

# **Why Literature Matters in the 21st Century**

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The arts and humanities, including literature and literary criticism, concern themselves with the fate and prospects of humankind. These fields have been placed under increasing pressure to give an account of themselves—partly because unlike science and technology the value of the arts and the humanities is not immediately apparent, partly because states and universities have suffered harshly competitive fiscal demands, and partly because increased criticism has been lodged against the arts and humanities from both within and beyond the academy. Any attempt to justify the arts and humanities must account for their universal purpose and their specific role in a given age. Today the fate and prospects of humanity are under the influence of technology—the technological transformation of the world was *the* defining feature of the twentieth century, both in the strict sense of the harnessing and transformation of nature and the creation and application of tools, machines, and information and in the broad sense of an elevation of means-ends rationality.

### THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY

Technology represents a mode of means-ends thinking that allows us to manipulate material for a given end. We can be said to live in an age of technology when four conditions have been met: first, our daily living presupposes constant interaction with the products of technology, such that we have as steady a relation to these products as we do to nature or to other persons; second, the most dramatic events of our era are defined by technology, in this case new inventions that change our lives dramatically, for better and for worse; third, our mode of thinking is very much driven by the paradigm of technology, by which I mean above all technical rationality; and fourth, technology takes on a life of its own, becoming not just a means to a higher goal but its own end—such that, for example, the products of technology elicit new needs as much as satisfy intrinsic needs. These conditions apply to the contemporary age and have increasingly defined the modern world since the first industrial revolution. In the words of the Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt, “Technology is the thought of our age in visible, pictorial terms” (26.63).

The influence of technology on modernity places new tasks before both literature and literary criticism, and a legitimization of these spheres must reflect on these new tasks. Accordingly, I analyze the moral aspects of literature and literary criticism in general, discuss prominent categories of the technological age and the influence of technology on literature, and address what great literature and literary criticism should be specifically in this age. The topic is innovative in at least two respects. First, the question of a moral justification of literature and literary criticism tends to be neglected—both by philosophers, who have increasingly retreated into the narrow confines of their own subdisciplines, and by literary critics, who despite their attention to issues of self-reflection have focused more on historical and sociological issues, pragmatic concerns, and questions of ideology or interpretation than on the fundamental principles of their profession, including the value of literature and literary criticism. Exceptions, such as Sven Birkerts, are few and far between and surface for the most part outside the mainstream of the academy. Conferences on the profession of literary criticism tend to address its history and sociology, the descriptive not the normative sphere. When the future is thematized, one tends to speak of pragmatic concerns, such as there being either too many students (in graduate programs) or too few students (in undergraduate programs) and in the latter case, how we might enroll more students. Sometimes the suggestion made is to become

more interdisciplinary, which need not mean—but unfortunately often does mean—that beyond expanding our horizon, we should also abandon the teaching of literature as literature. We rarely ask why we should read literature and why we should pursue literary criticism, nor generally is the question asked, What are our specific obligations as literary scholars in an age marked by technology and increasingly threatened by ecological crisis?<sup>1</sup> This inattention to the ethical challenges of modernity is one of the central reasons for the contemporary crisis in literary criticism, and the emphasis on the *how* at the expense of the *why* is—as we shall see below—simply another expression of technological consciousness.

