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Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective

Ihab Hassan

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Postmodernism once more—that breach has begun to yawn! I return to it by way of pluralism, which itself has become the irritable condition of postmodern discourse, consuming many pages of both critical and uncritical inquiry. Why? Why pluralism now? This question recalls another that Kant raised two centuries ago—“*Was heisst Aufklärung?*”—meaning, “Who are we now?” The answer was a signal meditation on historical presence, as Michel Foucault saw.¹ But to meditate on that topic today—and *this* is my central claim—is really to inquire “*Was heisst Postmodernismus?*”

Pluralism in our time finds (if not finds) itself in the social, aesthetic, and intellectual assumptions of postmodernism—finds its ordeal, its rightness, there. I submit, further, that the critical intentions of diverse American pluralists—M. H. Abrams, Wayne Booth, Kenneth Burke, Matei Calinescu, R. S. Crane, Nelson Goodman, Richard McKeon, Stephen Pepper, not to mention countless other artists and thinkers of our moment—engage that overweening query, “What is postmodernism?,” engage and even answer it tacitly. In short, like a latter-day M. Jourdain, they have been speaking postmodernism all their lives without knowing it.

But what *is* postmodernism? I can propose no rigorous definition of it, any more than I could define modernism itself. For the term has become a current signal of tendencies in theater, dance, music, art, and architecture; in literature and criticism; in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and historiography; in cybernetic technologies and even in the sciences.

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Indeed, postmodernism has now received the bureaucratic accolade of the National Endowment for the Humanities, in the form of a Summer Seminar for College Teachers; beyond that, it has penetrated the abstractions of "late" Marxist critics who, only a decade ago, dismissed postmodernism as another instance of the dreck, fads, and folderol of a consumer society. Clearly, then, the time has come to theorize the term, if not define it, before it fades from awkward neologism to derelict cliché without ever attaining to the dignity of a cultural concept.

To theorize postmodernism, though, is to change its character in the making no less than to acknowledge its errancies, vexations. These bear on problems of cultural modeling, literary periodization, cultural change—the problems of critical discourse itself in an antinomian phase.² Still, the exhaustions of modernism, or at least its self-revisions, have prompted incongruous thinkers to moot its supervention. Thus Daniel Bell, a "conservative" sociologist, testifies to "the end of the creative impulse and ideological sway of modernism, which, as a cultural movement, has dominated all the arts, and shaped our symbolic expressions, for the past 125 years."³ And thus, too, a "radical" philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, tries to distinguish—vainly, as I see it—between the "premodernism of old conservatives," the "antimodernism of the young conservatives," and the "postmodernism of the neoconservatives."⁴

This is neither the time nor the place, however, to theorize postmodernism in depth. Instead, I want to offer a catena of postmodern features, a paratactic list, staking out a cultural field. My examples will be selective; traits may overlap, conflict, antecede, or supersede themselves. Still, together they limn a region of postmodern "indeterminacies" (indeterminacy lodged in immanence) in which critical pluralism takes shape.⁵

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Here, then, is my catena:

1. *Indeterminacy*, or rather, indeterminacies. These include all manner of ambiguities, ruptures, and displacements affecting knowledge and society. We may think of Werner Karl Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, Kurt Gödel's proof of incompleteness, Thomas Kuhn's paradigms, and

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Paul Feyerabend's dadaism of science. Or we may think of Harold Rosenberg's anxious art objects, de-defined. And in literary theory? From Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic imagination, Roland Barthes' *textes scriptibles*, Wolfgang Iser's literary *Unbestimmtheiten*, Harold Bloom's misprisions, Paul de Man's allegorical readings, Stanley Fish's affective stylistics, Norman Holland's transactive analysis, and David Bleich's subjective criticism, to the last fashionable *aporia* of unrecorded time, we undecide, relativize. Indeterminacies pervade our actions, ideas, interpretations; they constitute our world.

2. *Fragmentation*. Indeterminacy often follows from fragmentation. The postmodernist only disconnects; fragments are all he pretends to trust. His ultimate opprobrium is "totalization"—any synthesis whatever, social, epistemic, even poetic. Hence his preference for montage, collage, the found or cut-up literary object, for paratactic over hypotactic forms, metonymy over metaphor, schizophrenia over paranoia. Hence, too, his recourse to paradox, paralogy, parabasis, paracriticism, the openness of brokenness, unjustified margins. Thus Jean-François Lyotard exhorts, "Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name."⁶ The age demands differences, shifting signifiers, and even atoms dissolve into elusive subparticles, a mere mathematical whisper.

3. *Decanonization*. In the largest sense, this applies to all canons, all conventions of authority. We are witnessing, Lyotard argues again, a massive "delegitimation" of the mastercodes in society, a desuetude of the metanarratives, favoring instead "*les petites histoires*," which preserve the heterogeneity of language games.⁷ Thus, from the "death of god" to the "death of the author" and "death of the father," from the derision of authority to revision of the curriculum, we decanonize culture, demystify knowledge, deconstruct the languages of power, desire, deceit. Derision and revision are versions of subversion, of which the most baleful example is the rampant terrorism of our time. But "subversion" may take other, more benevolent, forms such as minority movements or the feminization of culture, which also require decanonization.

