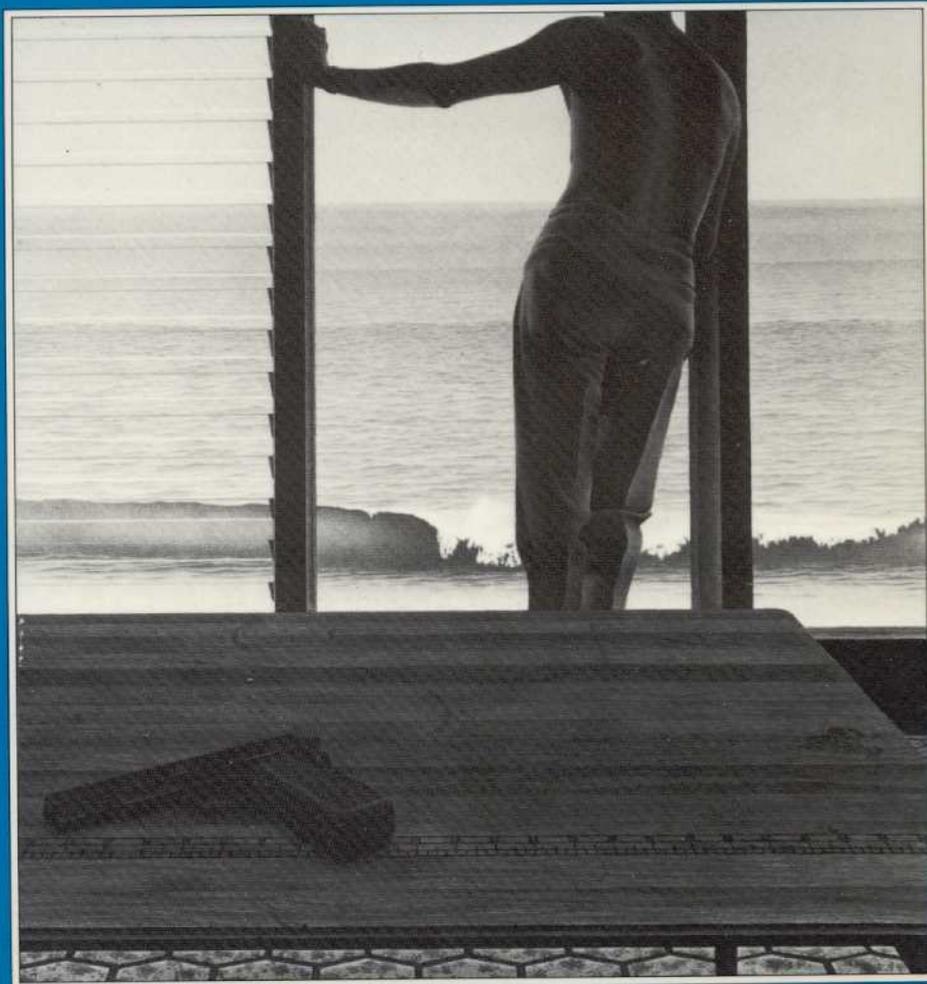


Life After Postmodernism

essays on value and culture



edited and introduced by
John Fekete

LIFE AFTER POSTMODERNISM
Essays on Value and Culture

For Victoriana

LIFE AFTER POSTMODERNISM
Essays on Value and Culture

Edited and introduced by
John Fekete

New World Perspectives
Montréal

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Published by CTHEORY BOOKS in partnership with NWP and copyright, © 2001, by CTHEORY BOOKS. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers. Readers are encouraged to download this material for personal use. Commercial use with permission only.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Life after postmodernism: essays on value and culture

(CultureTexts series)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Values 2. Culture 3. Postmodernism.
I. Fekete, John II. Series.

BD232.L54 1987

121'.8

C87-090199-0

Printed and bound in Canada

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introductory Notes for a Postmodern Value Agenda <i>John Fekete</i> | i |
| Value Without Truth-Value <i>Barbara H. Smith</i> | 1 |
| Art and the Sociological Ego: Value from a Psychoanalytic Perspective <i>Charles Levin</i> | 22 |
| Vampire Value, Infinitive Art, and Literary Theory: A Topographic Meditation <i>John Fekete</i> | 64 |
| Aesthetic Alienation: Heidegger, Adorno, and Truth at the End of Art <i>Jay M. Bernstein</i> | 86 |
| Interpretation, Interminability, Evaluation: From Nietzsche toward a General Economy <i>Arkady Plotnitsky</i> | 120 |
| Diogenes Laertius <i>contra</i> Gadamer: Universal or Historical Hermeneutics? <i>György Márkus</i> | 142 |
| <i>Ceci Tuera Cela</i> : Graffiti as Crime and Art <i>Susan Stewart</i> | 161 |
| Panic Value: Bacon, Colville, Baudrillard and the Aesthetics of Deprivation <i>Arthur Kroker</i> | 181 |
| Contributors | 194 |
| Index | 195 |