Second, although the philosophy of technology is a burgeoning field, few philosophers of technology reflect at any length on art, even those, such as Hans Jonas and Karl-Otto Apel, who address ethics and technology. Here, too, the exceptions are few; one thinks above all of Walter Benjamin’s well-known contribution *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Although philosophers of technology have tended to neglect literature and literary criticism, one can integrate their insights by asking not only what arguments and categories these thinkers introduce and to what extent they are valid but also what relevance their ideas have for the study of literature in the technological age. In this sense I attempt to extend such thinkers as Jonas and Apel beyond their immediate claims. Some attention has been given by literary critics to the thematic study of technology in literature, and much can be gained from the few analyses available. Nonetheless, literature seems to be ahead of literary criticism, as there are seemingly more works, including anthologies of literary works, that thematize technology than literary-critical studies of the topic.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the modern tendency to place in opposition to one another two dominant spheres of knowledge, science and technology over against the humanities and the arts, the Greek notion of *techne* suggests that technique and art need not be viewed as exclusive poles. *Techne* means both art (e.g., literature) and craft (i.e., technique). As such it differs from *episteme*, which signifies pure knowledge or science. For the Greeks the artist was a craftsman, shoemaking was an art, and sculpture was a technique. For Plato no distinction existed between the fine and the mechanical arts. This connection between technique and art is widely characteristic of the premodern world. It is prominent, for example, in drawing and painting, where perspective, anatomy, and geometrical proportions assumed great significance; thus, for Leonardo da Vinci art and science were one and the same. Nonetheless, a shift occurs beginning in isolated cases already in the sixteenth century and, bolstered by the scientific revolution

of the seventeenth, becoming widespread by the end of the eighteenth (Kriszteller 507–27). Art and technique no longer serve the same purpose but develop independently and autonomously. The *artes liberales* and *artes mechanicae* diverge, and technology becomes aligned with science and industry, while art develops stronger ties to the humanities.

In *Man in the Age of Technology* Arnold Gehlen, one of Germany's earliest philosophers of technology, recognized that the emergence of the technological age was sped by the congruence of science, technology, and capitalism (11–13). Rapid scientific advances accelerate the development of new technologies, both of which require the investment of capital. Also, technical inventions make the market that much more efficient, improving infrastructure, commerce, and the number of desirable goods. In turn, the competitive nature of the market economy hastens the already quick developments of science and industry.<sup>3</sup> Science and technique have become so intertwined that systematic reflection on technique has become integral to the techniques themselves, and so many diverse techniques function in such close cooperation that today one speaks simply of “technology” even when describing the object sphere. Technical breakthroughs in the modern era were not isolated phenomena but “came in clusters, interacting with each other in a process of increasing returns” (Castells 1.37). In this way isolated techniques were transformed into the mass phenomenon of technology. Today, with so many technical innovations converging into shared enterprises and cooperative endeavors, the sense of technology as a single entity is accentuated daily. The complexity of modern technology, in its intersection with science and capitalism, represents not simply a quantitative break from the techniques of earlier eras, it is qualitatively different. In the premodern era, the poet frequently drew metaphors from the world of technique; Homer, like the medieval poets after him, was still close to the life worlds in which techniques, such as plowing or weaving, played roles. In contrast, the modern poet rarely employs metaphors from today's technology, the jet engine or the nuclear reactor, for example. The complexity of modern technology and our distance from its inner workings further this break and its effect on poetics. Not surprisingly, Dürrenmatt speaks of “the technology that has become impenetrable” (“Ich bin” 34).

Given the complexity of modern technology, literature and technology seem to have become separate and unbridgeable spheres. Half a century ago C. P. Snow advanced the thesis that natural scientists and literary intellectuals live in separate worlds. With increasing specialization in both realms, along with post-modern critiques of reason arising in the humanities and the prestige of tradi-

tional humanistic study diminishing among many scientists, Snow's claim has lost little of its relevance. Rare is the person who crosses these borders. Yet such crossings are to be encouraged, and the connections between literature and technology may be greater in principle than they appear at first glance. Technology is creative, and literature follows certain laws. Commonalities exist between them, as ancient and medieval thinkers believed, and the spheres are enriched when interaction and reflection surface in both directions. Certainly the differences between traditional techniques and modern technology will render any contemporary crossing of these spheres qualitatively different from, and immensely more difficult than, those of earlier eras.

