

## POSTMODERNISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PROS AND CONS

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*Abstract: Any meaningful debate must be based on a thorough understanding of the opponent. It is especially true regarding such a controversial topic as postmodernism. However, on the question of what "is" postmodernism, many are engaging in not so much a dialogue as a monologue. This paper attempts to put into interaction Vincent B. Leitch, an American theorist and advocate of postmodernism, and German-Italian New Realism which opposes postmodernism. While the former conceptualizes postmodernism as a style, a philosophy, and a period, the latter characterizes it with ironization, desublimation, and deobjectification. Equally insightful but distinctively different, the two sides converge on their fundamental understanding of postmodernism as Constructivism, highlighting the cover and replacement of the real by discourse. Constructivism is the key to understanding postmodernism because only by breaking free from the shackles of the real can postmodern philosophy deconstruct subjectivity and can postmodern art make bricolage. With discourse, postmodernism subverts the modernity-defined relationship between man and the world.*

It may be a mistake to define postmodernism in the first place. Just as Marx rejected the "Marxism" title, none of the representative postmodernists such as Baudrillard, Foucault, and Derrida was a self-confessed postmodernist. So the word postmodernism designates, at best, the commonality of many theorists rather than one theorist who, even if he is by and large postmodern, can by no means be called a postmodernist. In fact, there is no pure postmodernist; all the thinkers are mixed, complex, and protean.

Given this, it is essential to make clear that when we talk about what postmodernism is, we are not talking about any individual theorist titled postmodern, but those common characteristics he or she shares with a community of similarly titled theorists. In this sense, postmodernism is not peculiar to any individual theorist but refers to a trend of thought, a climate, and an atmosphere to which none is immune. Even those highly critical of postmodernism, such as Habermas<sup>1</sup> and Terry Eagleton, are possessed by the ghost of postmodernism.

With all this in mind, we can forget whether one is willing to call himself a postmodernist or not and start our analysis and evaluation of their conceptualization of postmodernism which are nevertheless beneficial for us to grasp postmodernism as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Verovšek argued that Habermas, especially his works published after the 1990s, shared much in common with Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard. He called Habermas' philosophy a "weak form" of postmodernism, or "reluctant postmodernism," revealing the similarity between Habermas and postmodernism. (See Verovšek, 2022, 397-421)

### I. Postmodernism: Style, Philosophy, Period

In his book chapter titled “Postmodernism Revisited,” American theorist Vincent B. Leitch provided a penetrating analysis of postmodernism. Contrary to popular belief that postmodernism came to an end in 1990 around, he argued that postmodernism continued well into the second decade of the 21st century: “Postmodernism lives and continues to evolve. Sure to come, its end is not yet in sight.” (Leitch, 2014, 131) Seizing on the close relationship between postmodernity and modernity, he asked: “Modernity spanned 200 years, so why shouldn’t postmodernity exceed the few decades often hastily allotted to it?” (Leitch, 2014, 122) In support of his idea, Leitch cited the example of the ubiquity and pervasiveness of commercialization, the ever-changing financial tricks which caught one off guard, the continuous disintegration of organizational culture, the overlapping and confusion of identities, and the conflicts between the global and the local. His argument, however, is not necessarily convincing, as the same evidence can be useful ammunition for his enemy. David Harvey, for example, would argue that all the examples given are demonstrations of capitalist modernity. On more than one occasion, Harvey criticized the failure of “postmodern” and “postmodernism” to convey the idea they sought to express. While acknowledging the sea-change in cultural practices in the 1960s and 1970s, he believed that “these changes, when set against the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation, appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new postcapitalist or postindustrial society.” (Harvey, 1992, vii)

Leitch could not offer an accurate picture of what postmodernism is nowadays. He needs to have the ability to foresee its future. In other words, he may fail to depict the postmodernism at present and to predict the postmodernism yet to come. Nevertheless, his encapsulation of its past is clear and definite, succinct yet powerful, and sufficient to be passed on as valuable knowledge.

