Review essay: Heidegger, literary theory and social criticism

Joseph D. Lewandowski

Philosophy Social Criticism 1994 20: 109
DOI: 10.1177/019145379402000307

Joseph D. Lewandowski

Review essay

Heidegger, literary theory and social criticism

William V. Spanos, *Heidegger and Criticism: Retrieving the Cultural Politics of Destruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

Looking back at the rise and fall of 'theory' in American university and college literature departments, one cannot help but notice the role and influence of Martin Heidegger. On the one hand, it was in many ways Heidegger's radical critique or 'destruction' of modernity and its instrumentalization of thinking, language and being, that inspired Derrida's 'deconstruction' and enabled much of the 'theorizing' that was considered common coin in literature departments during the 1970s and 1980s (and today). Derrida's deconstruction continued and accentuated the linguistic turn of Heidegger's later writings in a way that thematized and made relevant for literary criticism Heidegger's strong contrast between ordinary language (instrumental language, the one we speak) and poetry. In the latter it is language that *speaks man* and 'discloses' itself, reveals and hides itself, in its spontaneous happening; poetry, says the later Heidegger, lets truth originate. Indeed, one could do worse than to claim that Derrida's general theory of language or 'textuality' is a derivative of Heidegger's specifically disclosive account of poetic language. On the other hand, the Heideggerian roots of such prevailing theories of textuality in

PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL CRITICISM · **Vol. 20 No. 3** · pp. 109–122 PSC

literature departments have proven – after the de Man 'affair' and the continuing revelations of Heidegger's affiliation with German National Socialism – to be very much a limit to and even a liability in 'theory's' attempt to draw out and make explicit the sociopolitical implications and relevance of the interpretation of literature. The 'textual turn' – once an innovative source of insight into understanding the interweaving of such unstable notions of author, poem, culture and politics – has, it seems, signaled a blindness to or a retreat from the actual world where texts are produced, consumed and contested. When *all* the world's a text, there are no players: actual actors and their speech acts, nations and their politics, grow indistinguishable under the luminous force of an all-devouring and hypostatized textual event. As a result, literary theory has suffered a kind of trivialization from its own, self-induced 'textuality' disease – a trivialization unthinkable during, say, the heyday of de Man at Yale, when blindness and insight were very much the order of the day.[1]

It is, ultimately, from this kind of triviality and hypostatization that William V. Spanos's challenging and demanding book, *Heidegger and Criticism*, wants to rescue contemporary literary theory. Spanos wants to stake out a broader role for literary theory via Heidegger, thereby making it a kind of social criticism (hence the title is not 'Heidegger and *Literary* Criticism').[2] Subtitled 'Retrieving the Cultural Politics of Destruction', Professor Spanos's text is, by turns, a retrospective gaze (four of the six chapters have been previously published) at his own thinking on Heidegger and his encounter with Foucault, a polemical defense of Heidegger's continued validity and relevance in literary studies, a scathing critique of what he calls 'humanism' and its various attempts to delegitimate Heideggerian discourse by implicating it in Heidegger's politics, and a call for a 'post-humanist' thinking. Professor Spanos argues that it is not in American appropriations of deconstruction's 'textuality' but in Heidegger's 'destruction' and a careful analysis of Heidegger's texts (not his politics) that literary theory can become (Spanos says 'retrieve') a kind of oppositional cultural criticism as well. Though inspired by his dismay with Davidson's special issue of *Critical Inquiry* ('A Symposium on Heidegger and Nazism', 15 [Winter 1989]), and dissatisfaction with Victor Farias's controversial *Heidegger and Nazism*, the real motive of this book is, I want to argue, to couple Heidegger, sufficiently tamed by Foucauldian genealogy, with literary theory in a way that retrieves Heidegger from his politics and literary theory from its *lack of politics*.