Acknowledgements

This book was conceived as a companion volume to *The Structural Allegory* (1984). Since *The Critical Twilight* (1978), I have been occupied with the question of value, and the massive shift in the forms of thought in this century whose result has been a downgrading of attention to value in favour of a foregrounding of all the categories of structure. I have been convinced that, not only is the change of emphasis in some important respects disabling (though also productive), but that there is in any case an ineluctable connection between structure and value that has to be made again more visible. This book issues from that conviction and I hope that its evidence, in turn, provides support for it.

When I began to work on the text four years ago, with the intention of stimulating a collaborative project to complement the earlier book in the form of a (set of anticipations of a) retheorization of the value question, I learned rapidly just how deeply the whole issue had been buried, even in the midst of a lively proliferation of (related) concerns and methods. The one intellectual current that addressed it at all with a contemporary flavour — one section of the heirs of Nietzsche — spoke to it only to denounce and put an end to the discourse of value, in the extravagant belief that the latter, especially in its reductive acceptance as in effect *moral* value, was completely under the deathly hegemony of the pathologies of Christianity, or modernity, or both. It was very difficult, even among friendly colleagues, to make intelligible a post-axiological, more-than-ethical, perspective on value, fit for a post-modern and post-scarcity prospect.

Now, at the end of that period, I think that a change is coming. As it becomes clearer that we are living after the onset (in some unobtrusive yet unavoidable sense) of postmodernity, it seems also strategically desirable to more people to think about life beyond the horizons of the more nihilistic and paralyzing aspects of postmodernism. Ultimately, it turns out to be possible to think *with* the question of value, and this book is offered as a kind of early testimony and invitation to that possibility.

I am particularly grateful to Barbara Smith, who invited me to think out loud about value at the MLA, and who has herself been effectively campaigning at the frontiers of a renewed discussion of value. I want to express my appreciation to Charles Levin, Andrew Wernick, Ian McLachlan, and Costas Boundas, friends and colleagues, who encouraged my interest, read manuscripts, and generally provided the loosely supportive milieu in which the project could be personally sustained. As often before, I am thankful to Suzan Wheeler, who has helpfully given of her time to provide the index. I want to thank Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, who have not only been always generous, but who have been prepared to take risks to back up their intellectual commitments. Finally, I want to acknowledge that, without the untiring attention and many-sided engagement of Victoria de Zwaan, my task would have been harder beyond calculation.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed, collaborated, or helped. In particular, I want to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose leave fellowship helped with the earlier stages of this project, and Trent University which, with some support within its modest means, helped to complete it.

J.F.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES FOR A POSTMODERN VALUE AGENDA

John Fekete

We may be on the threshold of a new round of theoretical value discussion in cultural studies, opening to a radical reconstruction and revaluation of the modern fact-value discourse. The essays in this volume are characteristically postmodern probings into the wilderness of looming interdisciplinary agendas. Grouped together in a text, their coordinated inscription may be read as playing on the critical and creative hinges between deconstruction and deconstruction.

Not to put too fine a point on it, we live, breathe, and excrete values. No aspect of human life is unrelated to values, valuations, and validations. Value orientations and value relations saturate our experiences and life practices from the smallest established microstructures of feeling, thought, and behavior to the largest established macrostructures of organizations and institutions. The history of cultures and social formations is unintelligible except in relation to a history of value orientations, value ideals, goods values, value responses, and value judgements, and their objectivations, interplay, and transformations. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that the oceans and continents of value, though much travelled, remain almost entirely uncharted in any way suitable to the navigational contingencies of postmodern itineraries.

We live our intellectual lives transitionally, in the interval between an onto-epistemological tradition that has been losing currency and a value-theoretical tradition that is just beginning to be coined and released into exchange and circulation. The gap yawns through both the everyday and the social-political levels of life and, without a viable value discourse, we are obliged to negotiate a commotion of disorientational crises amidst un-

adjudicated claims of validity and diverse experiences of evaluation (ranging from the most automatized to the most conflicted). Among professional academics, value inquiry has been by and large fragmented and specialized into sub-specialities of economics and philosophy, confirmed in their respective proprietorships by the distinction that the Dewey system of classification makes between "value" and "worth". References to value, where they are not confined narrowly to disciplinary subject-matter, tend to be either casual and colloquial (as in the remnants of traditional humanist discourse, including literary criticism), or literally censored from the theoretical agenda, exiled from theory-formation, and censured in discursive practices (as in the post-Northrop Frye cornucopia of interpretative frameworks for literary theory).