Nonetheless, already with the emergence of photography and later with film, we again see both the need and the opportunity to bridge art and technique. Some of today's most avant-garde artists have returned to this original union by using technology to create great art, as, for example, in the computer graphic art of Charles Csuri. One is also reminded of Edgar Allan Poe's description of the poetic craft as involving, in his metaphor, “wheels and pinions” (289) or of his construction of “The Raven” as proceeding “step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem” (290). One thinks as well of Gottfried Benn's statement that “a poem very rarely comes into being—a poem is made” (1059) or Dürrenmatt's description of himself as a “craftsman” (Bienek 108). So, too, can we consider the integration of art and technology in such spheres as sculpture, graphics, and film, or the architect's necessary engagement with both spheres, which reached a high point in the integrative efforts of the Bauhaus. Not only do we see occasional integration, we see actual inversions, whereby a bridge, for example, may evidence a certain beauty and elegance, and a painting may be distinguished by its jarring negation of beauty.<sup>4</sup> In any age the artist must execute well in his or her chosen medium. A goal of this book is to suggest that on many levels art can respond to technology's positive and negative moments in as yet unexplored ways. Technology is an imaginative enterprise, and much of the wisdom contained in it has a poetic dimension, but it nonetheless seems to lack certain aspects privileged when we speak of art as opposed to technology. This book attempts to define these features.

Not only does a scientific technology emerge that differs from the techniques of art, both art and technology become autonomous vis-à-vis morality. For centuries art was created within an overarching moral universe. The link between art and the sacred is obvious to anyone who reflects on the history of the visual arts or music. Carl Dahlhaus has shown in *The Idea of Absolute Mu-*

*sic* that the connection between music and text and the development of music within a functional context, a paradigm that was prominent from antiquity to the seventeenth century, dissolved in the modern era. Music increasingly developed what was unique to itself, a purely independent instrumental music without concept, object, or purpose, which became known as absolute music. Also in literature we see the dissolution of a tradition that encompassed virtually all literary activity through the end of the eighteenth century and viewed literature as serving a moral purpose and as embedded within a broader moral frame.

The catalysts for the disassociation of art from morality were multiple. First, modernity increasingly lost its belief in a religious or even simply a moral frame. The distinction between *is* and *ought* that Kant had emphasized and that elevated morality in the wake of the modern dissolution of religion loses all effectiveness if the normative sphere cannot be adequately grounded, and skepticism toward such grounds has consistently increased since the nineteenth century. Second, if the normative realm cannot be grounded, one turns to being, though no longer a realm of being that has implicit in it a normative claim, but sheer facticity. The social sciences, which emerge at this time, approach the descriptive sphere with new methodologies, and literature in some ways does the same, though with different means, analyzing the complexity of the modern psyche, our human relations, and our social world, including modern humanity's lament over a loss of orientation. Analyses of this broad and increasingly complex realm of reality become further and further divorced from the kind of thinking that focused on transcendental claims and, indeed, more and more removed from any moral sphere of evaluation. The recognition that many spheres of social reality had not been included in previous claims of synthesis and the discovery of alternative paradigms, bolstered by the emergence of historicism, also contributed to this erosion of the transcendental. Third, a central idea of modernity is that each sphere of life is fully autonomous. Art, business, law, politics, science—each develops according to the logic of its own subsystem, and each sphere is divorced from the moral realm.

This idea is imaginatively expressed in Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*, to which I return below, and has been prominent in the analyses of sociologists from Max Weber to Niklas Luhmann. The artist is slowly freed of having to work in harmony with other spheres. A concept of originality replaces the idea of contributing to our understanding of the cosmos, of God, or of human potential. This freedom unleashed an incredible range of options and led to some extraordinary aesthetic works. It also precipitated not only a divergence in spheres and a rejection of the ideal of holistic knowledge but also in some

thinkers, such as Kierkegaard, who reflects on the aesthetic, ethical, and religious modes, a theoretical sharpening and an embrace of the distinctions, and in some writers, Oscar Wilde, for example, a deep antagonism between the aesthetic and the ethical: "The sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate" (1048; cf. 17). Indeed, in "The Decay of Lying" Wilde argues not only that art has intrinsic value and need not be viewed as subordinate to external ends but also that art cannot serve any external ends; if it does, it is no longer art (976).