To think through all the implications of such a coupling will take more time and space than I have here. So I want only to follow some of

Spanos's attempts to explore 'the possibilities (which his [Heidegger's] current detractors now deny) inhering in the excess of Heidegger's excessive texts for a theory of interpretation that, whatever the locus, is simultaneously an emancipatory practice' (p. 6). In following Spanos's move to retrieve destruction for a literary theory that wants to be a *critical* theory interested in 'emancipatory practice', two key questions will emerge. (1) What, precisely, does Spanos's version of Heidegger's hermeneutics of 'destruction' mean for interpreters of literature and critical theorists of cultures? And (2) can Heidegger's 'destruction' – *even if* we set all questions of Nazism and 'humanism' and 'post-humanism' aside – really support a critical theory oriented toward emancipation in the ways Spanos thinks it can? These two questions will, in turn, prompt a third that I want to address toward the end of this article: if Spanos's Heideggerian hermeneutics as disclosure is inadequate, and if Spanos is right (and I think he is) to criticize American deconstruction for its retreat from or, as he says, its 'indifference' to questions of culture, politics and power, then *how can* literary theory be *critical*?

Section I will present an admittedly reductive encapsulation of the entire project of *Heidegger and Criticism*. Section II will try to situate Spanos's appropriation of Heidegger's 'Hermeneutics as Dis-Closure' in the context of critical theory, Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, and Vattimo's theory of postmodern 'truth'. Section III will suggest a road not yet taken in an attempt to make literary theory the kind of critical theory Spanos thinks it should be.

I

Spanos begins his reflections on the viability of 'destruction' as a mode of critical inquiry with three claims that in many ways frame his entire project in this book:

> I want to suggest that (1) Heidegger's philosophical texts as such, from *Being and Time* to the late essays interrogating the hegemony of *Technik* (including the notorious 'Rectorate Address'), resist any simple identification with historical Nazism or Nazi practices; that they exceed the essentially reactionary political purposes attributed to them by his 'liberal' humanist detractors; (2) this simplistic identification constitutes an ideological strategy, the ultimate purpose of which is to circumvent the responsibility of thinking that excess: precisely that epochal 'antihumanist' thrust in Heidegger's discourse which has exposed the will to power informing the 'disinterested'

> problematic of the humanist subject; and (3) this negative or 'destructive' gesture, whatever its limits, has gone far to enable the contemporary emancipatory discursive practices of what traditional humanists, conservative and liberal alike, have pejoratively called 'theory'. What is at stake in my intervention in the debate is not Heidegger the historically specific man, nor finally is it Heidegger's thought as such. It is rather the discourse and practices, variously called 'poststructuralist', 'postmodern', or 'posthumanist', enabled or catalyzed by Heidegger's interrogation of the anthropo-logos. (pp. 5–6)

Spanos's 'intervention', then, situates itself very much in relation to the question of 'theory' in contemporary discourse. He sees Heidegger's interrogation of 'humanism' as 'enabling' such 'post' critiques as poststructuralism, postmodernism and posthumanism: 'Heidegger's interrogation of metaphysics, of the *anthropo-logos* of modern Occidental Man, especially in *Being and Time* but also in all that follows the so-called turn (*Kehre*), has served as the catalyst, if not precisely the origin, of the oppositional discourse that has come to be called (pejoratively) "theory"' (p. 184).

Thus Spanos's intervention into the question of 'theory' is bound up with his (and Heidegger's) much larger critical opposition to humanism. Though a thorough explication of such a critique of humanism is beyond the scope of this review, I think it salient to note that opposition to humanism – to the privileging of a sovereign subject over and against a distinct world of manipulable objects – for Spanos (or Heidegger) does not generally suggest negation (anti-humanism). The de-structuring of humanism is not a call for nihilism. Quite the contrary. To paraphrase Heidegger in the 'Letter on Humanism' (a text which resides just beneath the surface of all of Spanos's thinking in *Heidegger and Criticism*) an opposition to humanism in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas (p. 227).

This kind of 'opening of other vistas' is precisely what Spanos's Heidegger is all about. 'Destruction', when properly understood, has ostensibly a very positive function, and consequently Spanos wants to give a 'positive' account of it.