For Leitch, “postmodernism” is first employed as “a style”: “The canonical trait of postmodern architecture is pastiche, of postmodern painting appropriation, of postmodern cuisine fusion. Historical recycling and remixing are the primary cultural modes.” (Leitch, 2014, 121) Such a description is simple, but the author is even more sparing with words and yet more general in describing postmodern culture as a whole: “What most dramatically characterizes postmodern culture for me is disorganization.” (Leitch, 2014, 9) In contrast to the disorganization of postmodern culture, modernity is characterized by “the autonomies of art, science, religion and politics.” (Leitch, 2014, 68) This characterization is not difficult to understand. With enlightenment modernity, reason replaces God; reason becomes the new God. Since everyone has a reason and, therefore, divinity, everyone has autonomy.

It brings us to the second employment of “postmodern” as “a philosophy or movement”: “For philosophers, postmodernism signifies French poststructuralism, mainly works by Jean Baudrillard, Gill Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Jean-Francois Lyotard, with special emphasis on the transformation of reality into images, floating signifiers and simulations, disseminated by ever more ubiquitous media screens and spectacles.” (Leitch, 2014, 121) Foucault’s “the order of discourse,” Derrida’s “there is nothing outside the text,” Deleuze’s “non-representational difference,” Lyotard’s “grand narrative,”

Kristeva's "intertextuality" that triggers the "death of the author" (Roland Barthes), and Baudrillard's "simulacrum" that does not contain any realistic content, etc. are all concise expressions of this second meaning of postmodernism.

Apart from this, the main features of philosophical postmodernism are also summarized as "the death of man," "the death of history," and "the death of metaphysics." (See Flax, 1990, 32-34) It is undoubtedly accurate, but given the linguistic origin of poststructuralism (Saussure), Leitch's encapsulation of postmodernism as the transformation of reality into images, floating signifiers, and simulations, though short and oversimple, penetrates the core of postmodernism. To cut Leitch's encapsulation shorter, "Crisis of Representation" (Nöth, 2003, 9-15) would be a more economical term to express the origin and core of postmodernism both in linguistics and philosophy.

"Postmodernism" is also used to refer to "a period": "Cultural critics construe postmodernism as a period spanning from the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s up to the current (or alternatively ending in the 1990s) distinguished by, for example, the dramatic erosion of the traditional high/low culture distinction, the implosion of disciplinary autonomies, the rise of numerous innovative new social movements, and the global spread of extreme laissez faire economics." (Leitch, 2014, 122) Based on this, "postmodernism" refers specifically to the period after the 1960s, so it is incorrect to name postmodern the first half of the 20th century which shares none of the above characteristics.

Of the triple meanings of postmodernism, the period concept is given the most significant importance by Leitch. He believed it had long encompassed postmodern style and philosophy following Jameson's widely accepted broad usage of postmodernism in his *postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Leitch, 2014, 122) To understand it conversely, the postmodern period presents and represents postmodern style and postmodern philosophy. As such, it is more of a meaning-loaded theoretical concept than a temporal concept. Leitch argued that "as a period concept, postmodernism "continues to do useful work today," and "in its absence, contemporary history appears haphazard, chaotic and atomized." (Leitch, 2014, 122) Obviously, the postmodern period endowed with such a function has transformed into a theory or instrument. In terms of its essence, Leitch pointed out that "very often the term 'postmodernity' serves as a synonym for 'postmodernism.'" (Leitch, 2014, 122)

Leitch showed his infatuation with the period concept, especially its instrumental advantage, when he looked back on his life and academic experience: "When I first came to think about postmodernism, I naturally turned to painting as well as literature, philosophy and popular arts (I am a child of the 1960s). One of the genuine benefits of construing postmodernism as a period, not just as a school of philosophy or a style, is the necessity to explore political economy and society as well as the arts high and low. I find, in the period's food, wine, fashion, film, music, art, philosophy, religion, literature and theory." (Leitch, 2014, 10) According to Leitch, everything that belongs to the postmodern period is postmodern. It is not difficult to understand, for even traditions can be articulated to a new era and takes on their color, demonstrating the ability of the *Zeitgeist* to fashion everything.

