

General Introduction

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History/postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism is problematic enough in itself. There are the cliché confusions over terms (“postmodernity”/“postmodernism”) and old problems with definitions of a concept once used as everyday currency. It is not at all hard to understand why in an entry entitled “A Brief History of Postmodernism,” a website simulacra of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy; Earth (hsg2)* constructs a notion so hugely overused in “the last fifty years” that “it is now difficult to take ... seriously as a sociological or philosophical concept.”¹ But then, from this potential endgame, *hsg2* effects something of a rescue through the difficult-to-ignore argument that the importance of the term “postmodernism” lies precisely in the one-time ubiquity of its usage. This was what made it so key, so defining of “an age,” if only in the sense that it once framed the way so many people formulated themselves in, or perhaps against the world. That by itself guarantees return to the term in the future, a return inevitably made manifest as historiography, or at least made in relation to the historiographic — as, indeed, *hsg2* illustrates. It is itself an example of historiographical return, a contemporary reconstruction, albeit a half-joke one. Written in the form of an imagined future and place, this interactive fanzine dedicated to, and parodying, Douglas Adams’s 1970s mock travel guide is distinct, but not entirely separate from, the “palpable” postmodern once embodied for Andreas Huyssen in quite different form — as art objects on display at Documenta 7 (1982).²

There are, of course, certain ironies to rethinking the postmodern in retrospect. Not least, the postmodern has had issues with historiography — these so fundamental that they were once central to the definition of postmodernism. Important interventions imagined the postmodern as being somehow “outside” history, famously positioned at the end of ideology. Just as modernist manifestos talked of a clean break, so postmodernism was often understood as being decisively torn away from its past. From a privileged point “beyond” history, versions of the postmodern made an assault on the very idea of historical narrative, reconfigured now as contaminated master narrative and reinserted as wild fabulation and myth of modernity. It may have been “safest,” as Jameson announced in the early 1990s, to imagine postmodernism as “an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically in the first place,” but postmodern cultures were not greatly interested in safety. Jameson himself seemed ambivalent. At the very moment of appearing to seek refuge in historicism, he visualized the postmodern in more destabilizing, dazzling ways as “what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good.”³

Unsurprisingly such versions of the postmodern had a powerful impact on the discipline of history itself at the time, and the rumblings carried on well into the Noughties and beyond.⁴ Mainstream historians seemed willing to recognize that postmodernism had brought something significant to the practice of historical research but only up to a certain point. An on-line website, *Butterflies and Wheels*, specifically set up to counter what it called “pseudo science and epistemic relativity (aka postmodernism)” carried an article in late 2002, well past the heyday of postmodern proper, which outlined the value-added of postmodernism — or at least of a soft, easily assimilated version. According to the author of “Postmodernism and History” — Sir Richard J. Evans, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge — postmodernism had the beneficial effects of encouraging historians to,

take the irrational in the past more seriously, to pay more attention to ideas, beliefs and culture as influences in their own right, to devote more effort to framing our work in literary terms, to put individuals, often humble individuals, back into history, to emancipate ourselves from what became in the end a constricting straitjacket of social-science approaches, quantification and socio-economic determinism.

But things didn't end there. Making a historian's distinction between "moderate" and "radical," the latter taking its cue from "poststructuralism," the article continued on in rankled tones to worry away at what postmodernism in the extreme version might have done to historiography. Still mindful of postmodernism's potentially "corrosive" effect, it looked back to earlier skirmishes when figures like Keith Jenkins, historian of the French Revolution, Alan Munslow and Hans Kellner had led the postmodern charge inside the domains of academic history writing. Under the influence of Jean Baudrillard, Michel de Certeau, Robert Berkhofer, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Ernesto Laclau, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Hayden White and so on, such historians, so the argument went, had deskilled the history project — or, rather, all possible history projects. Here history writing became reduced to "just ideology," professional objectivity was rendered as farcical fantasy, historians wrote about "it" as though, paraphrasing Kellner, "it" were as real as the text which was "the object of their labours." Whatever reconciliatory noises could be made in 2002, Evans's article constructed a "radical" postmodernism that at its worst had threatened to condemn the past to the realms of the unknowable, with the result that all we would ever get to were "historians' writings." This was the vanishing point at which History disappeared leaving us with nothing but "historiography as a species of literary endeavour." Here postmodernism rendered any generalised version of the past both irretrievable and irredeemable as humanistic science.⁵