4. *Self-less-ness, Depth-less-ness*. Postmodernism vacates the traditional self, simulating self-effacement—a fake flatness, without inside/outside—or its opposite, self-multiplication, self-reflection. Critics have noted the "loss of self" in modern literature, but it was originally Nietzsche who declared the "subject" "only a fiction": "the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all."⁸ Thus postmodernism suppresses or disperses and sometimes tries to recover the "deep" romantic ego, which remains under dire suspicion in post-structuralist circles as a "totalizing principle." Losing itself in the play of language, in the differences from which reality is plurally made, the self impersonates its absence even as death stalks its games. It diffuses itself in depthless styles, refusing, eluding, interpretation.⁹

5. *The Unpresentable, Unrepresentable*. Like its predecessor, postmodern art is irrealist, aniconic. Even its “magic realism” dissolves in ethereal states; its hard, flat surfaces repel mimesis. Postmodern literature, particularly, often seeks its limits, entertains its “exhaustion,” subverts itself in forms of articulate “silence.” It becomes liminary, contesting the modes of its own representation. Like the Kantian Sublime, which thrives on the formlessness, the emptiness, of the Absolute—“Thou shalt not make graven images”—“the postmodern would be,” in Lyotard’s audacious analogue, “that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself.”¹⁰ But the challenge to representation may also lead a writer to other liminal states: the Abject, for instance, rather than the Sublime, or Death itself—more precisely, “the exchange between signs and death,” as Julia Kristeva put it. “What is unrepresentability?” Kristeva asks. “That which, through language, is part of no particular language . . . That which, through meaning, is intolerable, unthinkable: the horrible, the abject.”¹¹

Here, I think we reach a peripety of negations. For with my next “definien,” Irony, we begin to move from the deconstructive to the coexisting reconstructive tendency of postmodernism.

6. *Irony*. This could also be called, after Kenneth Burke, perspectivism. In absence of a cardinal principle or paradigm, we turn to play, interplay, dialogue, polylogue, allegory, self-reflection—in short, to irony. This irony assumes indeterminacy, multivalence; it aspires to clarity, the clarity of demystification, the pure light of absence. We meet variants of it in Bakhtin, Burke, de Man, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White. And in Alan Wilde we see an effort to discriminate its modes: “mediate irony,” “disjunctive irony,” and “postmodern” or “suspensive irony” “with its yet more radical vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity.”¹² Irony, perspectivism, reflexiveness: these express the ineluctable recreations of mind in search of a truth that continually eludes it, leaving it with only an ironic access or excess of self-consciousness.

7. *Hybridization*, or the mutant replication of genres, including parody, travesty, pastiche. The “de-definition,” deformation, of cultural genres engenders equivocal modes: “paracriticism,” “fictual discourse,” the “new journalism,” the “nonfiction novel,” and a promiscuous category of “paraliterature” or “threshold literature,” at once young and very old.¹³ Cliché and plagiarism (“playgiarism,” Raymond Federman punned), parody and pastiche, pop and kitsch enrich *re*-presentation. In this view, image or replica may be as valid as its model (the *Quixote* of Borges’ Pierre Menard), may even bring an “*augment d’être*.” This makes for a different concept of tradition, one in which continuity and discontinuity, high and low culture, mingle not to imitate but to expand the past in the present. In that plural present, all styles are dialectically available in an interplay between the Now and the Not Now, the Same and the Other. Thus, in

postmodernism, Heidegger's concept of "equitemporality" becomes really a dialectic of equitemporality, a new relation between historical elements, without any suppression of the past in favor of the present—a point that Fredric Jameson misses when he criticizes postmodern literature, film, and architecture for their ahistorical character, their "presentifications."¹⁴

8. *Carnivalization*. The term, of course, is Bakhtin's, and it riotously embraces indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, selflessness, irony, hybridization, all of which I have already adduced. But the term also conveys the comic or absurdist ethos of postmodernism, anticipated in the "heteroglossia" of Rabelais and Sterne, jocosely pre-postmodernists. Carnivalization further means "polyphony," the centrifugal power of language, the "gay relativity" of things, perspectivism and performance, participation in the wild disorder of life, the immanence of laughter.¹⁵ Indeed, what Bakhtin calls novel or carnival—that is, antisystem—might stand for postmodernism itself, or at least for its ludic and subversive elements which promise renewal. For in carnival, "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal," human beings, then as now, discover "the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' . . . of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life."¹⁶

9. *Performance, Participation*. Indeterminacy elicits participation; gaps must be filled. The postmodern text, verbal or nonverbal, invites performance: it wants to be written, revised, answered, acted out. Indeed, so much of postmodern art calls itself performance, as it transgresses genres. As performance, art (or theory for that matter) declares its vulnerability to time, to death, to audience, to the Other.¹⁷ "Theatre" becomes—to the edge of terrorism—the active principle of a paratactic society, decanonized if not really carnivalized. At its best, as Richard Poirier contends, the performing self expresses "an energy in motion, an energy with its own shape"; yet in its "self-discovering, self-watching, finally self-pleasuring response to . . . pressures and difficulties," that self may also veer toward solipsism, lapse into narcissism.¹⁸

10. *Constructionism*. Since postmodernism is radically tropic, figurative, irrealist—"what can be thought of must certainly be a fiction," Nietzsche thought¹⁹—it "constructs" reality in post-Kantian, indeed post-Nietzschean, "fictions."²⁰ Scientists seem now more at ease with heuristic fictions than many humanists, last realists of the West. (Some literary critics even kick language, thinking thus to stub their toes on a stone.) Such effective fictions suggest the growing intervention of mind in nature and culture, an aspect of what I have called the "new gnosticism" evident in science and art, in social relations and high technologies.²¹ But constructionism appears also in Burke's "dramatic criticism," Pepper's "world hypothesis," Goodman's "ways of worldmaking," White's "prefigurative moves," not to mention current hermeneutic or post-structuralist theory. Thus post-

modernism sustains the movement “from unique truth and a world fixed and found,” as Goodman remarked, “to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions or worlds in the making.”²²