Starting from the period concept rather than a school of philosophy or a style, one will understand the interrelationship between various phenomena and events of a period, that is, a comprehensive and holistic vision. It is a vantage point made

possible by period as contextualized. As we know, context is both temporal and spatial, thereby stereoscopic. Given the contextuality of the period concept and that everything or activity must exist in a particular context, “period” can even become a perspective and method in which all the styles and philosophies are studied.

For Leitch, “period” is not a general theoretical perspective or method. Instead, it is a postmodern one. The metaphysical totality that “period” seems to have on the surface is actually chaos, which means an all-encompassing “period” cannot be grasped by any single theory. Theory, therefore, has to be plural, interdisciplinary, and capitalized. It does not aim for truth but seeks to articulate a position. Hence a heteroglossia of theories. As Leitch wrote, such is the nature of postmodern theory: “Theory designates the historically new - a postmodern phenomenon that assembles and fuses modern disciplines and subdisciplines into a hybrid compound of literary criticism, linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, sociology, history, and political economy. As its critics point out, most contemporary theory is linked with standpoint epistemology, social constructionism, cultural relativism and popular culture, so it is very much a postmodern formation.” (Leitch, 2014, 56)

Leitch attributed the postmodern fusion of disciplines to the mixture of the objects of study, which was also a postmodern feature of theory: “The twenty-first-century theory renaissance takes a characteristically postmodern form, namely disorganization or disintegration of many subdisciplines, fields and topics.” (Leitch, 2014, vi) If the fusion of research methods derives from that of the objects of study, then the postmodern period can only be explained by postmodern theory. After giving various examples ranging from cultural hybridity to gene splicing and recombinant DNA, Leitch concluded that “the disaggregation and pastiche characteristic of postmodern times might be spotted anywhere in the culture.” “We need to account for these phenomena. Theory, itself a fusion, does that effectively.” Counting cultural studies, itself an interdisciplinary and hodgepodge, as part of the theory, Leitch believed “This kind of theory responds to its time,” a time when autonomy has been collapsing all around. (Leitch, 2014, 68-69)

Leitch declared himself a *Theorist* (big “T”). It is rooted in the fact that he is a theorist of an era, a “period.” He described himself as a child of the 60s, a time engraved on his soul when he was theoretically the most sensitive. Naturally, every bit of his theory is infatuated with this period. Period, obviously, is the basis upon which Leitch builds his entire edifice of postmodern theory.

This infatuation explains why Leitch was obsessed with the question of whether postmodernism had come to an end. There is a period to any period, after all. Leitch answered that postmodernism would continue well into the 21st century and be at least as long-lived as modernism. Whether this is true is not verifiable, as the future is not here and now. Theoretically, Leitch is not unreasonable when he asks rhetorically why postmodernity should not exceed the four decades allotted. Is not the fortress of modernism just too vincible if it takes postmodernism a mere 40 years to capture it? The fact is, modernism and its critique go hand in hand, just as where there is the Enlightenment, there is always the criticism of the Enlightenment. So as long as modernity does not end, postmodernism, as a reaction against it, will not sheath its weapons.

Nevertheless, there are several things that Leitch needs to realize. First, both modernity and postmodernity are theoretical “labels” for history and reality, and labels are by no means equivalent to the objects they refer to. It can be said that

even “postmodernism” is not a good umbrella to cover all the cultural phenomena in the second half of the 20th century. Secondly, “postmodernism” mainly designates some cultural phenomena that have emerged since the 1960s and are characterized by depthlessness, meaninglessness, fragmentation, hybridity, differentiation, pluralism, simulacrum, etc. However, poststructuralism, as a postmodern philosophy, does not necessarily signify these cultural phenomena or the period since the 1960s. Instead, it has its inherent logic and signified.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, poststructuralist theories, developed by Baudrillard and Jameson as a response to the above phenomena, begin to gain a life of their own once they are born. In other words, they continue to signify and be significant even if the culture they once signified is long gone. Leitch is not unaware. He concluded at the end of the book that “Theory in the sense of methods and approaches, perennial texts and intellectual problems, plus critique is alive and well.” (Leitch, 2014, 157)

Some researchers might take issue with Leitch on the originality of his description and definition of postmodernism. In response, Leitch wrote: “The question of originality has vexed me off and on throughout my career. Here’s my main concern. Should a historian aim for originality? I wonder. My predecessors, for example René Wellek, seek to be original?” (Leitch, 2014, 82) He defended himself more or less by explaining how he put into practice the imperatives he distilled for historians: atomize, totalize, pluralize. Whether Leitch is original or not depends on how originality is defined. Leitch may fail to develop a systematic theory as a theorist. However, he does provide us with a system of theoretical knowledge and a helpful textbook, both essential for any theorist who wants to create something original.