In fact great swathes of postmodern critical culture once tackled such issues without ever giving up on poststructuralism, history or necessarily losing out in terms of the radical edge. For many convenors of the postmodern in the Seventies, Eighties and beyond, the point was not to keel over from the initial onslaught of a conservative academy but, rather, to argue the case for a history, politics and ethics already “embedded” in contemporary aesthetics. Linda Hutcheon’s influential formulation, for instance, famously responded to the charge that postmodern culture was both ahistorical and ethically withdrawn by constructing an ambivalent complexity obsessed with its own textuality at the same time as it reached out to a much wider politics of contemporary culture and society. Her term for this kind of high-status textuality — “historiographic metafiction” — seemed to confirm the fear that history was in danger of become nothing more than a species of “literary endeavour,” at the same time as it challenged the notion of postmodernism as decontextualized intellectual faddism.⁶ For all these problematics and qualifications, however, one knows full well what Evans was getting at in his broadside and how from some perspectives *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* will, even now, appear as a doubtful endeavour indeed, a text which claims to produce a cultural history using methods once unravelled by postmodern criticality — although the central focus of study here is postmodern cultural practices rather than postmodern critical theory.

Pre-empting such criticisms, we would want to emphasize that now, in the early twenty-first century, things really have genuinely, rather than notionally, moved on — much further on than Evans thought in 2002. We are no longer locked in to the old arguments; nor were we by the onset of the noughties. By most contemporary accounts, even then we had gotten well past, or perhaps over, postmodernism. Certainly nothing could be clearer than that we had left its peak years behind us, presumably somewhere in the Seventies and Eighties, and its onset (whenever that was) even farther back. Literary and wider intellectual cultures

had already become positioned in different ways at the turn of the new century, outside or beyond postmodernity in cultures newly imagined through such concepts as Gilroy's post-racial "planetary humanism" (2000); Baumann's "soft" or "liquid" materiality (2000); Moraru's "cosmodernism" and a host of other related formulations.⁷

From our perspective, these episodes leading up to the now makes histories of the postmodern entirely viable. Enough time has elapsed for us to be able to discern more of the internal articulation of the "postmodern era" — its successive moments or phases. Looking back on what now emerges into view as "the major phase" of postmodernism, it is easier to grasp what Fredric Jameson calls the "dialectic of the break and the period" in late-twentieth-century cultural historiography. There is, Jameson says, "a twofold movement in which the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent and unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break; while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right".⁸ Bring enough reflective pressure to bear on a period, and it begins to look like a break; squint intently enough at a break, and it begins to look like a period. Squinting hard, then, at the postmodern break or moment, *The Cambridge History of Postmodernism* asks what kind of internal temporality can now begin to come into focus now and how we might begin to distinguish sub-periods and locate internal thresholds, constituent moments within the postmodern moment?

A historiography of the postmodern — break, period, interregnum?

How are historiographical problematics formulated in relation to postmodernism? As Jameson implies, however radical and subversive postmodernism may at one time have appeared, any serious historiography of its rise and fall would have to engage at some level with questions about continuity with what went before — this is the domain tackled in part

one of *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, entitled “Postmodernism before Postmodernity.” What would such an engagement imply? What would it mean to seek an alignment for the postmodern world and its fictions with such figures as Rabelais, Sterne, and Cervantes and, from a much later period, Nietzsche, Joyce and Beckett? Or to other forms outside the novel tradition, the tradition of shaped (concrete) poetry; the Romantic fragment-poem and aesthetics of the fragment generally; Renaissance court masque and its successors, fantastic opera, for instance, and popular analogues like pageant or pantomime; *Las Meninas* and self-reflective image-making and so on? Would the seeking of such precedents for “postmodern” culture — a lineal descent from the raucous, rebellious, “dialogic” cultures of the past — constitute a genuine piece of cultural archaeology, or signify no more than the familiar process of assimilation and authorization where the once edgy, dangerous and marginal became appropriated by revisionist centers? Or is there a more complex paradox here, as Lyotard asserted to much ridicule, where “a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern,” and “postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.”⁹ What would be the wider political and social contexts to such apparent continuities? What, for example, were the articulations made between postmodernist culture and the collapse of modernist progressivism marked by such events as the dismantling of mercantile national empires, the Holocaust, the spread of postcolonialism and the Cold War?