> To put the project of this book positively, these essays are intended to demonstrate the continuing use-value of a certain Heideggerian initiative of thinking – especially the project of overcoming philosophy – for oppositional intellectuals. Despite the politically conservative bent of his antihumanist discourse, Heidegger's destructive hermeneutics remains viable – indeed, has been rendered crucial by the historical demise of Marxism – to the polyvalent task of

> emancipation in the face of the massive 'reform' movement that would relegitimate not simply the discourse of humanism and its cultural institutions, but also the discreetly repressive sociopolitical order it has always served. (p. 13)

Or again:

> To put it positively, to 'leap primordially and wholly' into the circle of the Heideggerian text is not only to encounter its contradictions but also to discover an *emancipatory impulse* in its solicitation of the humanist representation of being (as Being) and the affiliated relay of binary metaphors this hegemonic representation has constituted, codified, and naturalized: sovereign subject/collective subject, choosing freely/following blindly, knowledge/power, and so forth. (p. 15, emphasis added)

This 'positive' account of destruction is supposed to reveal an 'emancipatory impulse' latent in Heidegger's hermeneutical (not his political) enterprise.

To be sure, Spanos acknowledges the political aporias of such an attempt, but nevertheless claims that

> . . . whatever the political limitations of Heidegger's hermeneutics – and they are substantial – it nevertheless lends itself to appropriation in behalf of an emancipatory discursive practice that overcomes the limitations of deconstructive textuality, classical Marxist essentialism, and the genealogical criticism that tends to understand history as a discontinuous series of epistemic ruptures. (p. 133)

What is provocative (and, as we shall see, problematic) about such a positive account of Heidegger's hermeneutics of destruction is precisely the way in which it links destruction to *emancipation* in ways that most literary appropriations of deconstruction have hitherto failed to manage. In Spanos's reading of Heidegger and critique of deconstructive tendencies to hypostatize 'textuality' and Marxian tendencies toward essentialisms, destructive hermeneutics emerges as the emancipatory alternative for a critical theory of the sociopolitical power structures of modernity.

Demonstrating whether and *how* 'destruction' is emancipatory and a viable alternative to 'oppositional intellectuals' is the crucial and difficult move in *Heidegger and Criticism*. Indeed, in many ways this move is most difficult for Spanos, considering Heidegger's denigration of existing subjects to a fallenness into idle chatter and a forgetfulness of their (a)historical destiny and Being. Spanos senses the obstacles posed by Heidegger's tendency to abstraction and dehistoricization, to make the 'really existing' (ontic) subject and his history into essentialized

abstractions, and realizes how a truly critical theory cannot afford such abstractions. Spanos says

> . . . [i]t is true that Heidegger focused his interrogation of the dominant discourse of modernity on the most rarified site on the indissoluble continuum of being. . . . It is also true that this focus blinded him to the other more 'concrete' or 'worldly' sites, most notably – and it must be conceded, irresponsibly – the site of European politics. (p. 150)

So he turns to Foucault in order to tame Heidegger's superfoundationalism:

> Thinking Heidegger with Foucault thematizes the tendency of Heidegger's discourse to abstract history: to overlook (or distort) the historical specificity of modern power relations (the sociopolitical sites on the ontic continuum). (p. 20)

Yet in this turn to Foucault, Spanos also wants to offer a Heideggerian critique of genealogy. Genealogy, in its ostensible analyses of the 'historical specificity of modern power relations', misses 'the ultimate ontotheological origins of "panopticism" or "the regime of truth"' (p. 174).

> Insofar as Heidegger's destruction emphasized the ontological construction of modernity (its philosophical ground) it was, as we have seen, a limited agency of critical practice. But insofar as Foucault (and other contemporary worldly critics) emphasizes its sociopolitical construction (its scientific/technological ground), his genealogy too constitutes a limited agency of critique. . . . A dialogue between their discourses will show that the overdetermined sciences and the 'residual' humanities . . . are, in fact, different instruments of the *anthropo-logos*, the discourse of Man, and thus complicitous in the late capitalist West's neoimperial project of planetary domination. (p. 152)

In this thinking Heidegger *with* Foucault, and in a 'dialogue between their discourses', Spanos thinks he has the necessary grounding for a structured theory of social relations with critical intent, a kind of theory that American literary theory, from Brooks to de Man, has been unable (or unwilling) to articulate, and a kind of theory neither Heidegger nor Foucault adequately articulated.