## II. Constructivism: How New Realism Defines Postmodernism

As the Chinese saying goes, pang guan zhe qing (Those closely involved cannot see

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<sup>2</sup> According to Perry Anderson, when Lyotard described “postmodernism” as the delegitimization of “grand narrative” or “meta-narrative”, he was not aware of the deployment of the term in architecture in North America. Nor did he specify when this delegitimization began. Similarly, when Habermas defined postmodernism as the colonization of the life-world, he did not specify when. As a result, “a concept by definition temporal lacks periodic weight in either.” Interestingly, Anderson believed that neither Habermas nor Lyotard ventured any exploration of postmodern forms to compare with the detailed discussions of Hassan or Jencks, resulting in a discursive dispersion of postmodernism: on the one hand, philosophical overview without aesthetic content; on the other aesthetic insight without coherent theoretical horizon. In other words, postmodern discourse is messy self-talk, lacking “intellectual unity” or systematic theory. (Anderson, 1999, 30, 45) Among many postmodern theorists, it is probably Jameson who can unify the three significant aspects of postmodernism, including style, period, and philosophy. That is why Anderson wrote, “Jameson’s marriage of aesthetics and economics yields a wondrous totalization of postmodern culture as a whole.” (Anderson, 1999, 132) Here, economics refers to the political framework Jameson used to describe postmodern culture: the division of capitalist periods by Mandel’s concept of “late capitalism.” That is to say, Jameson construes the postmodern stage in capitalist development when culture becomes coextensive with the economy. (See Anderson, 131) As for whether Jameson, as a Marxist critic, sees postmodern culture as a deepening of political criticism or as a retreat from the front line of political criticism, it is an exciting issue but not one to be discussed here..

as clearly as those outside). “Pang guan zhe” designates not only a non-intervention position but also an opposite one which entails both “going inside” and “emerging from within.” Moreover, the ability to take such a position defines a good opponent who, while intimate with his object and himself, remains “external” to both. Therefore, for a “pang guan zhe,” Bakhtin and Julian were only looking at one side of the same coin when they lavished praise on “externality,” a great asset in the knowing subject; they need to “go inside” the object so that it will have nowhere to hide.

Postmodernism has innumerable opponents, among which New Realism that has recently arisen in Germany and Italy is a good one. According to Marcus Gabriel, an Italian representative of New Realism, New Realism “describes a philosophical stance that designates the era after so-called postmodernity.” (Gabriel, 2015, 1) It “is nothing more than the name for the age after postmodernity.” (Gabriel, 2015, 2) How does New Realism describe postmodernism that it has left behind and overcome? As mentioned above, philosophical postmodernism turns everything in reality into words, texts, or images no longer relevant to reality. Gabriel called this “Constructivism,” which “assumes that there are absolutely no facts in themselves and that we construct all facts through our multifaceted forms of discourse.” (Gabriel, 2015, 3) He noted that even some less radical postmodernists, such as the American philosopher Richard Rorty, thought “that there might in fact still be something behind the world as it appears to us. However, this could play no role for us as human beings.” (Gabriel, 2015, 3)

It is easy to see how postmodernism, defined as Constructivism, continues Kant’s classical distinction of the thing in itself and its appearance to humans. It is in this sense that Gabriel argued, “Postmodernism was only yet another variation on the basic themes of metaphysics.” (Gabriel, 2015, 3) This thesis might confuse readers familiar with Derrida’s philosophy with the deconstruction of metaphysics at its heart. Now the question is, what is metaphysics for Gabriel? Does metaphysics mean the same thing for him as for Derrida? To illustrate his idea of metaphysics, Gabriel gave the example of color. Color, according to Gabriel, has been suspected to be non-existent ever since Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton. The world is entirely without color, and it consists only of elementary particles that strike human sensory receptors. This thesis “is a widespread form of metaphysics in our time. It claims that, in itself, the world is completely different than it appears to us and that everything that we know is made by us, and just because of this we are also able to know it.” The forefather of this tradition is Kant, though he was much more radical, since he went even further to claim that the assumption about particles in space-time was only a way in which the world, as it is in itself, appeared to us. (see Gabriel, 2015, 3-4)