We find ourselves today in a complex position. Artists and critics tend to bracket moral questions. Art increasingly becomes a sophisticated game devoid of moral value, or it is reduced to commercial entertainment and kitsch. In a climate in which the value of art is not part of a broader sphere and the dominant subsystem of modernity, the economic, determines value through an elevation of instrumental reason, not only society's but also the artist's recognition of the value of art begins to wane. We become further and further estranged from the questions of why art is legitimate and valuable and which art should be preferred. The predicament of the artist in such an age is difficult. Artists working in earlier eras knew to what ends they might develop their talents. They knew what themes were privileged and what higher purpose their creativity might serve. In a sense the artist's optimism was still evident during the early stages of aesthetic autonomy; charting new territory gave the artist an enabling sense of opportunity. Even in Dahlhaus's account of absolute music we recognize not only the development of music's autonomy but also the idea that music is expressive of the absolute, an idea that today seems entirely foreign. We have now reached a point where the modern artists who seek to articulate a vision cannot imitate the models of the past, which seem no longer to hold; yet if they continue simply to innovate, primarily by way of a negation of tradition, the public may remain cold to their work. Even the artist's bold sense of resistance to the status quo is dissolved when recognized in its fuller context. Insofar as art participates in the historical development of autonomous subsystems, the autonomous artist does not resist his or her age as much as participate in the general subsplintering of values: just as other spheres call for experts, so now are there specialists in art, removed from the broader sphere of life. The artist's would-be distance from society only fulfills the expectation that the artist operate within his or her autonomous sphere and have no impact on the larger world.

People are driven to become artists by their talents and their desire to develop and express them, but in an age when art no longer seems to serve a moral

purpose, the question of the artist's role becomes increasingly unclear. The number of modern artists who suffer difficult lives and crises of identity increases, and these problems are related not only to the stresses of creation and the difficulties of reception but also to the unsettling idea that the artist's path may be devoid of higher purpose. We must have respect and compassion for artists who find themselves in this unenviable situation. Few authors have portrayed this complex predicament more insightfully than Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus*. Mann's hero, Adrian Leverkühn, is so eager to find a viable path that will allow his extraordinary talents to be fulfilled that he is willing to negotiate with the devil. The despair of isolation, intensified by his disengagement from the burden of tradition, which he can only mock, and his eventual capacity for expression, which presupposes a break with morality, leads to ruin. Leverkühn's plight shows the tragedy of the modern artist, who is overburdened with tradition and unable to work within a moral frame. Upon abandoning love and the moral sphere in order to break through as an artist, Leverkühn becomes a murderer and is damned. Nonetheless, we empathize with him even as we condemn him.

We understand how art has developed so as to have been divorced from morality and we sense the incredible burdens of being an artist in an age that tends no longer to see the value of art beyond its status as a commercial product or an idle game. Nonetheless, the idea that art has nothing or little to do with truth or goodness, that it must operate independently of a moral universe, is distinctly modern and may need to be viewed as a tendentious ideology, which after a short period of release may now actually be hindering the value and self-consciousness of the contemporary artist. What ultimately is wrong with this separation of art and morality? To suggest that art has only a formal value and that a determination of its quality is not subject to an evaluation of its content, which can be accomplished only from within a moral frame, not only leads to the artist's despair, it is also philosophically untenable. Morality is not one subsystem among the others, such that there is art, science, religion, business, politics, and so forth, *alongside* morality. Instead, morality is the guiding principle for all human endeavors.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that great art cannot arise out of a culture in which art has become an autonomous subsystem, or that freedom from ethical considerations doesn't allow poets to create with a greater sense of experimentation and focus on form, but it does suggest that the modern autonomy of art is not in every respect welcome. This critique of autonomy has its analogy among those who argue, contrary to modern developments, that the

economy cannot be fully divorced from ethics, or that science is subject to higher claims of moral legitimacy.