11. *Immanence*. This refers, without religious echo, to the growing capacity of mind to generalize itself through symbols. Everywhere now we witness problematic diffusions, dispersals, dissemination; we experience the extension of our senses, as Marshall McLuhan crankily presaged, through new media and technologies. Languages, apt or mendacious, reconstitute the universe—from quasars to quarks and back, from the lettered unconscious to black holes in space—reconstitute it into signs of their own making, turning nature into culture, and culture into an immanent semiotic system. The language animal has emerged, his/her measure the intertextuality of all life. A patina of thought, of signifiers, of “connections,” now lies on everything the mind touches in its gnostic (noö)sphere, which physicists, biologists, and semioticians, no less than mystic theologians like Teilhard de Chardin explore. The pervasive irony of their explorations is also the reflexive irony of mind meeting itself at every dark turn.²³ Yet in a consuming society such immanences can become more vacuous than fatidic. They become, as Jean Baudrillard says, pervasively “ob-scene,” a “collective vertigo of neutralization, a forward escape into the obscenity of pure and empty form.”²⁴

These eleven “definiens” add up to a surd, perhaps absurd. I should be much surprised if they amounted to a definition of postmodernism, which remains, at best, an equivocal concept, a disjunctive category, doubly modified by the impetus of the phenomenon itself and by the shifting perceptions of its critics. (At worst, postmodernism appears to be a mysterious, if ubiquitous, ingredient—like raspberry vinegar, which instantly turns any recipe into *nouvelle cuisine*.)

Nor do I believe that my eleven “definiens” serve to distinguish postmodernism from modernism; for the latter itself abides as a fierce evasion in our literary histories.²⁵ But I do suggest that the foregoing points—elliptic, cryptic, partial, provisional—argue twin conclusions: (a) *critical pluralism is deeply implicated in the cultural field of postmodernism*; and (b) *a limited critical pluralism is in some measure a reaction against the radical relativism, the ironic indeterminacies, of the postmodern condition; it is an attempt to contain them*.

3

So far, my argument has been prelude. I must now attend to those efforts which seek to limit—quite rightly, I believe—the potential anarchy

of our postmodern condition with cognitive, political, or affective constraints. That is, I must briefly consider criticism as genre, power, and desire—as Kenneth Burke did, long ago, in his vast synoptics of motives.

Is criticism a genre? Critical pluralists often suppose that it may be so.²⁶ Yet even that most understanding of pluralists, Wayne Booth, is forced finally to admit that a full “methodological pluralism,” which must aspire to a perspective on perspectives, only “seems to duplicate the problem with which we began”; so he concludes, “I cannot promise a finally satisfactory encounter with these staggering questions, produced by my simple effort to be a good citizen in the republic of criticism.”²⁷ Booth’s conclusion is modest but also alert. He knows that the epistemic foundations of critical pluralism themselves rest on moral, if not spiritual, grounds. “Methodological perspectivism” (as he sometimes calls his version of pluralism) depends on “shared tenancies” which in turn depend on a constitutive act of rational, just, and vitally sympathetic understanding. In the end, Booth stands on a kind of Kantian—or is it Christian?—categorical imperative of criticism, with all that it must ethically and metaphysically imply.

Could it have been otherwise? Throughout history, critics have disagreed, pretending to make systems out of their discord and epistemic structures out of their beliefs. The shared tenancies of literary theory may make for hermeneutical communities of provisional trust, enclaves of genial critical authority. But can any of these define criticism both as a historical and cognitive genre? That may depend on what we intend by genre. Traditionally, genre assumed recognizable features within a context of both persistence and change; it was a useful assumption of identity upon which critics (somewhat like Stanley and Livingstone) often presumed. But that assumption, in our heteroclitic age, seems ever harder to maintain. Even genre theorists invite us, nowadays, to go beyond genre—“the finest generic classifications of our time,” Paul Hernadi says, “make us look beyond their immediate concern and focus on the *order of literature*, not on *borders between literary genres*.”²⁸ Yet the “order of literature” itself has become moot.

In boundary genres particularly—and certain kinds of criticism may have become precisely that—the ambiguities attain new heights of febrile intensity. For as Gary Saul Morson notes, “it is not meanings but appropriate procedures for discovering meaning” that become disputable—“not particular readings, but how to read.”²⁹ Since genres find their definition, *when* they find any, not only in their formal features but also in labile interpretive conventions, they seldom offer a stable, epistemic norm. This makes for certain paradoxes in the “law of genre,” as Derrida lays it, a “mad law,” though even madness fails to define it. As one might expect from the magus of our deconstructions, Derrida insists on undoing genre, undoing its gender, nature, and potency, on exposing the enigma of its “exemplarity.” The mad “law of genre” yields only to the “law of the law

of genre”—“a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy.”³⁰

One is inclined to believe that even without the de-creations of certain kinds of writing, like my own paracriticism, the configurations we call literature, literary theory, criticism, have now become (quite like postmodernism itself) “essentially contested concepts,” horizons of eristic discourse.³¹ Thus, for instance, the latest disconfirmation of critical theory, the latest “revisionary madness” is Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels’ statement against theory.³² Drawing on the pragmatism of Richard Rorty and the stylistics of Stanley Fish, the authors brilliantly, berserkly contend that “true belief” and “knowledge” are epistemologically identical, that critical theory has no methodological consequences whatever. “If our arguments are true, they can have only one consequence . . . ; theory should stop,” the authors conclude.³³ In fact it is their own conclusion that will have little consequence, as Knapp and Michaels themselves admit. So much, then, for the case of the self-consuming theorist.