Simply put, the human world is a humanized world. Having recourse to a metaphor by the German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist, Gabriel compared human intellect to a pair of “green glasses” through which all the objects we perceive are green, thus transforming Kant to the originator of Constructivism: “Constructivism believes in Kant’s ‘green glasses’.” And to Kant’s “green glasses”, “postmodernism added that we wear not only one but, rather, many glasses: science, politics, language games of love, poetry, various natural languages, social conventions and so on.” (Gabriel, 2014, 4) The “green glasses” turn everything into a complicated play of illusions in which we mutually assign each other a place in the world.

Gabriel concluded that “both metaphysics and constructivism fail because they understand reality unilaterally either as the world without spectators or, equally one-sided, as the world of spectators.” (Gabriel, 2015, 6)

Compared with Gabriel, Maurizio Ferraris, Italian philosophy and Gabriel’s senior, Gabriel offered a more systematic criticism of postmodernism. His *Manifesto of New Realism* is not so much a manifesto of the fundamentals of New Realism as a display of postmodernism it tries to criticize. Like Gabriel, Ferraris defined the nature of postmodernism as Constructivism, but he summarized postmodernity into three points.

The first is ironization, that is, putting everything that claims to be real between quotation marks: “Postmodernism marks the entry of inverted commas in philosophy: reality becomes ‘reality’, truth ‘truth,’ objectivity ‘objectivity,’ justice ‘justice,’ gender ‘gender,’ and so forth.” (Ferraris, 2014, 4) As for the significance of this quotation marking, Ferraris explained that given that postmodernists had great faith in a cultural turn, “namely, the prevalence of conceptual schemes over the external world,” there is nothing in the world but our construction mediated by conceptual schemes: “we never deal with things themselves but forever and only with mediated, distorted, improper phenomena that are therefore placeable between quotation marks.” (Ferraris, 2014, 6) Therefore, this recourse to inverted commas is a means for distancing from things themselves, a testament to Nietzsche’s meta-proposition anticipating postmodernism that there are no facts, only interpretations.

The second is desublimation, the idea that “Desire constitutes as such a form of emancipation, because intellect and reason are forms of dominion, and liberation must be looked for through feelings and the body, which are revolutionary per se.” (Ferraris, 2014, 4) As we know, the opposite of “sublime” is “sink,” “degenerate,” etc., and in the pyramid of “the sublime,” spirit and faith are on the top, while body and desire have to sit at the bottom. Ferraris’ desublimation shows the postmodernist obsession with the body or desire. In the view of Deleuze and Guattari noted by Ferraris,<sup>3</sup> discourse, order, system, organization, ethics, and society represented the suppression and discipline of desire. So emancipation and liberation are made possible only by a rebellion against all these forms of dominion, so that desire can extricate itself from the subject, object, or organ (organization) and return to itself, that is, to Nietzsche’s “will to power.”

The third point is deobjectification which means there is no objectivity or truth; anything that claims to be “objective,” “real” and “knowledge” is but “the manifestation of the will to power” and “an instrument of dominion or deceit.” (Ferraris, 2014, 13) If there is no “truth,” then “truth” becomes a “faith,” a “metaphor,” a “myth,” a “dream,” an appeal to “solidarity” or “community,” as Ferraris wrote: “friendly solidarity must prevail over an indifferent and violent objectivity.” (Ferraris, 2014, 4) For Ferraris, the work that best explained the prevalence of solidarity over objectivity came from Richard Rorty, who, in *Solidarity or Objectivity?* wrote: “For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one’s community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of ‘us’ as far as we can.” (Rorty, 2010, 395) This idea, however, is not

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<sup>3</sup> Ferraris noted in the footnote that his argumentation was based upon *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Deleuze and Guattari. (See Ferraris, 2014, 87)

just found in *Solidarity or Objectivity*. However, it marks Rorty's unswerving view as a pragmatist. Simply, it subordinates truth to goodness and insists that it is not desirable to love the truth, which serves no purpose. As a category of ethics and intersubjectivity, goodness requires neither metaphysics (truth) nor epistemology (correspondence). Therefore, "solidarity" or "goodness" is to pragmatists what "discourse" is to postmodernism, although "discourse" is not used in the critical sense.