II

While the attempt to make literary theory critical in this innovative union of Heidegger and Foucault is laudable, Spanos's 'retrieving' of

Heidegger shares many of the problems that faced an earlier generation of critical theorists interested in Heidegger (here I am thinking of Marcuse), and many of the problems that face contemporary philosophical hermeneutics (here I am thinking mostly of Gadamer and Vattimo). Remember that Marcuse's dissatisfaction with Heidegger grew, in fact, not simply out of Heidegger's political engagements but more so out of his failure to link his fundamental ontology to any historically concretized praxis (a problem Spanos is aware of, as I suggested earlier, but never resolves via genealogy – a point I shall return to shortly). Heidegger never has much to say about agents and their capacity for historically realizable emancipation: for Heidegger, it is always a freedom that possesses man, a historical destiny that awaits or calls us, and not the other way around. Thomas McCarthy raises this problematic in his essay on 'Heidegger and Critical Theory':

> Heidegger, Marcuse wrote, 'remained content to talk of the nation's link with destiny, of the "heritage" that each individual has to take over, and of the community of the "generation", while other dimensions of facticity were treated under such categories as "they" and "idle talk" and relegated in this way to inauthentic existence. [He] did not go on to ask about the nature of this heritage, about the people's mode of being, about the real processes and forces that *are* history.' (p. 96)

The point to be made here is that Heidegger's politics are not the only (or necessarily the largest) obstacle to coupling him with critical theory. Hence much of Spanos's energetic defense of Heidegger against his 'humanist detractors' (particularly in his defiant concluding chapter, 'Heidegger, Nazism, and the "Repressive Hypothesis": The American Appropriation of the Question') is misdirected. For as McCarthy rightly points out, 'the basic issues separating critical theory from Heideggerean ontology were not raised post hoc in reaction to Heidegger's political misdeeds but *were there from the start*. Marcuse formulated them in all clarity during his time in Freiburg, when he was still inspired by the idea of a materialist analytic of Dasein' (p. 96, emphasis added). In other words, Heidegger succumbs quite readily to an immanent critique. Heidegger's aporias are not simply the result of his politics but rather stem from the *internal limits* of his questioning of the 'being that lets beings be', truth as disclosure, and destruction of the metaphysical tradition, all of which divorce reflection from social practice and thus lack critical perspective.

Spanos, however, thinks Foucault can provide an alternative materialist grounding for an emancipatory critical theory that would obviate the objections of someone such as Marcuse. But the turn to

Foucault is no less problematic than the original turn to Heidegger. Genealogy is not critical in any real way. Nor can it tame or augment what Spanos calls Heidegger's 'overdetermination of the ontological site'. Foucault's analysis of power, despite its originality, is an *ontology of power* and not, as Spanos thinks, a 'concrete diagnosis' (p. 138) of power mechanisms.[3] Thus it dramatizes, on a different level, the *same* shortcomings of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. The 'affiliative relationship' (p. 138) that Spanos tries to develop between Heidegger and Foucault in order to avoid the problem Marcuse faced simply cannot work. Where Heidegger ontologizes Being, Foucault ontologizes power. The latter sees power as a strategic and intentional but subjectless mechanism that 'endows itself' and punches out 'docile bodies', whereas the former sees Being as that neutered term and no-thing that calls us.

Foucault (like Spanos) never works out *how* genealogy is emancipatory, or *how* emancipation could be realized collectively by actual agents in the world. The 'undefined work of freedom' the later Foucault speaks of in 'What Is Enlightenment?' remained precisely that in his work.[4] The genealogy of power is as much a hypostatization as is fundamental ontology: such hypostatizations tend to *institute* the *impossibility* of practical resistance or freedom. In short, I don't think the Heideggerian 'dialogue' with Foucault sufficiently tames or complements Heidegger, nor does it make his discourse (or Foucault's, for that matter) any more emancipatory or oppositional. Indeed, Foucault's reified theory of power seems to undermine the very notion of 'Opposition', since there is no subject (but rather a 'docile' body) to do the resisting (or, in his later work, a privatized self to be self-made *within* a regime of truth), nor an object to be resisted. As Said rightly points out in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 'Foucault more or less eliminates the central dialectic of opposed forces that *still* underlies modern society' (p. 221, emphasis added). Foucault's theory of power is shot through with *false* empirical analyses, yet Spanos seems to accept them as valid diagnoses. Spanos fails to see, to paraphrase Said's criticisms of Foucault's theory of power, that power is neither a spider's web without the spider, nor a smoothly functioning diagram (p. 221).