Subjecting postmodernism to such questioning would inevitably raise the issue of when the postmodern ‘age’ properly began. However problematic such an idea seems, cultural historians have been drawn to it. Though earlier dates have sometimes been advanced, a broadly consensual view might be that postmodernism can be dated to the “long Sixties,” spanning the years from the late Fifties to the early Seventies — Marianne DeKoven, for example, takes such a view.¹⁰ Particular years have been proposed, more or

less seriously, in the spirit of Virginia Woolf's dating of modernism to "On or about December, 1910."¹¹ 1958, advanced by the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins as the onset of what he called "postcognitive" art, once seemed compelling, but now seems too early, reflecting not postmodernism's onset so much as the achievement of "critical mass" by a certain American postwar avant-garde (Black Mountain, the New American Poetry, Higgins's own Fluxus circle, *etc*).¹² 1973, favored by Jameson and extensively documented by Andreas Killen, seems too late; it correlates more likely with the *relaunch* of postmodernism, its consolidation and the onset of its peak period.¹³ Roughly splitting the difference, one might venture the dating of postmodernism's onset to the year 1966. Other years (1967, 1968) no doubt have a stronger claim to attention in world-historical terms, but its relative lack of landmark events could actually strengthen 1966's appeal, making it a test-case for the hypothesis that movements in culture are *not* necessarily in synch with world-historical epochs; that asynchronicity, slippage, and semi-autonomy prevail across the different partial histories that make up capital-H History.

However the case is made, it is clear that postmodernism has an intimate relation with sixties culture. If one *were* trying to make the case for 1966's threshold status as a kind of Year Zero of cultural postmodernism, a place to begin might be architectural theory. Not one but two manifestos of what would come to be called postmodernism in architecture appeared in that year: Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, forerunner of his later polemics against modernist purism, and the Italian architect Aldo Rossi's *Architecture of the City*, which proposed a vision of architectural historicism and urban form at odds with orthodox modernism. Theory in general achieved breakthroughs on several fronts in 1966: in Paris, narratology was launched with the appearance of a special issue of the journal *Communications*, while poststructuralism arrived in the United States by way of a celebrated Johns Hopkins conference. Other European cultural imports of that year included

art-house films such as Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Masculine Feminine*, and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, which resonated with American "underground" cinema, such as Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. The reorientations of the year 1966 are symbolized by the re-envisioning of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books by Grace Slick in her song "White Rabbit"—the first of a series of postmodern *Alices* extending down to the present. A number of conspicuous art-world and rock-music careers hit speed-bumps in 1966 and underwent more or less drastic reorientations. Warhol renounced painting in 1966 (not for the first time; he had already renounced it in favor of film a couple of years earlier). Pushing his art further toward the "dematerialization" that became typical of postmodernism, he produced art environments such as the shiny, bobbing, helium-filled pillows of *Silver Clouds*, and mixed-media performances of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, featuring the Velvet Underground. Both the Beatles and Bob Dylan had highly creative years, and then stopped touring — the Beatles permanently, retreating from the road into the studio, Dylan only temporarily, after a motorcycle accident. The British science-fiction writer J. G. Ballard completed a tetralogy of apocalyptic science fictions begun in 1962, then reoriented his fiction toward the technological fetishism of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969) and *Crash* (1973). His American counterpart, Philip K. Dick, published three of his weakest novels in 1966, but spent the year writing the texts on which his posthumous fame would later rest — the ones that would form the basis of the films *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Total Recall* (1990) — as well as his masterpiece of world-unmaking, *Ubik* (published 1969).

Also in 1966 the Beat writer William S. Burroughs published a revised version of his 1961 text, *The Soft Machine*, the first of his full-length novels to employ cut-ups and fold-ins, while John Ashbery and Allen Ginsberg both published long poems produced by collaging found materials. Truman Capote launched the hybrid fact/fiction novel (*In Cold Blood*), Jean Rhys inaugurated the practice of postmodern "rewriting" of canonical texts (*Wide Sargasso*

Sea), and John Barth (*Giles Goat-Boy*) consolidated the encyclopedic “meganovel” genre that came to dominate American fiction in the postmodern era. Arguably the most important literary threshold of the year, however, was the one crossed by Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, by many accounts the text that marks the frontier between modernism and postmodernism. The postmodern emerges from this period and engages with it at fundamental levels, as the group of chapters in part two of *The Cambridge History of Postmodernism* — “The Long Sixties, 1954-75” — shows.