Rorty admitted that pragmatism was not dissimilar to postmodernism since pragmatism denied a natural order that existed independently of human language and history. This denial assumed what Ferraris summarized as the "conceptual scheme over reality." So for Rorty, there could exist "a natural order," but only in language, and the more language is reflected on, the less nature is cared about. How similar is this to Nietzsche-inspired postmodernism? Nevertheless, Rorty was reluctant to use 'postmodernism' as an alternative to pragmatism because "postmodernism" had been so ruined by over-use that it led to a confusing blurriness. Indeed, cultural or artistic postmodernism is not identical to philosophical pragmatism. Rorty had no idea what the philosophical views of Nietzsche and such post-Nietzsche philosophers as Heidegger and Foucault (he might as well include postmodernist pragmatists like himself) had to do with the changes in architecture and painting. Nor did he see what they had to do with the new and frightening socio-political problems that confronted him. (See Rorty, 1997, 13-14) The way Rorty wanted to keep pragmatism separate from and uncontaminated by postmodernism, obviously, is unpalatable for Leitch, who favored an all-encompassing concept, namely, the period concept of postmodernism. (See Rorty, 1997, 13)

Ferraris traced the origin of postmodernism to Kant: "Following and radicalizing Kant, constructionists will confuse, without residues (i.e., also abolishing the noumenon), ontology with epistemology: what there is (and is not dependent on conceptual schemes) and what we know (and depends on conceptual schemes)." (Ferraris, 2014: 27) He even blended 'Kant' and 'Foucault' into 'Foukant' to show the close relationship between Kant and postmodernism and summarized the basic idea of Foukant as the following syllogism: "The real is constructed by knowledge which is constructed by power. Therefore, the real is constructed by power." (Ferraris, 2021, 20) To go deeper, if every piece of knowledge comes from structurally uncertain experience, as Hume argued, then Kant founds experience upon science, finding *prior* structures that stabilize its uncertainty and guarantee its general validity. Such *prior* structures are external conceptual schemes that precede experience and are universal rather than culture/context-specific. From them, science or scientificity is derived. And science, as Ferraris argued, "is the construction of paradigms," so "at this point experience will be construction too, namely, it will shape the world starting from conceptual schemes." (Ferraris, 2014,27) Finally, Ferraris suggested "abandoning Kant's Ptolemaic revolution and bringing ontological anthropocentrism to an end", while he was somehow tolerant of epistemological anthropocentrism: "Epistemologically, we can certainly do what we want, but ontologically, we must not make anthropocentric mistakes." (Ferraris, 2021, 36) As is shown here, Ferraris argued that postmodernism is anthropocentric, running contrary to what is generally believed. However, one does not need to disagree here, given that postmodernism is



skeptical about the subject and the self. We need to see the complex influence of Kant and Hegel on postmodernism and the postmodernist vanity of wanting “the real” it never gets.

### Conclusion

This paper claims no lofty goals; it is but an attempt to discuss some of the new thoughts on postmodernism that have arisen since the new millennium, especially in the recent decade, updating and increasing our inventory of postmodernist knowledge. It specifically chooses Leitch as the pro-postmodernist side and German and Italian New Realism as its opposite, hoping to achieve an intertextual interpretation. Widely different as their approach to postmodernism is, the two sides converge on several points. First, both believe that postmodernism is a form of constructivism; that is, the world is constructed by discourse, without which one cannot enter reality but through which one cannot enter reality. We can enter a reality constructed by our discourse or semiotic system. Second, both agree that postmodernism takes subjectivity as one of its targets for criticism. It was once proven to be a discursive construction concerning the Other but incapable of articulating with the real subjectivity’s authority and autonomy collapse. Hence, the failure of aesthetic autonomy; in the field of literary theory, the death of the author and the birth of textuality; culturally, the decline of the elite and the triumph of the plebeians. Such a collapse also illuminates such obscure anti-art practices as copying, montage, graffiti, and ready-made. When man fails to be the legislator of nature, everything he does will be disorganized. Postmodernism is a natural product of the development of Western history and even human history, that is, the plebeianization<sup>4</sup> of Western society since ancient Greek, a process marked by such important periods as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the postmodern society.