My own conclusion about the theory and practice of criticism is securely unoriginal: like all discourse, criticism obeys human imperatives, which continually redefine it. It is a function of language, power, and desire, of history and accident, of purpose and interest, of value. Above all, it is a function of *belief*, which reason articulates and consensus, or authority, both enables and constrains.³⁴ (This statement itself expresses a reasoned belief.) If, then, as Kuhn claims, “competing schools, *each of which constantly questions the very foundations of the others*” reign in the humanities; if, as Victor Turner thinks, the “culture of any society at any moment is more like the debris, or ‘fall out’ of past ideological systems, rather than itself a system”; if also, as Jonathan Culler contends, “‘interpretive conventions’ . . . should be seen as part of . . . [a] boundless context”; again, if as Jeffrey Stout maintains, “theoretical terms should serve interests and purposes, not the other way around”; and if, as I submit, the principles of literary criticism are historical (that is, at once arbitrary, pragmatic, conventional, and contextual, in any case not axiomatic, apodictic, apophantic), then how can a generic conception of criticism limit critical pluralism or govern the endless deferrals of language, particularly in our indetermanent, our postmodern period?³⁵

4

To exchange a largely cognitive view of our discipline for another that more freely admits politics, desires, beliefs is not necessarily to plunge into Hades or ascend Babel. It is, I think, an act of partial lucidity, responsive to our ideological, our human needs. The act, I stress, remains partial, as I hope will eventually become clear. For the moment, though,

I must approach power as a constraint on postmodern relativism and, thus, as a factor in delimiting critical pluralism.

No doubt, the perception that power profoundly engages knowledge reverts to Plato and Aristotle, if not to the *I Ching* and the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. In the last century, Marx theorized the relation of culture to class; his terms persist in a variety of movements, from totemic Marxism to Marxism with a deconstructionist mask or receptionist face. But it is Foucault, of course, who has given us the most cunning speculations on the topic.³⁶ The whole burden of his work, since *Folie et déraison* (1961), has been to expose the power of discourse and the discourse of power, to discover the politics of knowledge. More recently, though, his ideology had become antic, to the chagrin of his orthodox critics.

Foucault still maintained that discursive practices “are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behavior, in forms of transmission and diffusion.”³⁷ But he also accepted the Nietzschean premise that a selfish interest precedes all power and knowledge, shaping them to its own volition, pleasure, excess. Increasingly, Foucault saw power itself as an elusive relation, an immanence of discourse, a conundrum of desire: “It may be that Marx and Freud cannot satisfy our desire for understanding this enigmatic thing which we call power, which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous,” he remarks.³⁸ That is why, in his late essay “The Subject and Power,” Foucault seemed more concerned with promoting “new kinds of subjectivity” (based on a refusal of those individual identities which states force upon their citizens) than with censuring traditional modes of exploitation.³⁹

In a Foucauldian perspective, then, criticism appears as much a discourse of desire as of power, a discourse, anyway, both conative and affective in its personal origins. A neo-Marxist like Jameson, however, would found criticism on collective reality. He would distinguish and “spell out the priority, within the Marxist tradition, of a ‘positive hermeneutic’ based on social class from those [‘negative hermeneutics’] still limited by anarchist categories of the individual subject and individual experience.”⁴⁰ Again, a leftist critic like Edward Said would insist that the “realities of power and authority . . . are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics.”⁴¹

Other critics, less partisan and less strenuously political, might concur. Indeed, the “institutional view” of both literature and criticism now prevails among critics as incongruous in their ideologies as Bleich, Booth, Fish, Donald Davie, E. D. Hirsch, Frank Kermode, and Richard Ohmann. Here, bravely, is Bleich:

Literary theory should contribute to the changing of social and professional institutions such as the public lecture, the convention

presentation, the classroom, and the processes of tenure and promotion. Theoretical work ought to show how and why no one class of scholars, and no one subject (including theory) is self-justifying, self-explanatory, and self-sustaining.⁴²

The ideological concern declares itself everywhere. A bristling issue of *Critical Inquiry* explores the “politics of interpretation,” and the facile correlation of ideology with criticism drives a critic even so disputatious as Gerald Graff to protest the “pseudo-politics of interpretation” in a subsequent number.⁴³ At the same time, a critic as exquisitely reticent as Geoffrey Hartman acknowledges the intrusions of politics in his recent work.⁴⁴ The activities of GRIP (acronym for the Group for Research on the Institutionalization and Professionalization of Literary Study) seem as ubiquitous as those of the KGB or the CIA, though far more benign. And the number of conferences on “Marxism and Criticism,” “Feminism and Criticism,” “Ethnicity and Criticism,” “Technology and Criticism,” “Mass Culture and Criticism,” keeps American airports snarled and air carriers in the black.

All these, of course, refract the shifts in our “myths of concern” (Northrop Frye’s term) since the fifties. But they reflect, too, the changes in our idea of criticism itself, from a Kantian to a Nietzschean, Freudian, or Marxist conception (to name but three), from an ontological to a historical apprehension, from a synchronous or generic discourse to a diachronic or conative activity. The recession of the neo-Kantian idea, which extends through Ernst Cassirer, Suzanne Langer, and the old New Critics, ambiguously to Murray Krieger, implies another loss—that of the imagination as an autochthonous, autotelic, possibly redemptive power of mind. It is also the loss, or at least dilapidation, of the “imaginary library,” a total order of art, analogous to André Malraux’s *musée imaginaire*, which triumphs over time and brute destiny.⁴⁵ That ideal has now vanished; the library itself may end in rubble. Yet in our eagerness to appropriate art to our own circumstances and exercise our will on texts, we risk denying those capacities—not only literary—which have most richly fulfilled our historical existence.