When did postmodernism reach its high tide mark, its “culmination”? The appearance of Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* in 1973 coincides with other indicators of the launch of postmodernism’s major phase around the years 1972-74. One of the most telling signs of its onset was the gradual adoption of the term *postmodernism* itself, first in literary studies — by Fiedler in 1970, Hassan in 1971 and Spanos in 1972 — then around 1975 by architects, who disseminated it to ever wider circles of the culture. Having learned how to name itself, postmodernism could now emerge as a concept, which it did from the late Seventies to the mid-Eighties in the writings of Lyotard, Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, and others. Thus, if postmodernism does not actually begin in 1973, it at least *brands* itself in that year. The “grand narrative of 1973” which, according to Joshua Clover, has yet to be told, would have to include the kind of synchronicities that Andreas Killen abundantly documents: the Yom Kippur War and the start of the Arab oil embargo, the Paris Peace Accords and the repatriation of the American prisoners of war, the beginning of the end of the Nixon presidency as details of the Watergate break-in emerged and so on.¹⁴

Moreover, 1973 saw the founding of the first fully neoliberal regime anywhere, in Chile, following Augusto Pinochet’s bloody, CIA-backed coup. Neoliberal economics seeks to “liberat[e] individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” It requires “the

construction of a ... market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism.” More typically associated with changes inaugurated a little later and with less overt violence — during the years 1978-80 when Deng Xioping began the liberalization of the Chinese economy, and Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were elected as (respectively) Prime Minister of Great Britain and President of the United States — nevertheless, Chilean neoliberalization came first. “Not for the first time,” writes David Harvey, “a brutal experiment carried on in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the centre.”¹⁵

In this perspective, postmodernism appears as something like the cultural expression of neo-liberalism, or of what Jameson calls “late capitalism,” roughly the same thing. The market-based, populist, consumerist, libertarian neoliberal regimes “proved more than a little compatible with that cultural impulse called “post-modernism” which had long been lurking in the wings but could now emerge full-blown as both a cultural and an intellectual dominant.” “Lurking in the wings” since at least the mid-60s, postmodernism seemed to step out into the spotlight around 1973.¹⁶

On the cultural front, 1973 was the year not only of postmodern architecture’s arrival on the scene, but also of the new, iconoclastic American “director’s cinema” (Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, Sam Peckinpah, Terrence Malick, Woody Allen). It was the year when reality TV (not yet called that) was invented in PBS’s *An American Family*; the year when the New York Dolls enjoyed their brief heyday, anticipating punk by several years; a year when Warhol was a ubiquitous figure in American culture, high and low. In other words 1973 is a year when world-historical and cultural-historical thresholds *do* appear to synch up.

Probably few would dissent from the proposition that the period between the early Seventies and the late Eighties represents the peak phase of postmodernist culture. This is the phase during which, in the wake of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “megafictions”

stalked the earth (John Barth, Robert Coover, Samuel R. Delany, Don DeLillo, Carlos Fuentes, William Gaddis, Alasdair Gray, Joseph McElroy, Salman Rushdie, Gilbert Sorrentino, *etc.*). The American metafictionists and surfictionists of the Fiction Collective defected from the publishing industry, while their European counterparts, the intransigent experimentalists of OuLiPo, broke through to a wider public with Italo Calvino's *If one a winter's night a traveler* and Georges Perec's *Life a User's Manual*. High theory flourished. Language Poetry emerged; so did the punk and hiphop sub-cultures, arguably reflecting the "postmodern" phases of their respective subcultural spheres. The magical realism of the Latin American literary "boom" of the Sixties was internationalized. Cyberpunk was invented, and along with it the blueprint for cyberspace, to be realized in the Nineties. The hierarchical structures of culture that kept the "high" and the "low" apart in separate categories suffered erosion, as witness phenomena as diverse as postmodern architecture, minimalist music, and the spectacular popular success of Umberto Eco's cerebral genre novel, *The Name of the Rose*. The fine arts, "dematerialized" in the late Sixties and early Seventies, was "rematerialized" again with the rediscovery of painting in the Eighties (Jean-Michel Basquiat, Eric Fischl, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Robert Yarber, the German and Italian Neo-Expressionists), driven by an overheated art market. This bare list subjects the era to drastic foreshortening, of course, but this material is substantively what we refer to when talk about postmodernism. All these developments are submitted to finer-grained analysis into successive mutations, constituent moments, sub-sub-periods in part three of *A Cambridge History of Postmodernism* — "The Major Phase: Peak Postmodernism, 1973-1991."