Given its purpose and scope limited, this paper cannot but leave several points unattended in its main body. As a remedy, the author likes to point out here the interactive and dialogic relationship between the real and discourse, autonomy and

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson wrote that the word plebeianization came from Brecht and was used by Jameson to refer to a leveling process: not democratization, which would imply political sovereignty is constitutively missing. Jameson’s account of this was more favorable than otherwise. (See Anderson, 1999, 111-112) However, plebeianization has a dialectical double bind. On one hand, it is described as “a destructive process that violently opens up the lifeworld of the common individual to capitalism,” and presents itself as “the penetration of the global system in everyday life.” From this perspective, plebeianization connotes “an existential reduction, subjective shrinking, depersonalization, and anonymity of the self.” Indeed, all the classical accounts of modernism tend to define plebeianization through tropes of historical decay, existential anguish, social fragmentation, linguistic failure, and subjective alienation. On the other hand, plebeianization is depicted as “the leveling impact of capitalist modernity on the private self” which “brings about (as the positive content of plebeianization) a greater recognition of the multiplicity of lives and the multitude of others. Rather than a nameless, faceless, and indistinct mass, plebeianization invokes a flexible conception of collectivity where the self can imagine a new set of anonymous, interchangeable associations with others.” (Oruc, 2013, 280-281) Either way, plebeianization offers a perspective on postmodern society and postmodernist culture. As for how to evaluate it, that is another question.

heteronomy. The idea that discourse isolates the real is over-simplistic. Discourse is an intellectual response of the subject to the object/the real. As such, it is both dialogic and reflection. It emphasizes the correspondence between words and the reality they represent and the way the subject reacts to the object, which is praxis-oriented. In human activities, the theory of reflection must be subordinated to dialogism, as human survival and interaction come first.

Similarly, it is not advisable to believe that autonomy is opposed to heteronomy. Autonomy is the autonomy of reason that necessarily involves social interaction, so the moral law upon which autonomy depends for its constitution must come from society and be interlinked. Moreover, once put into practice, this law manifests as social norms regulating the relationship between the self and the Other. Autonomy is heteronomy at once. Furthermore, even non-social desires are not dis-organizational or purely physical. Deleuze's "body without organs" is desire-free and thus a lump of dead matter. Desire is always a desire for something. Even seemingly unorganized inorganic substances, such as Deleuze's body without organs (organization), have their own structure and Schopenhauer's will, manifesting as desire. Everything in the world has its organization upon which it depends for survival.

Moreover, existence "demands" to be, that is, it desires to be. A society or community, as a whole, has its self-organization, autonomy, and desire, but what acts as its autonomy could be a heteronomy for individuals within it. Nevertheless, this heteronomy is made possible by laws shared between or among individuals. So it is partly, if not entirely, the autonomy of individuals. Even an individual is a community of differences, "a miniature spiritual society" to borrow from Hermans. (Hermans, 2022, 27) Therefore, its autonomy is heteronomy for its constitutive forces. Discourse, as a form of heteronomy, could be coercive or violent, but only partially, never entirely, as it always partially reflects the autonomy of individuals. No organization is possible if no individual identifies himself with it! From this perspective, one can easily see the one-sidedness of postmodernist resistance to discourse and its struggle for the emancipation of the body.

Postmodernism is still with us. Many problems it has raised remain unsolved today. As is discussed above, postmodernism in the sense of theory remains; it is a topic whose discussion can never be exhausted. Its eternality lies in the fact that it IS a philosophy. Pure or not, whether a philosophy of "style" or one of "period" matters little since the reason why style is a "style" and period a "period" is that both contain the element of identity which defines philosophy per se, albeit in unusual forms.

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