I confess to some distaste for ideological rage (the worst are now full of passionate intensity *and* lack all conviction) and for the hectoring of both religious and secular dogmatists.⁴⁶ I admit to a certain ambivalence toward politics, which can overcrowd our responses to both art and life. For what is politics? Simply, the right action when ripeness calls. But what is politics again? An excuse to bully or shout in public, vengeance vindicating itself as justice and might pretending to be right, a passion for self-avoidance, immanent mendacity, the rule of habit, the place where history rehearses its nightmares, the *dur désir de durer*, a deadly banality of being. Yet we must all heed politics because it structures our

theoretical consents, literary evasions, critical recusancies—shapes our ideas of pluralism even as I write here, now.

5

Politics, we know, becomes tyrannical. It can dominate other modes of discourse, reduce all facts of the human universe—error, epiphany, chance, boredom, pain, dream—to its own terms. Hence the need, as Kristeva says, for a “psychoanalytic intervention . . . a counterweight, an antidote, to political discourse which, without it, is free to become our modern religion: the final explanation.”⁴⁷ Yet the psychoanalytic explanation can also become as reductive as any other, unless desire itself qualifies its knowledge, its words.

I mean desire in the largest sense—personal and collective, biological and ontological, a force that writers from Hesiod and Homer to Nietzsche, William James, and Freud have reckoned with. It includes the Eros of the Universe which Alfred North Whitehead conceived as “the active entertainment of all ideals, with the urge to their finite realization, each in its due season.”⁴⁸ But I mean desire also in its more particular sense, which Paul Valéry understood when he wryly confessed that every theory is a fragment of an autobiography. (Lately, the fragments have grown larger, as anyone who follows the oedipal *psychomachia* of critics must agree.) And I mean desire, too, as an aspect of the pleasure principle, that principle so freely invoked and seldom evident in criticism.

Here Barthes comes elegantly to mind. For him, the pleasure of the text is perverse, polymorph, created by intermittences of the body even more than of the heart. Rupture, tear, suture, scission enhance that pleasure; so does erotic displacement. “The text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*,” he confides.⁴⁹ Such a text eludes judgment by anterior or exterior norms. In its presence, we can only cry, “That’s it for me!” This is the Dionysiac cry par excellence—Dionysiac, that is, in that peculiarly Gallic timbre. Thus, for Barthes, the pleasure of the text derives both from the body’s freedom to “pursue its own ideas” and from “value shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier.”⁵⁰

We need not debate here the celebrated, if dubious, distinctions Barthes makes in that talismanic text; we need only note that pleasure becomes a constitutive critical principle in his later work. Thus in *Leçon*, his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Barthes insists on the “truth of desire” which discovers itself in the multiplicity of discourse: “*autant de langages qu’il y a de désirs*.”⁵¹ The highest role of the professor is to make himself “fantasmic,” to renew his body so that it becomes contemporaneous with his students, to unlearn (*désapprendre*). Perhaps

then he can realize true *sapientia*: “*nul pouvoir, un peu de savior, un peu de sagesse, et le plus de saveur possible.*”⁵²

Fragments of a Lover's Discourse shows a darker side of desire; for pain and solitude here attend the subject more than delight. Simulating discretely a lover's speech, rendering it in broken figures such as a modern dancer may perform, Barthes presents us with an encyclopedia of affective culture ordered by no principle other than the alphabet of desire. Yet the spirit of the Erinyes pervades the work's pages; and the text to which it always returns, without ever leaving, is that incontinent book of love, death, and madness, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which so many in Europe read and, reading, learned to sigh and die. Thus both love and suicide become textual mimesis: in the book of Barthes, language and desire meet continually at the limits of their mutual destruction. There is no possibility of explication, of hermeneutics, in this forlorn, imaginary confession which strokes language in erotic foreplay: “*Je frotte mon langage contre l'autre. C'est comme si j'avais des mots en guise de doigts.*”⁵³

Other versions of this critical suasion come easily to mind.⁵⁴ But my point is not only that critical theory is a function of our desires, nor simply that criticism often takes pleasure or desire as its concern, its theme. My point is rather more fundamental: much current criticism conceives language and literature themselves as organs of desire, to which criticism tries to adhere erotically (“*se coller*,” Barthes says), stylistically, even epistemically. “Desire and the desire to know are not strangers to each other,” Kristeva notes; and “interpretation is infinite because Meaning is made infinite by desire.”⁵⁵ Happily, this last remark leads into my inconclusion.

Let me recover, though, the stark lineaments of my argument. Critical pluralism finds itself implicated in our postmodern condition, in its relativisms and indeterminacies, which it attempts to restrain. But cognitive, political, and affective restraints remain only partial. They all finally fail to delimit critical pluralism, to create consensual theory or practice—witness the debates of this conference. Is there anything, in our era, that *can* found a wide consensus of discourse?

6

Clearly, the imagination of postmodern criticism is a disestablished imagination. Yet clearly, too, it is an intellectual imagination of enormous vibrancy and scope. I share in its excitement, my own excitement mixed with unease. That unease touches more than our critical theories; it engages the nature of authority and belief in the world. It is the old Nietzschean cry of nihilism: “the desert grows!” God, King, Father, Reason, History, Humanism have all come and gone their way, though their power may still flare up in some circles of faith. We have killed our

gods—in spite or lucidity, I hardly know—yet we remain ourselves creatures of will, desire, hope, belief. And now we have nothing—nothing that is not partial, provisional, self-created—upon which to found our discourse.