There persists a normative-hermeneutic issue as well. Spanos criticizes (quite rightly) the New Criticism for suspending the temporality of the literary text (p. 43) and making the interpreter (the disinterested 'human' judge) the sole determiner of its meaning. Spanos rightly senses the need for a more 'hermeneutically informed' account of literary theory. Literary texts are situated in particular sociocultural and historical matrices (what Gadamer calls 'traditions'), as are those who encounter them; thus for any understanding to be reached there must be,

to borrow Gadamer's apt phrase, a 'fusion of horizons' rather than a superimposition of the interpreter's horizon upon the object interpreted. Yet rather than draw on such vital hermeneutical insights, which for Spanos remain within a particular mode of metaphysical humanistic inquiry, Spanos returns to Heidegger to proffer a 'hermeneutics of disclosure' (p. 22 ff.), where disclosure is in contradistinction to *veritas*: the Greek *aletheia* Heidegger retrieves enables the de-structuring process of inquiry (p. 141). Spanos thinks that this kind of hermeneutics as a 'disclosive process of inquiry' enables and can support a postmetaphysical critical theory and resist the Foucauldian 'regime of *veritas*': Heidegger's 'destruction of the [metaphysical] tradition points to a hermeneutics of being that is capable of surpassing metaphysics (*Uberwindung*), to a postmodern hermeneutics of dis-covery, in which a disclosed temporality is given ontological priority over Being' (p. 23), but remains 'a temporality grounded in nothing' (p. 52). In Spanos's view, this kind of disclosive 'postmodern hermeneutics' radicalizes Gadamerian hermeneutics: a destructive, disclosive encounter with a text 'enables the interpreter to render the temporal "structure" . . . explicit: to *hear* the *logos* as *legein*. . . . It is this phenomenological/destructive imperative, in other words, that brings meaning, not as determinate truth, but as being-saying, out of concealment or oblivion into the opening/closing of finitude' (pp. 47–8).

But radicalized or not, Spanos's trading of any possibility of 'determinate truth' for Heideggerian disclosure as eventing of truth/untruth robs his critical theory of the necessary yardstick needed to measure 'emancipation'. Heidegger's disclosure is a cryptonormative truth; it is an event before which any *critical* judgment necessarily *fails*. Disclosure is *not* a process of inquiry, but rather a revealing/concealing that befalls or overtakes us. In his eagerness to draw out the enabling features and 'post'-humanist dimension of Heidegger's disclosure, Spanos fails to see the inevitable and internal limits to truth as disclosure.[5] Gadamer encounters similar problems, despite his keen insights, when he holds on to a Heideggerian disclosure that too often undermines the power of critical reflection. And the postmodern Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo encounters a related problem when he attempts to take leave of modernity and proclaim a liberating postmodernity via Heidegger's disclosure.[6] But while a purely aesthetic theory interested in 'textuality' can quite justifiably be grounded in truth as disclosure (as American deconstruction or Vattimo's *il pensiero debole* is), a truly *critical* theory interested in emancipation simply cannot: some types of 'emancipation' are false and need to be rejected. Texts may very well 'disclose' worlds in the same way that, say, the Greek temple does for Heidegger. But a genuinely critical theory needs

to be able to say what worlds are better or worse for actual agents in actual worlds – a need, I might add, that Spanos is constantly aware of and typifies in his denunciation of American imperialism in Vietnam (and elsewhere) in *Heidegger and Criticism.*

III

In the strongest sections of *Heidegger and Criticism*, Spanos rightly faults deconstruction (and earlier forms of immanent textualism – from formalism to the New Criticism) for making world-disclosure the *only* function of texts, thereby divorcing them from the actual world and rendering many forms of deconstruction a 'sterile textual game' (p. 123). He criticizes deconstruction for '*its oversight both to the worldliness of the text under scrutiny and to the positive, the pro-jective, that is, worldly possibilities it discloses*' (p. 122, original emphasis). In this 'oversight', deconstruction misses what, according to Spanos, a positive account of destruction sees: the 'positive' possibilities of disclosive texts. But the 'positive' possibilities of a destructive hermeneutics as disclosure – if by 'positive' we mean 'other', possibly freer or better, worlds – cannot be critically assessed. The limits of the one-sided disclosive account of 'textuality' Spanos finds troublesome in deconstruction presents no less a limit to *his* appropriation of Heidegger's hermeneutics that also preserves Heidegger's 'post'humanist notion of truth as disclosure. Spanos's Heideggerian destruction, despite its positive, emancipatory intentions, is caught in the same acritical 'game' in which he finds critics such as Barbara Johnson, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man, and the same cryptonormativity of other contemporary appropriators of Heidegger such as Gadamer and Vattimo. The question is not one of humanism, posthumanism, or even Nazism (labels I think we should use sparingly: 'isms', as Heidegger himself said, are suspect), but rather of what is an adequate ground for a critical theory oriented toward emancipation, and how best to situate literary theory upon such a ground.