In modernity art has increasingly freed itself not only from artistic precepts but also from any reflection on its morality or relation to truth. I do not question the facticity of this development, which is simply a manifestation of the modern emergence of discrete subsystems of culture and leads to new insights and opportunities even as it gives rise to other problems. I do, however, problematize this development insofar as the *quaestio iuris* is concerned, and in doing so I do not differ from writers—from E. T. A. Hoffmann to Thomas Mann and beyond—who question their own artistic paradigms. To render art entirely autonomous is to say that morality, too, is only one sphere among many, and so would free one to remove morality from other spheres, such as religion or politics, which few advocates of aesthetic autonomy would likely endorse. Any reprehensible action could be justified by way of its autonomous sphere: it was for art, it was for war, it was for religion, it was for love, and so forth. Certainly, reprehensible actions also arise when individuals commit acts for allegedly moral purposes, but our recognition of an action as reprehensible presupposes that higher moral norms allow us to measure an allegedly moral stance as immoral. In this sense the superiority of the moral is not brought into question.

Every enterprise, especially those that receive public funding, should have moral legitimacy. One can legitimate the value of an activity either by pointing to its intrinsic value or by stressing its value for society. The question of the moral legitimacy of art should not be relegated to a nonquestion (which is in many ways the dominant liberal position) or a simplistic response (which is in many ways the dominant conservative stance). Several ambiguities lie in the term *morality*. Most commonly, it refers to questions of conduct and behavior. In this context moral art might be viewed as art that does not violate the moral customs of the age, for example, that it not contain frank depictions of sexuality. I mean something entirely different. My concern is the moral value of literature, whether it is worthy of our investment of time and if so, what it can and should be. To distinguish between “moral conventions,” that is, the moral claims and customs of a certain society at a given point in history, and “morality,” that is, the moral claims legitimated by reason after measuring and evaluating specific moral conventions, is important. Keeping this distinction in mind, we can recognize that the morality of some literary works might consist in breaking free of the moral conventions of a given age, which from a higher perspective are to be viewed as less than ideal.

### IDEALISM AS A RESOURCE

Philosophy and the individual disciplines can intersect in either of two directions. On the one hand, philosophy can reach out to other disciplines and address the claims of those sciences instead of being simply philosophy for the sake of philosophy; and it is indeed imperative that philosophy do so if it is to remain relevant. On the other hand, philosophical questions can be raised from within the specific disciplines, whenever these disciplines address the fundamental questions of their enterprise. What is art? Why should we read literature, and which literature should we read? How might literary criticism enhance our experience of literature? One sign of the crisis of literary criticism is that such questions have for the most part been neglected or become taboo. To answer them presupposes a normative level, and we live in an age of normative paralysis.

Several ironies surface in this development. First, literature and literary criticism have never been doubted by the general public as much as they are today, and so the question of legitimacy is central to the future health of the discipline. Second, literary criticism has never been as self-reflective as it is today, yet the most central normative questions are consistently neglected. Third, even as literary critics have abandoned the idea of grounding any normative claims, literary criticism has itself become increasingly dogmatic, splintering into schools and subschools that speak their own language and criticize one another, often without addressing overarching questions of legitimacy. Fourth, and most ironic, in the past thirty to forty years literary critics have undertaken a desperate search for relevance. Relevance is indeed desirable, but in this search extra-aesthetic and ideological considerations have so fully replaced aesthetic ones that the question of why we should study literature has remained unanswered precisely by those who have sought to give moral relevance to the study of literature.

Many persons looking for orientation from the field of literary criticism are skeptical about its current state and are looking for alternative perspectives. Undoubtedly very few contemporaries would expect to find viable answers in the tradition of objective idealism, which argues that synthetic a priori knowledge exists and that this knowledge has ontological valence. Held by Plato and Hegel and currently given its strongest defense in the diverse writings of Vittorio Hösle,<sup>6</sup> the view that there is an ideal sphere that transcends nature and consciousness is foreign to what Stanley Fish would call “the *going* argument,” namely, that there are no foundational positions and that the only norms to

which one can legitimately appeal are the professional norms practiced at any given time (“Anti-Foundationalism” 68; cf. Culler 45). When the distinction between *is* and *ought* is leveled, the power of the professions increases. Professional consensus is in principle no longer accountable to a higher purpose, and criticism of the reigning paradigm becomes increasingly difficult, as people have professional stakes in the status quo, which itself becomes the standard of judgment. Nonetheless, in a climate that fails to excite both practitioners and observers, alternative perspectives may be both welcome and invigorating.

