic of political reason suggests the desirability of drawing limits to the scope assigned to politics. The transcendentalist or individualist refusal of politics can be seen perhaps as part of a broad resistance to the idea of politics as a collective ritual affirming group solidarity and the will to power. The psychoanalytic refusal of politics can be seen perhaps as part of a broad resistance to the debasement of politics to nothing but administration built on premises of manageable certainty (cf Boyers 135, 140). The two refusals offer a resistance to the reduction of politics to the scale of diminished images of both private and public realms, and also, put differently, to the political subordination of both private and public realms.

I am now back to my earlier caveats about the delimitation of the political, having passed through the proper claims of politics by way of a series of politically oriented challenges to the scope of formalization. We live in interesting times — to bow to the terms of an ancient Chinese curse. In modern mass mediatized society, where mass media liquidate meaning through excess rather than scarcity of information, and where the excesses of the statistical simulations of the mass will paradoxically tend to liquidate politics — that is, in an excess information environment that promotes unavoidable uncertainty and the loss of the authority of such categories as desire, will, opinion, and representation — it would be dogmatic not to acknowledge and ponder the fact that the scene of the political is deconstructed as much as it is constructed, and the social loses itself as much as it enacts itself.

One modern tendency is the autonomisation of a self-sufficient will to will in technological society and its apparatuses. This has been much lamented since Heidegger by substantively oriented normative philosophy. Over against it, there stands the sovereign lack of will. Against mass alienation and manipulation, there stands the refusal to know, wish, or desire; against the bureaucratic intent to define and rationalize stands the mass abdication from participation on the stages of political reason. I am aligning myself here with the observations urged by Jean Baudrillard. Everywhere, one may note, the conscious sadism

of political epistemology is matched with the unconscious masochism of abstention. Quite contrary to the so-called political unconscious (which has been used as a substitute term for repressed class consciousness, that is, for the sociological will), the deeper social unconscious, on Baudrillard's account, may be the ironic power of non-participation, the drive toward the symbolic murder of political reality, the "in-voluntary challenge to everything which was demanded of the subject by philosophy — that is to say, to all rationality of choice, and to all exercise of will, of knowledge, and of liberty" (566).

The responsibility for all these rational-political things then simply devolves by delegation to political or intellectual apparatuses, to clerks and professionals, to the official holders of concept and desire. What if, in mass culture, the challenge to meaning and participation is primary, as against the secondary efforts to resuscitate them? What is called into question by this line of argument is just that professional quest for more meaning power that tends to be taken for granted in the humanities and social sciences. Yet the successes of such a program may represent the Pyrrhic victories of a political intellectual class paradoxically burdened by a new cultural-political productivity precisely as a result of a massive de-volution and a devolutionary transfer of responsibility (585).

What then might be a reasonable program for critical practice, in the context of a mass culture that places the critic in a double bind, similar to that of children who are expected by adults to be simultaneously autonomous subjects and submissive objects? The child resists at all levels — with a subject-strategy of disobedience and revolt against being an object, and with an object strategy of infantilism, hyperconformity, and dependency against being a subject (Baudrillard 588). Critical practice, too, may be well served by a double strategy: a subject-strategy, on the political model, where the crux of the emergent relationship between criticism and politics lies in getting involved and renouncing the habitual contemplative positions of formalism; and an object-strategy, on the psychoanalytic model, where the significant drive may be to renounce the position of subject and meaning and to resist the dissemination of professional authority in the power-knowledge nexus.

To the subject-strategy may belong the critical task of recovering the conditions of judgement, of restoring both literature and criticism to their contexts and of judging the producing properties of those contexts; the task, that is, of interpreting, not only their structure, but also their function and value. The point here is to restore the dimension of value, to interpret the critical world as a challenge to the orientation of lived experience and instituted articulation, and to place the critic

within, not above, the processes of social-cultural practice. It is a question of reorienting the profession to break with the isolation of literary culture, and to make critical practices productive of transvaluations of desires, needs, and representations. In this direction, with the aid of programs that are marked by but not reducible to the political, critical practice may navigate with a sense of culture as a contested area, recover its bite, escalate the level of value conflict, cross the boundaries among the literary, social, and personal realms, and undertake to clarify utopian parameters through contingent practices.

Object-strategy in critical practice is more difficult to conceptualise, but it may start with the recognition that the literary institution is a complex of reception and distribution, and of critical production more than of literary production, and that it is desirable to leave a site of historical meaninglessness which the literary object may occupy as an objective historical action without fear of transparent constitution by criticism. This meaninglessness, when transcribed in writing, may be in effect the sublime in literature, its surplus autonomy in excess of its situations of production and reproduction. Critical practice can encounter such autonomy, that of paradigmatic works in particular, as a force, as a value, and as an appeal for a response, and may opt to refrain from reducing it to a mere effect of procedures of understanding and explanation. Such pragmatic openings to cultural resources are possible, and desirable, I suspect, without subscribing to the high culture/low culture antinomy that has traditionally framed them.

On the scenes of a wider cultural hermeneutic, as well, critical practice can learn a certain strategic reticence. It can learn to respect the space of the enigmatic, to resist the systematic demand to maximise speech, meaning, and participation, and to deconstruct the various orders of paradigms that frame the scarcities that political reason administers and that underwrite the closures of intelligibility.

This is a difficult speculative area, but I am willing to go one small step further. I would imagine that a relative success at a radical participatory opening to the full play of value articulations in the actualities of cultural space, on one side, and a relative success at a corresponding decontamination of the atopia of the real as a virtual space for value abundance, on the other, could be taken as touchstones of a measure of success in the subject and object strategies.

The space for the play of these conflicting and complementary strategies is the continual heterogeneous social constitution of an asymmetrical ensemble of social relations and practices. In that frame, and within the context of a professional recomposition, it seems conjuncturally desirable both to expand critical discourse and to reduce the critical ego. There is in this program an element of paradox, but

perhaps we can wager that it amounts to a tension one can live by. It caters to both the authorization and the deauthorization of the critical will, to a kind of purposelessness with purpose, as well as to its inverse in the traditional Kantian aesthetic formula of purposiveness without purpose.

In this anti-formalist optic, it would seem that it is not finally enough for criticism just to historicize within an anti-foundational ethos. As a practice, it must also put itself openly at stake in an indeterminate utopian search for orientation. In short, criticism is invited to problematize, revalue, consequentialize, and adventure, bringing its discourse to bear on its own practices as well as on the other cultural objects and practices against which it is juxtaposed. The expanding and diverging strategic currents can probably be held together only within a *configuration* that is structured to embrace and synergize an expanding and differentiating value ecology and a *project* that is positively motivated not only toward value abundance and its wide cultural diffusion, but also toward the perpetual play of value. On my argument, then, to summarize one last time, the political categories of literary culture are necessary conditions, to whose claims it is important to attend. But they are not sufficient conditions in themselves, if we also wish to attend to the emergence of the axiologically inflected configuration and project that I would urge as being desirable.

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