In other words, the fields of value lie fallow, even within the specialist social sciences and humanities. Further, both interdisciplinary value-theoretical inquiry and, equally importantly, a metatheoretical discourse (on the analogy of the philosophy of science) that would be concerned with specialist discourses related to value, validity, and valuation, today have only the standing of as yet unarticulated promises that are already, as I shall argue, on postmodern paradigmatic horizons. The anticipatory observation of the Cornell value-study group in 1949, that "value is a potentially bridging concept which can link together many diverse specialized studies — from the experimental psychology of perception to the analysis of political ideologies, from budget studies in economics to aesthetic theory and philosophy of language, from literature to race riots"¹ is, in effect, programmatically implied for an emerging theoretical enterprise. This latter will have absorbed the ineluctable contemporary impact of anti-epistemological neo-pragmatism, deconstruction, and the post-rationalist structural allegories (that have already brought the regulative metaphors of the humanities and social sciences into familial relations with those categorical reconfigurations that have been effected by the paradigm shifts in contemporary physical and biological sciences).² Such new field theories and metatheories of value may come to provide invaluable guidance for linking the professional intellectual discourses, the lifeworld of orientational background assumptions, and the systems of institutional social organization.

Emphasizing the revaluation of value inquiry that can be expected from postmodernism necessitates some thoughts on the shape of this revaluation. A look at the trajectory of modern axiology suggests that both the neglect, censorship, or exile of value inquiry in some quarters, and its disciplinary and subdisciplinary confinement (and evisceration) in others, are results of the exhaustion of a particular tradition of value that has dominated the heritage of Western Enlightened modernity: the positivist-modernist tradition, with its antinomic 'fact-value' structure, within which value inquiry underwent both its heroic rise and scandalous reduction and decline in the span of roughly a century and a half. By this I mean that

the methodological narrowing, the substantive dead ends, and the thinning credibility that mark the late fate of this whole region of discourse are all paradigm-dependent, with the effect that the postmodern paradigm shift may place value-theoretical interventions into positions of far greater esteem. (Naturally, within the sketchy schematism of a brief account, I cannot provide a social-theoretical or social-phenomenological accounting for rationality structures and paradigm shifts; I can only acknowledge these through the inner logic of the foregrounded tradition of value discourse.)

The modern axiological project has been shaped by British and Austrian empiricists, German Kantians and neo-Kantians, American pragmatists and realists, and logical empiricists around the world. In brief, it has been built on a secular world picture that accepts the characteristically modern division between two stable terms: a world of objects and a world of representations; entities that are object-constrained and entities that are subject constrained; facts and values. These are, of course, polar terms, but the mode of intellectual articulation, as could be expected from the antinomic reproduction of such binary categories, is occupied with establishing relationships (dialectical, hierarchical, causal, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, etc.) between the poles. (Indeed, the pre-occupation with the subject-object relationships becomes so obsessive that, when the modern paradigm is given its postmodern flip, the polar terms are retranslated as mere effects of the relationality that remains foregrounded and methodologically foundational).

The point is that a general, autonomous value inquiry (into value as an autonomous kind of entity) is from the start a product of this paradigm, emerging from the pre-modern subordination of value study to metaphysics, and from the correspondingly metaphysical subordination of value to its metabolism with being. Modern axiology, in a significant sense, constituted the emancipation of value from its immediate ties to ontology; but, accordingly, as a modern cognitive venture, it was also to face the persistent demand within the secularized onto-epistemological paradigm that it should justify and ground values objectively in relation to existence or else consign them to the status of a diminished reality. In other words, the validity or significance of values was no longer a metaphysical given, entailed in the nature of being, but rather a *demonstrandum*. The effect and pathos of the positivist-modernist approach is that the realm of fact is hypostatized without validation, while the realm of value is left floating in indeterminate relation to it; but now that both are free of the metaphysical symbiosis, the realm of value is under pressure to reconnect itself with the realm of fact (being) and to find secular supports (grounding) to guarantee this connection, on the analogy of the former metaphysical supports. This problem haunts all action orientations and cognitive inquiries from within, including the newly autonomous inquiry into value. The problematic of foundation is thus organized around the gap between the positive terms, the secular abyss, the interval of uncertainty, the absence of tran-

scendental guarantees. In its comic mask, the triumphalism of this onto-epistemic configuration is known in philosophy as positivism; in its tragic mask, its pathos is known in literary culture as modernism.