At least two ways exist to show the validity of a position—to argue from first principles that are proven or to demonstrate a position’s heuristic value. Since this book is not an effort to develop first principles and since few contemporaries would find an objective idealist framework a natural choice for the present age, I pursue the second path, attempting to present a framework that allows us to see the sphere of literary studies in unexpected ways. While many of my positions can be grounded within the book itself, others draw on a tradition of thought that is presupposed, and not proven, in this study. While presuppositions exist for all works of literary criticism, this book’s presuppositions are not part of the consensus of the age. For many centuries the strongest defense of the arts and humanities derived from the idealist tradition. This tradition has vanished for the most part, and our contemporaries have considerable difficulties convincing others of the value of the arts and humanities. Certainly, insights into their value may derive from diverse complementary sources, and one voice, among others, might well draw on this tradition. If we are in agreement that the humanities, literary criticism in particular, are suffering from a crisis of legitimacy, we must be flexible and open in seeking solutions. Skeptics of a more traditional stance may wish to begin with my analyses of culture studies and deconstruction in chapter 4. If the evaluation of contemporary currents seems sound, then the skeptical reader might return to the book’s more logical opening and read the development of normative principles that motivate the later evaluation.

Suppose then, for the sake of argument, that even though few would accept the premises of idealism, we experiment with some of its positions and weigh whether or not it might allow us to see values and perspectives that might otherwise be hidden. In drawing on this tradition, I do not follow all of its claims; the reader will recognize specific points of disagreement with Plato and Hegel, which are highlighted in my reflections. In addition, any effort to reawaken some of the forgotten arguments of objective idealism needs to draw on the diverse advances in the individual sciences and arts since the last system of ideal-

ism was developed. Höslle, for example, employs the rich resources of the social sciences in developing his arguments on morals and politics, and in an earlier study, in which I developed Hegel's theories of tragedy and comedy for the contemporary age, I sought to integrate advances in the arts since the time of Hegel. In this book, I not only attempt to integrate post-Hegelian advances in literary criticism, I seek to bring the tradition of objective idealism into conversation with the challenges of the technological age.

The idealist thinker who engaged the moral value of literature more fervently than any other is Friedrich Schiller. Schiller takes his initial cues from Kant. Among Kant's main achievements in aesthetics are not only a rich account of aesthetic judgment but also a recognition of the intrinsic value of art and its relation to morality and an articulation of the connections between art and nature. Schiller, both poet and Kantian, challenges the philosopher in various ways, arguing, for example, that our motivations for moral action need not derive only from reason. But Schiller also develops a Kantian perspective; indeed, his importance in the history of aesthetics derives from his extraordinary ability to explore the seemingly contradictory path of art as autonomous and as moral. Schiller links the autonomy of art with its wholeness and harmony, which represent a counterimage to the fragmentation of reality; the experience of harmony has an effect on our souls and is viewed as a prerequisite for the moral regeneration of society. I return to this insight, but seek to supplement it in diverse ways. First, Schiller's efforts, not unlike Kant's, are highly formal, and an aesthetics that seeks to deepen Schiller's claims about the moral value of literature will need to integrate the historical perspective and concrete content characteristic of Hegel's aesthetics, even if on diverse points (such as whether philosophy makes art superfluous, I side with Schiller against Hegel). Second, any effort to return to a thinker like Schiller, whose aesthetic works are now two centuries old, must also be enriched by reflections on the developments of modernity—both in the object world, ranging from technology to politics and art, and in the scholarly world, encompassing advances in the natural sciences and the emergence of the social sciences. Above all, the ugly, which dominated aesthetic discussion immediately after the idealist period, needs to be fully integrated into art. Schiller can be valuable for the present, but we cannot be Schillerians.