Inevitably, the next threshold in the history of postmodernism can only be 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Nineteen eight-nine is manifestly another of those watersheds where cultural-historical and world-

historical transitions coincide. But if 1989 is a threshold, the question is, the threshold of *what*? If it is a transition, a transition to *what*?

David Harvey's "new cosmopolitans" have been able to construct the transition in optimistic, if not euphoric terms.¹⁷ Figures like Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Beck and Moraru understand the nineties in terms of an overturning of imperialist relationality by planetary relationality, with the latter using the term "cosmodernism," to identify a cosmopolitanism stripped of that concept's inevitable association with "First World" privilege.¹⁸ Francis Fukuyama notoriously associated the watershed events of 1989 with the Hegelian "end of history."¹⁹ An alternative view might be Joshua Clover's, that 1989 signals not the end of history but, following Jameson, the end of historical *thinking* — not at all the same thing — or, in other words, the final triumph of postmodernism. In or about 1989, the promise, or threat, of postmodernism is finally realized in full. To use Jameson's formulation, "culture . . . become[s] the economic, and economics . . . become[s] cultural"; or, in Clover's own terms, henceforth "history is now itself pop, and pop, history".²⁰ By one account, then, 1989 ushers in the next big thing, while by another it marks the apotheosis of the same old same old: so, either *postpostmodernism*, or *more* postmodernism.

Philip Wegner takes a third more nuanced option where the "long Nineties," the phase after the symbolic turning-point of 1989, represents a kind of interregnum, a term taken up in part four of *A Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*. Here,

the 1990s are the strange space between an ending (of the Cold War) and a beginning (of our post–September 11 world), one of those transitional phases that . . . following the leads of Lacan and Žižek, I call the "place between two deaths." This place, located as it is between the Real Event and its symbolic repetition, is strictly speaking "non-historical," and such an "empty place" is experienced in its lived reality, as Žižek suggests, in a Janus-faced fashion. On the one hand, it feels like a moment of

“terrifying monsters,” of hauntings by a living dead past. Yet it is also experienced as a moment of “sublime beauty,” of openness and instability, of experimentation and opportunity, of conflict and insecurity — a place, in other words, wherein history might move.²¹

There is abundant evidence in the Nineties of the “openness and instability,” the “experimentation and opportunity,” the “conflict and insecurity,” the potential multi-directionality of history of which Wegner speaks. During this “strange interlude” in global affairs, the dualistic or Manichaeian world-view of the Cold War era was temporarily suspended, replaced by a vision of multi-polarity, or even *apolarity*, that was at once baffling, risky, and rich with possibilities, with implications and knock-on consequences extending beyond geopolitics as far as epistemology and metaphysics. Madeline Albright, President Clinton’s Secretary of State during this period, is quoted as saying, “It was like being set loose on the ocean and there wasn’t really any charted course.”²²

This condition of “being set loose on the ocean” also expresses itself through the cultural production of the Nineties, especially in the years immediately after the fall of the Wall. This was an episode of multi-polarity not only in world affairs, but also in culture and the arts. The early Nineties were the years of efflorescent multiculturalism and of the backlash against it in the so-called “culture wars.” It was the era of apartheid’s unraveling, reflected in William Kentridge’s “Drawings for Projection” (1989-2003), which captured the South African experience of living in an interregnum. Early-nineties culture was characterized by the proliferation and flowering of various subcultural and paracultural alternatives, including, as Clover reminds us, the brief heyday of grunge and the emergence of gangsta rap, as well as New Age spirituality and the short-lived utopian and communitarian phase of the Internet, before it was swept away in the frenzy of commodification and monetization that was the Dot-Com boom. As skeptical as Clover is

about the utopian potentialities of this early-Nineties episode, even he has to admit that “in such volatile moments, with one dominant toppling and another not yet consolidated, the field flies open, or at least so it feels.”²³

This volatility, the feeling of fields flying open, or of what Clover elsewhere characterizes as a sensation of “boundlessness,” is aptly symbolized by the popular iconography of the *angel* that was a hallmark of the era.²⁴ Angel iconography had already been revived in a secular context by a series of postmodernists since at least the late Sixties – Donal Barthelme, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Thomas Pynchon, James Merrill, Wim Wenders, Laurie Anderson – climaxing just as the Nineties opened in Tony Kushner’s Brechtian drama of the AIDS epidemic, *Angels in America*. From here, angel iconography, largely dissociated from orthodox religious contexts, was disseminated throughout popular culture, appearing on television and at the movies, on greeting-cards, calendars and T-shirts, on coffee-mugs and in coffee-table books. Angels were the perfect icons of the era, airborne figures of what Milan Kundera, in the title of his 1984 novel, had mordantly called “the unbearable lightness of being,” and what Jameson once called “the antigravity of the postmodern.”²⁵ Angels captured the experience of in-betweenness, volatility, multi-directionality, a bubble economy