It is important that the first specific value theories outside the religious-metaphysical world views (where the stratifications of being and value directly coincided, descending from such onto-axiological peaks as the Good, or God) were formulated in the field of economics. Value in the modern economic tradition has been customarily tied to the various costs of producing goods for exchange in the market, particularly the costs of labour (power) as measured by the costs of its (physical) reproduction. This labour theory of value, from Cantillon to Smith, Ricardo, and Marx, distinguished value in use from value in exchange, increasingly stressing the latter, particularly when under challenge from theorists of “marginal utility” (Gossen) who emphasized the priority of the former. It matters less to us here which of these two abstractions serves the other better as its phantom grounding or alibi. We are concerned to note that in either case, and in all the variations (including the Mercantilist issues of supply and demand), the question of value was being raised by economic theorists within a specific subsystem of explicitly human activity, at a distance from metaphysical considerations. It was also being raised, we may note, from the *object* side, in derivation from empirical elements.

General value theories, however, that could encompass all areas of human valuing, remained to be attempted from the *subject* side. In England, Hobbes, Hume, and Bentham all derived value from affect — the Benthamite utilitarian calculus of pain and pleasure, summing to the ‘greatest-happiness principle,’ being perhaps the first general model of a value theory. (I shall return to utilitarianism below.) The most sustained and self-conscious intervention in this area, however, was that of Austrian axiologists (Brentano, Meinong, von Ehrenfels, Marty, Kraus, and Mally), often called the “Second Austrian School of Values.” Theirs was a deliberate move to generalize a unified value theory beyond the concerns and scopes of economic value theorists — even the original utilitarian “First Austrian School of Values” (Menger, Wieser, Böhm-Bawerk), whose work they considered superior to that of the labour theorists of value. The axiologists’ argument was that the derived value of the utility theorists (not to mention the cost-accounting of their opponents) would not address the problem of unmediated values, that the economic concern with the object side could not account for subject-variant valuation, and that, in any case, the subject, *presupposed* in the economic discussion, was the key to the value problem.

In general, on this *relational* account, value *phenomena* are encountered solely in value *experience*, and can be described only with reference to the affective-conative responses of subjects, with the result that a psychological value theory alone is capable of offering a unified account of value across the range of our interests and actions in economics, ethics,

and other areas. Within the broad framework of value-hedonism, members of the school then divided, on psychological grounds, as to whether the source of value was to be found in feelings (Meinong) or desire (von Ehrenfels). They also divided, on epistemological grounds, as to whether the relationship between the objects valued and the psychological experience of value was objective (Brentano, Meinong) or subjective (von Ehrenfels): that is 1) whether value had an objective basis in the characteristics of the object, such that it was valued (correctly) because it was valuable, the value experience thus disclosing the value of the object (a phenomenological line that goes from Brentano and Meinong to Husserl, Scheler, and Nicolai Hartmann); or 2) that an object was valuable because it was actually or potentially valued, the value experience thus conferring value on the object (the line from von Ehrenfels to the most influential American subjectivist value theorist before the Second World War, Ralph Barton Perry: 'x is valuable = interest is taken in x').³

These disagreements are well documented and need not concern us here.⁴ I want to note only that the epistemological objectivists and subjectivists in the Austrian psychological school of axiology both agreed that, whether value was the capacity of an object to command psychological attention or whether value sprang from psychological attention, it was not an independent but a derivative characteristic, arising out of a relationship between stable, self-possessed entities, i.e., between integral objects and the unitary self-conscious experience of integral subjects. But implicit in this relationship (as it was constructed within the disabling framework of the onto-epistemic subject-object fixation) was the characteristic axiological question, always identified in different branches of the continental tradition, but never quite resolved (nor resolvable within the antinomic framework).

The question of the validity of values — validity across a number of different subjects and a range of differing situations — is posed in the following way. If something is *valuable* or *desirable*, as opposed to *merely* subjectively valued or desired, or, put differently, if not every experience of pleasure or striving is *ipso facto* a value experience — if, that is, there is a real, non-arbitrary, and not merely terminological connection between the object and the value response, so that the recourse to the concept "value" is to do some real work — then the concepts "valuable" or "desirable" (as opposed to "valuing," "desiring") involve an aspect that refers to some quality that makes the object *worthy* of desiring or valuing. What is at issue here is a closely related further dimension pertinent to the valuing experience and beyond the purview, strictly speaking, of psychology or sociology, because it touches on whether we *ought* to value or on the demand to *be* valued — it touches, in other words, on a normative relation between subject and object, exceeding the preferred boundaries of the naturalist inquiry into value as valuation. In short, the validity question was the form in which value theory attempted to raise the question

of value to a second order inquiry into the *value of value*. Implicit in this move is the strategy of establishing at this second level of value that objectivity (or that universality) which always remained elusive at the first level. Contemporary forms of rationalism continue to pursue this tack, and they continue to be resisted by contemporary forms of naturalism, behaviorism, and pragmatism.