My analysis of why literature matters in the twenty-first century has three parts. The book begins with a normative discussion of the value of literature and literary criticism. Despite my focus in this first part on more traditional questions and a more traditional aesthetics, I do not ignore contemporary de-

velopments: chapter 4, for example, outlines strengths and weaknesses in contemporary literary criticism. Recent developments offer us new ways of viewing art, and these valuable horizons should not be lost. However, the question also arises of whether some valid questions have been forgotten. The historical transcendence of a theory is not one and the same as its philosophical refutation. A return to certain questions that have been neglected in modernity may in fact be the best way to open up new vistas for modernity. In the book's second part I turn to a descriptive account of the dominant categories of the technological age and their impact on aesthetics. I consider some of the intellectual-historical prerequisites of the technological age, especially those with a direct or indirect impact on aesthetics, and their manifestation in society and culture. I also reflect on the ways in which the specific technical innovations of the age have influenced not only society in general but also art and especially literature. Combining the normative and descriptive parts, I then turn in the third section to constructive suggestions concerning the possibilities of literature and literary criticism in the technological age, that is, a discussion of what great art and literary criticism should be today and the ways in which art can address some of the central categories and problems of the technological age. This triadic structure gives us insight into the universal value of literature and literary criticism and their specific possibilities and challenges in the twenty-first century.



## Notes

### CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. In May 2002 the Modern Language Association recognized the need to address the neglected question of the value of literature—as a result of pervasive concerns about a crisis of legitimacy. Despite some cogent and eloquent responses, such as that of Berman, the respondents devote as much space to reflection on the emergence of the question today as they do to its answer. See “Why Major in Literature?”

For recent anthologies on the future of German studies, see McCarthy and Schneider, Van Cleve and Wilson, and Förster. Gerhard Kaiser’s slim volume, written after a long and illustrious career, stands out as a partial exception to the rule. His focus is the relevance of literature for life. The specific question of the relevance of literature in the technological age is not part of his deliberations. The opposite strength and weakness are evident in another work written by a senior member of the profession: Jost Hermand admirably concludes his history of Germanics by calling for greater engagement with ecological issues, but his study contains no sustained reflection on the value of literature as literature, which would seem to be a necessary precondition if literature or literary criticism is to contribute meaningfully to this area.

2. On the thematic study of technology in literature, see, for example, Segeberg’s *Literatur im technischen Zeitalter*, which is essentially a history of German liter-

ature in the technological age and which, with its eighty-seven pages of notes, contains references to virtually all other literature on the topic through 1997. Of special interest too are Segeberg's earlier work on the topic, with fuller literary analyses, and his anthology as well as the recent anthology of Großklaus and Lämmert. The related issue of literature and the environment has received attention by way of a relatively new organization, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment <<http://www.asle.umn.edu>>, and its journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. For an introduction to what is now called ecocriticism, see Glotfelty and Fromm as well as Branch et al., which builds on the earlier volume. Also of interest is a special issue of *New Literary History*, summer 1999, which focuses on ecocriticism (30 [1999]: 505–712). For source materials on teaching environmental literature, see Grumbling and Waage. The first volume on ecofeminist criticism is Gaard and Murphy. Britain's first collective contribution to ecocriticism is Kerridge and Sammells. More international, though focused on the topic of nature, is Murphy. Many studies in the above collections suffer from one of the problems of contemporary criticism I elucidate, the neglect of the aesthetic dimension. In addition, insofar as ecocriticism has tended to focus on nature, it encompasses only one dimension of literature in the technological age. A welcome development is that the most recent contribution to ecocriticism of Lawrence Buell, a leading figure in American literary studies and ecocriticism, addresses both the natural and the human built, including urban, aspects of our environment. For an anthology that extends ecocriticism's range into the urban environment, see Bennett and Teague.