Sometimes I imagine a new Kant, come out of Königsberg, spirited through the Iron Curtain. In his hand he holds the “fourth critique,” which he calls *The Critique of Practical Judgment*. It is a masterwork, resolving all the contradictions of theory and praxis, ethics and aesthetics, metaphysical reason and historical life. I reach for the sublime treatise; the illustrious ghost disappears. Sadly, I turn to my bookshelf and pick out William James’ *The Will to Believe*.

Here, it seems, is friendly lucidity, and an imagination that keeps reason on the stretch. James speaks crucially to our condition in a “pluralistic universe.” I let him speak:

He who takes for his hypothesis the notion that it [pluralism] is the permanent form of the world is what I call a radical empiricist. For him the crudity of experience remains an eternal element thereof. There is no possible point of view from which the world can appear an absolutely single fact.⁵⁶

This leaves the field open to “willing nature”:

When I say “willing nature,” I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from,—I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact we find ourselves believing, we hardly know how or why. [W, p. 9]

This was written nearly a century ago and remains—so I *believe*—impeccable, unimpugnable. It proposes a different kind of “authority” (lower case), pragmatic, empirical, permitting pluralist beliefs. Between these beliefs, there can be only continual negotiations of reason and interest, mediations of desire, transactions of power or hope. But all these still rest on, rest in, beliefs, which James knew to be the most interesting, most valuable, part of man. In the end, our “passional nature,” he says, decides “*an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds*” (W, p. 11). James even suggests that, biologically considered, “our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, ‘Better go without belief forever than believe a lie!’ merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe” (W, p. 18).

Contemporary pragmatists, like Rorty, Fish, or Michaels, may not follow James so far. Certainly they would balk, as do most of us now, when James’ language turns spiritual:

Is it not sheer dogmatic folly to say that our inner interests can have no real connection with the forces that the hidden world may contain? . . . And if needs of ours outrun the visible universe, why *may* not that be a sign that an invisible universe is there? . . . God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. [*W*, pp. 55, 56, 61]

I do not quote this passage to press the claims of metaphysics or religion. I do so only to hint that the *ultimate* issues of critical pluralism, in our postmodern epoch, point that way. And why, particularly, in our postmodern epoch? Precisely because of its countervailing forces, its indeterminances. Everywhere now we observe societies riven by the double and coeval process of planetization and retribalization, totalitarianism and terror, fanatic faith and radical disbelief. Everywhere we meet, in mutant or displaced forms, that conjunctive/disjunctive technological rage which affects postmodern discourse.

It may be that some rough beast will slouch again toward Bethlehem, its haunches bloody, its name echoing in our ears with the din of history. It may be that some natural cataclysm, world calamity, or extraterrestrial intelligence will shock the earth into some sane planetary awareness of its destiny. It may be that we shall simply bungle through, muddle through, wandering in the "desert" from oasis to oasis, as we have done for decades, perhaps centuries. I have no prophecy in me, only some slight foreboding, which I express now to remind myself that all the evasions of our knowledge and actions thrive on the absence of consensual beliefs, an absence that also energizes our tempers, our wills. This is our postmodern condition.

As to things nearer at hand, I openly admit: I do not know how to prevent critical pluralism from slipping into monism or relativism, except to call for pragmatic constituencies of knowledge which would share values, traditions, expectancies, goals. I do not know how to make our "desert" a little greener, except to invoke enclaves of genial authority where the central task is to restore civil commitments, tolerant beliefs, critical sympathies.⁵⁷ I do not know how to give literature or theory or criticism a new hold on the world, except to re-mythify the imagination, at least locally, and bring back the reign of wonder into our lives. In this, my own elective affinities remain with Emerson: "Orpheus is no fable: you have only to sing, and the rocks will crystallize; sing, and the plant will organize; sing, and the animal will be born."⁵⁸

But who nowadays believes it?

1. "Maybe the most certain of all philosophical problems is the problem of the present time, of what we are, in this very moment," writes Michel Foucault in "The Subject and Power," reprinted as "Afterword" in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago, 1982), p. 210. The essay also appeared in *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982): 777–96.

2. I have discussed some of these problems in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2d ed. (Madison, Wis., 1982), pp. 262–68. See also Claus Uhlig, “Toward a Chronology of Change,” Dominick LaCapra, “Intellectual History and Defining the Present as ‘Postmodern,’” and Matei Calinescu, “From the One to the Many: Pluralism in Today’s Thought,” in *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*, ed. Hassan and Sally Hassan (Madison, Wis., 1983).

3. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, 1976), p. 7.

4. Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 13.

5. For an elaboration of “indeterminance,” see my *The Right Promethean Fire: Imagination, Science, and Cultural Change* (Urbana, Ill., 1980), pp. 89–124. Though postmodernism is a far more inclusive phenomenon than post-structuralism, the latter is more familiar in academic circles.

6. Jean-François Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?” trans. Régis Durand, in *Innovation/Renovation*, p. 341. On the paratactic style in art and society, see also Hayden White, “The Culture of Criticism,” in *Liberations: New Essays on the Humanities in Revolution*, ed. Hassan (Middletown, Conn., 1971), pp. 66–69; and see William James on the affinities between parataxis and pluralism: “It may be that some parts of the world are connected so loosely with some other parts as to be strung along by nothing but the copula *and*. . . . This pluralistic view, of a world of *additive* constitution, is one that pragmatism is unable to rule out from serious consideration” (“Pragmatism,” and *Four Essays from “The Meaning of Truth”* [New York, 1955], p. 112).