This aspect of the problem was most sharply developed in the 19th century by Rudolf Hermann Lotze, generally credited with founding axiology, and by the South German school of value theorists at Baden (Windelband, Rickert) whom he influenced. Lotze and the neo-Kantians write openly in the tradition of Kant's decisive distinction between problems of existence and problems of value, and with the corollary certainty that the latter are not derivable from (and hence not reducible to) the former. To protect a realm of humane significance from the militant imperialism of scientific naturalism, Lotze stresses a double-realm conception (fact and value), systematically working the Humean 'is-ought' dichotomy into an axiological framework. In a characteristic humanist posture, he polemically counterposes value rationality to cognitive-instrumental rationality. Values, on his account, have no being, only validity, which is not to be identified with actual valuations or *de facto* value judgements. This is the validity problem (including the relation between validity and the realization of value in actual practice) that the neo-Kantians (with Kant's *a priori* dichotomization of rational being and natural being) elaborated in sharp contrast to Austrian psychological naturalism, and to both empirical and non-empirical historicism (e.g. Dilthey, Hegel, Ranke, Mannheim), on the grounds that these failed to establish the significance of value positing and to provide for universal validity and value continuity.

Once again, looking past the problematical elements in the way that the questions and attempted solutions were posed — for example, in Scheler's project to theorise absolute values as *prior* to the world of objects and the representational contents of experience, within the realm of which they would have only relative subject-dependent validity — what we can see is that autonomous value inquiry has reproduced the paradigmatic antinomies that gave birth to it in the first place. From the naturalist side, the question of validity is left unanswered; from the rationalist side, the foundations for values fade into transcendence. Thus value is either dissolved in (empirical, experiential) fact or severed from it.

It remained for yet another current spreading out from Vienna, riding the waves of the linguistic turn in philosophy, to draw the consequences of these axiological impasses and to marginalize the axiological project of developing a unified field theory and phenomenology of value. Logical empiricism (Schlick, Carnap, *et al.*) of course had its own unification project: to purify and link the sciences on the basis of analytically clarified empirical propositions. The effect of their reduction of axiology and their classification of its inventory of utterances and key terms as mere emo-

tive expressions was to strip evaluative expressions of propositional status and of any pretensions (such as the early empiricists and rationalists had entertained) to offering cognitive meaning or descriptive information about either the value objects or the value experiences.

With the consolidated support of philosophers like Russell, Stevenson, and Ayer, and with incursions into other value fields like literary theory (where I.A. Richards' concept of artistic "pseudo-statements" for a time broadened the hegemony of this much reduced axiology), a widely influential logical empiricism succeeded in delegitimizing and marginalising theoretical value inquiry. To be sure, as empiricists and pragmatists all agreed, valuation behaviour could remain a proper object of empirical study in a variety of disciplines (psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, medicine, education, etc.). At that level, it has remained to varying extents a continuing humanist concern. But as a significant autonomous theoretical discourse, axiology had no further place in the dominant positivist-modernist tradition.

This separation of value from cognitive validity converged in its cultural impact with the effects of a theoretical approach with precisely the opposite cognitive intention: the effects of the realist theory of intrinsic value as a non-natural property advanced by G.E. Moore in England at the turn of the century. This effort to resist instrumentalism could expect support from the substantialist position lodged in the everyday belief that the grammatical structure of value judgements is a logically correct emblem of the propositional content asserted. But Moore's position that value was an unanalysable, non-natural, pure property of a natural state of affairs, to which the only securely assured cognitive access was by intuition, reversed the intended meaning, and had the practical effect of determining value through the expression of entirely personal preferences that were to stand as unguided and unjustified choices of the will.

Split by the dichotomy on which it was founded, the axiological project thus self-destructed, leaving the situation of value disarray that Alasdair MacIntyre has analyzed: "To a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism [the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character] were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical stand-point may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture."⁵

Out of the modern axiological tradition, then, in the context of the dynamic processes of a cognitively-instrumentally biased culture, the generic concept of value (as it was finally instituted) has the relational features of ungrounded subjective apprehension or taste: value in the mind of the beholder. At the professional level, meanwhile, more recent analytic philosophy has softened somewhat on the question of the rationality of value judgements. By and large, therefore, what is being developed from the modern axiological heritage is a formal theory of preference, equipped