The dark side of angel imagery is its capacity to reflect the experience of “ontological shock”: the shock of recognizing that there are other worlds besides this one, other orders of being beyond our own; that these other orders are at least potentially in communication with ours; that we live not in a single unitary world, but a *plurality of worlds*.²⁶ The term was coined by the controversial Harvard psychologist John E. Mack in response to the testimony of supposed alien abductees, and the motif of alien abduction is another of the hallmarks of the in-between era of the Nineties. The angels’ opposite number, their *dysphoric* counterpart, one might say, were the aliens of the science-fiction TV series *The X-Files* (1993-2002), whose nine seasons coincided almost perfectly with the interregnum.

The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature

Such then is the broad outline that circumscribes *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, less of an outline, in fact, than an interrogative zone. To know that we can historicize postmodernism in such ways does not make the historiographic practice any less difficult, complex or contentious. It is in the nature of the periodizing project that every gesture of temporal delimitation is a kind of experiment or enabling fiction, necessarily arbitrary, though not for that reason inconsequential. On the contrary, every such decision has knock-on consequences for the kind of period or sub-period one constructs and the kind of cultural-historical narrative one tells: choose a particular onset date or threshold moment, and particular continuities and discontinuities, causes and effects, themes and figures, leap into focus, while others recede into the background; choose a different date, and different continuities and discontinuities emerge.

This collection of essays is a coming to grips with the problematics of imagining a historiography of postmodern literature. We emphasize that the contributors to this collection have not signed up to any explicit historiographical manifesto as such, except in the sense that they were asked to construct their chapters around the relationship between cultural practice and the broader politics of the period, which implies the existence of a cultural dynamic which penetrated, or was penetrated, deeply. We suggested a periodizing framework, divided in certain ways, and devised a range of topics as a starting point. These were presented as guidelines rather than tablets of law. We kept things intentionally generalized in order to give our contributors as much opportunity as possible to develop their individual takes on things. At the same time we were drawn to certain themes and the kinds of issues that make any work of this kind challenging and exciting — cultural and political bias, the question of “objectivity,” the problem of presentism and so on. In short, we began

from the premise that any historiography of postmodernism worth a second glance would be controversial and contestable at virtually every point. From that position, we found a way of talking chronology about this subject, in the full knowledge that it would constitute more of a point of departure than a final destination.

Brian McHale

Len Platt

Notes

Parts of this introduction and the introductions to parts 2, 3 and 4 of this volume have been adapted from Brian McHale, “Break, Period, Interregnum,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3 and 57.4 (Fall/Winter 2011), 328-40 .

¹ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy: Earth Edition* (http://h2g2.com/edited_entry/A5140829, August 2014).

² Documenta is a periodic exhibition held at Kassel, Germany. It documents the latest trends in contemporary art every four or five years. For an account of his visit to Documenta 7 see Andreas Huyssen, “Modernity and Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* (Autumn, 1984), 5-51 [5-8].

³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 1.

⁴ For a fuller account of this impact see chapter 17 of this to this volume.

⁵ Richard J. Evans, ‘Postmodernism and History’, *Butterflies and Wheels*, 2002 (<http://www.butterfliesandwheels.org/2002/postmodernism-and-history>, August 2014).

⁶ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 12, 28-9.

⁷ See Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (2000; London: Routledge, 2004); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), Christian Moraru, *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

⁸ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 24. See also Phillip E. Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2000: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 20.

⁹ See Jean-François Lyotard, “Answer to the Question, What is Postmodern?” in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 13.

¹⁰ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.

¹² See Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes toward a Theory of the New Arts*. (New York: Printed Editions, 1978).

¹³ See Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006).

¹⁴ See Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown*.

¹⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7-8, 2, 9, 42,

¹⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 42.

¹⁷ David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 77-97

¹⁸ See Moraru, *Cosmodernism*.

¹⁹ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992)

²⁰ See Clover, 1989, 115, 109.

²¹ Phillip E. Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 24.

²² Quoted in Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror*. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2008), 69-70.

²³ Clover, 1989, 41.

²⁴ See Clover, 1989, 120.

²⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 101

²⁶ John Mack, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (New York: Scribner's, 1994), 26, 44.