7. See Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979). For other views of decanonization, see *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, ed. Leslie Fiedler and Houston A. Baker, Jr., Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979, n.s. 4 (Baltimore, 1981), and *Critical Inquiry* 10 (Sept. 1983).

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, 1967), p. 199; see Wylie Sypher, *Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York, 1962); see also the discussion of the postmodern self in Charles Caramello, *Silverless Mirrors: Book, Self, and Postmodern American Fiction* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1983).

9. The refusal of depth is, in the widest sense, a refusal of hermeneutics, the “penetration” of nature or culture. It manifests itself in the white philosophies of post-structuralism as well as in various contemporary arts. See, for instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1965), pp. 49–76, and Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York, 1966), pp. 3–14.

10. Lyotard, “Answering the Question,” p. 340. See also the perceptive discussion of the politics of the sublime by White, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,” *Critical Inquiry* 9 (Sept. 1982): 124–28.

11. Julia Kristeva, “Postmodernism?” in *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, ed. Harry R. Garvin (Lewisburg, Pa., 1980), p. 141. See also her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1982), and her most recent discussion of “the unnameable” in “Psychoanalysis and the Polis,” trans. Margaret Waller, *Critical Inquiry* 9 (Sept. 1982): 84–85, 91.

12. Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore, 1981), p. 10. Wayne Booth makes a larger claim for the currency of irony in postmodern times, a “cosmic irony,” deflating the claims of man’s centrality, and evincing a striking parallel with traditional religious languages. See his “The Empire of Irony,” *Georgia Review* 37 (Winter 1983): 719–37.

13. The last term is Gary Saul Morson’s. Morson provides an excellent discussion of threshold literature, parody, and hybridization in his *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoyevsky’s “Diary of a Writer” and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Austin, Tex., 1981), esp. pp. 48–50, 107–8, and 142–43.

14. See Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash., 1983). For a counter-

statement, see Paolo Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture*, trans. Meg Shore (New York, 1982), p. 11, and Calinescu, "From the One to the Many," p. 286.

15. See M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helena Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), and *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series, no. 1 (Austin, Tex., 1981). See also the forum on Bakhtin, *Critical Inquiry* 10 (Dec. 1983).

16. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 10–11.

17. See Régis Durand's defense, against Michael Fried, of the performing principle in postmodern art ("Theatre/SIGNS/Performance: On Some Transformations of the Theatrical and the Theoretical," in *Innovation/Renovation*, pp. 213–17). See also Richard Schechner, "News, Sex, and Performance Theory," *Innovation/Renovation*, pp. 189–210.

18. Richard Poirier, *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life* (New York, 1971), pp. xv, xiii. See also Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1978).

19. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 291.

20. James understood this when he said: "You can't weed out the human contribution . . . altho the stubborn fact remains that there is a sensible flux, what is true of it seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation" ("Pragmatism," p. 166).

21. See Hassan, *Paracriticism: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), pp. 121–50; and Hassan, *The Right Promethean Fire*, pp. 139–72. It was José Ortega y Gasset, however, who made this prescient, gnostic statement in 1925: "Man humanizes the world, injects it, impregnates it with his own ideal substance and is finally entitled to imagine that one day or another, in the far depths of time, this terrible outer world will become so saturated with man that our descendants will be able to travel through it as today we mentally travel through our own inmost selves—he finally imagines that the world, without ceasing to be the world, will one day be changed into something like a materialized soul, and, as in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the winds will blow at the bidding of Ariel, the spirit of ideas" ("*The Dehumanization of Art*" and *Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, trans. Helene Weyl [Princeton, N.J., 1968], p. 184). And before Ortega, James wrote: "The world is One just so far as its parts hang together by any definite connexion. It is many just so far as any definite connexion fails to obtain. And finally it is growing more and more unified by those systems of connexion at least which human energy keeps framing as time goes on" ("Pragmatism," p. 105). But see also Jean Baudrillard's version of a senseless immanence, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pp. 126–34.

22. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, 1978), p. x.

23. Active, creative, self-reflexive patterns seem also essential to advanced theories of artificial intelligence. See the article on Douglas R. Hofstadter's latest work by James Gleick, "Exploring the Labyrinth of the Mind," *The New York Times Magazine*, 21 Aug. 1983:23–100.

24. Baudrillard, "What Are You Doing After the Orgy?" *Artforum* (Oct. 1983): 43.

25. See, for instance, Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York, 1971), and Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

26. See, for instance, the persuasive article of Ralph Cohen, "Literary Theory as Genre," *Centrum* 3 (Spring 1975): 45–64. Cohen also sees literary change itself as a genre. See his essay, "A Propadeutic for Literary Change," and the responses of White and Michael Riffaterre to it, in *Critical Exchange* 13 (Spring 1983): 1–17, 18–26, and 27–38.

27. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago, 1979), pp. 33–34.

28. Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genres: New Directions in Literary Classification* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972), p. 184. See, further, the two issues on convention and genre of *New Literary History* 13 (Autumn 1981) and 14 (Winter 1983).

29. Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, p. 49.

30. Jacques Derrida, "La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980): 206. This entire issue concerns genre.

31. The term "essentially contested concept" is developed by W. B. Gallie in his *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York, 1968). See also Booth's lucid discussion of it, *Critical Understanding*, pp. 211–15 and 366.

32. See Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Summer 1982): 723–42, and the subsequent responses in *Critical Inquiry* 9 (June 1983). "Revisionary Madness: The Prospects of American Literary Theory at the Present Time" is the title of Daniel T. O'Hara's response (pp. 726–42).