A more promising move presents itself if we couple the world-disclosive account of textuality to the problem-solving capacities of language. Such a coupling is likely to be difficult, sound a bit foreign to aesthetic inquiry, and require greater length than I can give it here. So let me close abruptly by sketching this alternative way literary theory might become *critical.*

World disclosure is designed to achieve two of Heidegger's (and as we have seen, Spanos's) larger objectives in 'destroying' humanist modes of inquiry. On the one hand, disclosure radically decenters any

subject-centered notion of truth and language (see especially *Being and Time*, VI.44 'Dasein, disclosedness, and truth') – truth as disclosure is not something any agent can bring about or criticize; on the other hand, truth as disclosure is an attempt to account for innovations in a rigidified modern 'world-picture' (see especially the post-*kehre* lectures collected in *Basic Writings*). The attraction of such an account of language for aesthetically minded theorists lies in its ability to capture the spontaneity, fluidity and radical alterity (decentering) an interpreter undergoes in his or her encounter with aesthetic 'texts': in the reading of Calvino or Pynchon, texts indeed seem to meet (or dissolve into) other texts like reflecting pools. *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte.* And literary theory – in nearly all of its guises, from American deconstruction to New Historicism – has held on to this very general and totalizing theory of language, and even expanded it to include sociopolitical actualities.

Spanos rightly rejects the 'textuality' route in *Heidegger and Criticism* precisely because of its totalizing and hypostatizing tendencies. Nevertheless, he holds on to a destructive hermeneutics *as disclosure*. But as I have already intimated, disclosure alone cannot support a critical theory oriented toward emancipation. I think a critical theory needs a less totalizing account of language, one that articulates *both* the emphatic linguistic capacity to spontaneously disclose worlds – its innovative 'worlding' possibilities – and its less emphatic, but no less important, capacity to communicate, solve problems in and *criticize* the world. The essential task of the social critic – and any literary theory that wants to be critical – is to couple world disclosure with problem-solving, to mediate between the extra-ordinary world of 'textuality' and the everyday world of 'texts'. In this alternative route, literary theory may become the kind of emancipatory oriented critical theory it can and should be.

Foreign as this proposition may sound, literary-theoretical insights into 'textuality' have already mediated and begun to solve certain problems of representation facing ethnographers and cross-cultural interpretation (though here one could also point to, for example, certain strains of Feminisim and Post-colonialism). There have been unmistakable practical gains made in the social sciences as a result of disclosive accounts of textuality. Ethnographers such as Geertz, Clifford and Marcus (despite their differences) have all been the beneficiaries of literary-theoretical insights into the workings and decentering effects of 'textuality' in their cross-cultural interpretations.[7] Heightened awareness of the very 'textual' nature of language and interpretation has proven to be an effective way of anticipating an 'other's' competence and ability to challenge (and undermine) the

ethnographic 'gaze'.[8] Ethnographers have thus learned that the empire, to paraphrase Rushdie, always writes back. There is always another text to be criticized, interpreted, 'written', 'de-structured'. Problematic positions regarding the authorial status of the interpreter have been roundly criticized in ethnography. Naive claims to a God's-eye perspective in ethnography have been abandoned (in most quarters) in part because of literary theory's striking ability to demonstrate the world-disclosive potential of texts (and here we may say, with Spanos, that it was in many ways Heideggerian hermeneutical understandings/destructions of language that enabled such demonstrations) and undermine any notion of their stability, absolute 'authority', or fixedness.