For anthologies of German literary works on technology, see Bullivant and Ridley, Daniels, Dithmar, Krause, Minaty, Roehler, Sachsse, and Schneider. Each of these anthologies has the merit of drawing our attention to frequently overlooked literary works that thematize aspects of industrialization. The reduction of the truly aesthetic moment, which should not be ignored in such endeavors, comes to the fore, however, when works are selected independently of aesthetic considerations and in the form of brief excerpts, taken out of their organic contexts. A less central concern arises when such anthologies focus on the first and second industrial revolutions at the expense of the third industrial revolution, the transition to the information society; an irony arises, therefore, when they exemplify one of the problems associated with modern information, its frequent lack of organic meaning.

3. Although capitalism is an ideal engine for the development of technology, Gehlen's insight should not lead us to overlook the breadth of technology's impact; communism, too, had its "cult of technology" (Jonas 154), which was reinforced by the Marxist notion that the value of a product is defined by the labor put into it, not by its material basis (i.e., by nature).
4. Sedlmayr speaks, not unjustly, of the need for a third aesthetic category—along with the beauty of nature and the beauty of art—"the beauty of technology" (*Gefahr* 36).
5. On the transcendence of morality vis-à-vis diverse subsystems, see Hölsle, *Moral und Politik* 113–15. For an analogous attempt by an analytic philosopher to argue that the moral sphere has a distinctive status and that "moral principles cannot be overridden by aesthetic principles," see Beardsmore, esp. 23–30, who carefully shows that such a position is not at all incompatible with the idea that art has intrinsic value. The quotation is from page 23.

6. Useful as a first orientation to objective idealism, especially for those who immediately recognize the foreignness of the position, is Hölsle's essay on foundational issues of objective idealism, for it begins with an account and refutation of common perceptions that would make objective idealism seem wrong or musty or both.

## CHAPTER 2. THE VALUE OF LITERATURE

1. On the relationship of art and the idea from Plato through the early modern period, see Panofsky.
2. In differentiating the true from the accurate in art, I am abstracting from certain complex cases, such as Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* and *Soldiers*, where the work pretends to be both an artwork, which need not be accurate but only true, and a historical argument or document, which must, therefore, be measured with certain historical and not only aesthetic norms. While the aesthetic dimension is not influenced in such cases, authorial intention affects our discussion of such works as history. Also, the reception context, and with it the question of historical distance, comes into play. Schiller's contemporaries were certainly less concerned with his having Joan of Arc die in battle (note also the adjective in the subtitle, "A Romantic Tragedy in Five Acts," which sets different expectations concerning reality) than we are with Hochhuth's portrayal of Churchill as engineering the death of General Sikorski. What is affected here is again not our evaluation of the artwork as an artwork but our evaluation of the artwork as a historical and political document. In such cases both the aesthetic and historical spheres of evaluation are relevant, but distinct.
3. For an analytic account that seeks to explain and justify our emotional and affective responses to literature, see Feagin.
4. The passage from Remarque also tells us that technology which allows more distant warfare veils the specificity of our actions and makes killing easier, thus changing the face of war.
5. In practice Heidegger is not especially responsive to poetic works as poetic works; instead, he has a tendency to pull lines out of context and reflect on them independently. Ironically, precisely when criticizing subjectivity, Heidegger elevates his own subjectivity and treats poetic works as objects. For a trenchant critique of Heidegger's hermeneutics, see Weimar and Jermann. Although I see in Heidegger's view of truth as unconcealment an enrichment of our understanding of poetic truth, I do not reduce truth to this definition, which carries with it certain deficiencies, especially on the level of sifting competing truth claims, as I suggest more fully below.
6. Peter Zima has demonstrated, not unconvincingly, that modern literary theory tends to be divisible according to a Kantian tradition that elevates form and a Hegelian tradition that elevates content. For a differentiated view of Zima's claims, see my review.
7. On the National Socialist use of the term *organic*, see Denkler. On the resulting hesitancy to employ the category, see, for example, Krieger 36 and 49, who nonetheless seeks to recover a complex sense of the organic that includes, rather than excludes, variety and openness.
8. For a recent criticism of the organic in art, see Dana Phillips, who questions the contemporary scientific relevance of the organic and the related concept of the ecosystem. Certainly, many biologists concentrate on minute aspects of small interactions and never ask