33. Knapp and Michaels, "A Reply to Our Critics," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (June 1983): 800.

34. The relevance of belief to knowledge in general and conventions in particular is acknowledged by thinkers of different persuasions, even when they disagree on the nature of truth, realism, and genre. Thus, for instance, Goodman and Menachem Brinker agree that belief is "an accepted version" of the world; and E. D. Hirsch concurs with both. See Goodman, "Realism, Relativism, and Reality," Brinker, "On Realism's Relativism: A Reply to Nelson Goodman," and Hirsch, "Beyond Convention?" All appear in *New Literary History* 14 (Winter 1983).

35. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1970), p. 163, my emphasis; Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974), p. 14; Jonathan Culler, "Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin," *New Literary History* 13 (Autumn 1981): 30; Jeffrey Stout, "What Is the Meaning of a Text?" *New Literary History* 14 (Autumn 1982): 5. I am aware that other thinkers distinguish between "variety" and "subjectivity" of understanding in an effort to limit radical perspectivism; see, for instance, Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1942); Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton, N.J., 1972); and George Bealer, *Quality and Concept* (Oxford, 1982). But I wonder why their arguments have failed to eliminate, or at least reduce, their differences with relativists; or why, again, Richard Rorty and Hirsch find it possible to disagree about the "question of objectivity," which became the theme of a conference at the University of Virginia in April 1984.

36. Habermas, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1971), and *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), also offers vigorous neo-Marxist critiques of knowledge and society. Kenneth Burke, in *A Grammar of Motives* (New York, 1945), preceded both Foucault and Habermas in this large political and logological enterprise.

37. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), p. 200.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

39. See Michel Foucault: *Beyond Structuralism*, pp. 216–20.

40. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), p. 286.

41. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 5.

42. David Bleich, "Literary Theory in the University: A Survey," *New Literary History* 14 (Winter 1983): 411. See also *What Is Literature?* ed. Hernadi (Bloomington, Ind., 1978), pp. 49–112.

43. See *Critical Inquiry* 9 (Sept. 1982); and see Gerald Graff, "The Pseudo-Politics of Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (Mar. 1983): 597–610.

44. See Geoffrey Hartman, "The New Wilderness: Critics as Connoisseurs of Chaos," in *Innovation/Renovation*, pp. 87–110.

45. "If social circumstances . . . contradict too powerfully the [Romantic] world-view of literature, then the Imaginary Library, first its enabling beliefs and eventually its institutional manifestations, can no longer exist," remarks Alvin B. Kernan, *The Imaginary Library: An Essay on Literature and Society* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), p. 166.

46. Though “everything is ideological,” as we nowadays like to say, we need still to distinguish between ideologies—fascism, feminism, monetarism, vegetarianism, etc.—between their overt claims, their hidden exactions. Even postmodernism, as a political ideology, requires discriminations. Lyotard, for instance, believes that “the postmodern condition is a stranger to disenchantment as to the blind positivity of delegitimation” (*La Condition postmoderne*, p. 8; my translation); while Foster claims a “postmodernism of resistance,” a “counter-practice not only to the official culture of modernism but also to the ‘false normativity’ of a reactionary postmodernism” (*The Anti-Aesthetic*, p. xii). Interestingly enough, French thinkers of the Left—Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze—seem more subtle in their ideas of “resistance” than their American counterparts. This is curious, perhaps paradoxical, since the procedures of “mass,” “consumer,” or “postindustrial” society are more advanced in America than in France. But see also, as a counterstatement, Said’s critique of Foucault, “Travelling Theory,” *Raritan* 1 (Winter 1982): 41–67.

47. Kristeva, “Psychoanalysis and the Polis,” p. 78. In our therapeutic culture, the language of politics and the discourse of desire constantly seek one another, as if the utopian marriage of Marx and Freud could find consummation, at last, in our words. Hence the political use of such erotic or analytic concepts as “libidinal economy” (Lyotard, *Economie libidinale* [Paris, 1974]), “seduction” (Baudrillard, *De la séduction* [Paris, 1979]), “delirium” or “abjection” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*), “anti-Oedipus” (Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane [New York, 1977]), “bliss” (Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller [New York, 1975]), and “the political unconscious” (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*). See also Hassan, “Desire and Dissent in the Postmodern Age,” *Kenyon Review*, n.s. 5 (Winter 1983): 1–18.

48. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York, 1955), p. 276.

49. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 27.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 65.

51. Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale faite le vendredi 7 janvier 1977* (Paris, 1978), p. 25.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

53. Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (Paris, 1977), p. 87. A few sentences in the paragraph which this sentence concludes have appeared in my earlier essay, “Parabiography: The Varieties of Critical Experience,” *Georgia Review* 34 (Fall 1980): 600.

54. In America, the work of Leo Bersani has addressed such questions as “Can a psychology of fragmentary and discontinuous desires be reinstated? What are the strategies by which the self might be once again theatricalized? How might desire recover its original capacity for projecting nonstructurable *scenes*?” And it answers them by suggesting that *the* “desiring self might even disappear as we learn to multiply our discontinuous and partial desiring selves” in language. See *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston, 1976), pp. 6–7.

55. Kristeva, “Psychoanalysis and the Polis,” pp. 82, 86.

56. James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, 1956), p. ix. All further references to this work, abbreviated *W*, will be included in the text.

57. James once more: “No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another’s mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism’s glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things” (*W*, p. 30). How far, beyond this, does any postmodern pluralist go?

58. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1820–1872*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, 10 vols. (Boston, 1909–14), 8:79.