In his 1981 acceptance speech upon receipt of the Adorno prize, Jürgen Habermas formulates the positive and emancipatory possibilities of the coupling of world disclosure and problem-solving that I have only briefly suggested here. Habermas raises the question of the relationship between aesthetic (disclosive) experiences and life problems. When a disclosive experience is used

> . . . *to illuminate a life historical situation and is related to life problems, it enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic.* The aesthetic experience then not only renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world. It permeates as well our cognitive significations and our normative expectations and changes the manner in which all these moments refer to one another. (p. 12, emphasis added)

When the literary theorist (or 'aesthetic critic') can discern in texts world-disclosive possibilities *and* critically use them to illuminate, begin to criticize and solve life-historical problems – problems of cross-cultural representation, for example – then he or she has entered into a very different language game, one that is not merely a hypostatized 'sterile game' of deconstructing or de-structuring 'texts'. Here, then, in such a 'high'-stakes language game, the constellation of disclosive experiences, cognitive significations and normative expectations is *reconfigured*. Such a transformative reconfiguration opens up not simply the abyss, the indeterminacy, or the destructive will to power that seems to infect every aspect of modernity, but rather the possibility of linking the insights gained in aesthetic experience to everyday practice in *genuinely* emancipatory ways.

Department of Comparative Literature, SUNY-Binghamton

Notes

1 For a somewhat different account of Heidegger's reception in departments of literature, see Ziarek's 'The Reception of Heidegger's Thought in American Literary Criticism', *Diacritics* 19(3–4) (1989): 114–27. Ziarek sketches out some of the (problematic) borrowings in literary theory from Heidegger's understanding of language. But here I want to focus on Spanos's ambitious attempt to appropriate Heidegger for the much larger role of an *emancipatory* social criticism.

2 Spanos has elsewhere limited his examination of Heidegger to the question of literature. See the volume he edited entitled *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature.*

3 For a related set of criticisms of the inadequacy of Foucault's analyses of power, see, for example, Habermas's two lectures on Foucault in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Fraser's 'Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions', in *Unruly Practices*; McCarthy's 'The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School', in *Ideals and Illusions*; Said's 'Criticism Between Culture and System', in *The World, the Text, and the Critic.*

4 In *Philosophy in Question: Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme*, David Hiley summarizes Foucault's later commitment to, but failure to articulate, a notion of liberation: 'in eschewing the framework of legitimacy and truth in analyzing power, Foucault did not eschew the goal of liberation, though clearly his notions of liberation and autonomy are *implied* rather than explicit' (p. 105, emphasis added).

5 Here I am indebted to James Bohman's analysis of the enabling and limiting dimensions of disclosure in social criticism. See 'Welterschließung und radikale Kritik', in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 41(3) (1993): 563–74. At best, as Bohman suggests, disclosure may let truth emerge in second-order reflection; it is never a process of inquiry, but may let inquiry happen or be a *condition* for truth.

6 See Gianni Vattimo's *The End of Modernity*, where he argues that 'In very general terms, and referring to a number of different concepts that we can only begin to explore here, it may probably be said that the post-modern – in Heideggerean terms, post-metaphysical – experience of truth is an aesthetic and rhetorical experience' (p. 12).

7 See especially Geertz's *Works and Lives*; Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* and the volume he and Marcus edited, *Writing Culture*; and Marcus's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique.* Of course the borrowings and influences here have been bi-directional: Greenblatt, and New Historicisms generally, have benefited from the cultural anthropology of Geertz, Rabinow and others.

8 This kind of reflexive textualization of culture has also introduced a new set of problems for cross-cultural interpretation. Cultures may very well be 'textual', but I have elsewhere tried to suggest that interpreting social texts is not quite the same as interpreting literary texts. See my 'Culture, Textuality, and Truth', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 19(1) (1993): 43–58.

PSC

References

Clifford, James (1988) *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clifford, James and Marcus, George E., eds (1986) *Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fraser, Nancy (1989) *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Geertz, Clifford (1988) *Works and Lives*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen (1981) 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14.

Habermas, Jürgen (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Heidegger, Martin (1977) 'Letter on Humanism', trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and collected in *Basic Writings*. New York: Harper.

Hiley, David (1988) *Philosophy in Question: Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Marcus, George E. and Fisher, Michael (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

McCarthy, Thomas (1991) *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Said, Edward (1983) *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vattimo, Gianni (1988) *The End of Modernity*, trans. Jon R. Snyder. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.