9 TELEVISION AND POSTMODERNISM

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The development of some kind of working relationship between television and postmodernism within the realm of critical studies is inevitable, almost impossible, and absolutely necessary. Inevitable, because television is frequently referred to as the quintessence of postmodern culture, and postmodernism is just as frequently written off as mere "television culture." Close to impossible, because of the variability of both television and postmodernism as critical objects; both are currently undergoing widespread theorization in which there are few, if any, commonly agreed-upon first principles. Necessary, because that very lack, the absence of inherited critical baggage, places television studies in a unique position vis-à-vis postmodernism. Unlike the critical work devoted to other media, television studies does not have to "retrofit" critical paradigms developed in modernist or premodernist periods and therefore should ideally be able to provide unprecedented insights into the complex interrelationships between textuality, subjectivity, and technology in contemporary cultures.

There is no short definition of *postmodernism* that can encompass the divergent, often contradictory ways the term has been employed. One reason for this divergence is that the term is used to describe: (1) a distinctive style; (2) a movement that emerged in the sixties, seventies, or eighties, depending on the medium in question; (3) a condition or milieu that typifies an entire set of socioeconomic factors; (4) a specific mode of philosophical inquiry that throws into question the givens of philosophical discourse; (5) a very particular type of "politics"; and (6) an emergent form of cultural analysis shaped by all of the above.

This terminological confusion is exacerbated by the contentiousness of the various definitions. As Jonathan Arac has written, "It remains even now typically the case that to 'have a position' on postmodernism means not just to offer an analysis of its genesis and contours, but to let the world know whether you are for it or against it, and in fairly bold terms."[1] One could argue that the chief drawback of most of this work is that the latter inevitably takes precedence over the former, producing little in the way of actual description but a great deal in the way of critical ax grinding. But although easy moralizing about postmodernism may often reveal little besides the presuppositions of the critical languages used to demonize or valorize it, the contested nature of the term—the fact that no definition of contours can ever be ideologically neutral, that description is inseparable from evaluation—reveals one of the most significant lessons of postmodern theory: all of our assumptions concerning what constitutes "culture" and "critical analysis" are now subject to intense debate.

If there is a common denominator in all of these contentious definitions of postmodernism, it is the determination to define it as something other than *modernism*, a term that is likewise given variable status. Modernism is generally characterized in one of two ways, depending on the individual critic's perspective on postmodernism: as a heroic period of revolutionary experimentation that sought to transform whole cultures, in which case postmodernism is seen as a neoconservative backlash; or as a period of profound elitism, in which case postmodernism signals a move away from the self-enclosed world of the avant-garde back into the realm of day-to-day life. John Barth, for example, in developing his operating definition of postmodernism, cites Gerald Graff's list of tell-tale characteristics of modernism as a suitable point of departure.[2] Graff argued that modernism began as a criticism of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, a rejection of both its values and its most favored style, namely realism. This rejection involved a highly self-conscious overturning of the conventions of realist representation: a move away from "objective" depiction of the world to various forms of abstraction and symbolism that emphasized subjective inward consciousness; the frustration of expectations concerning the coherence of plot and character; the disruption of linear narrative; and the employment of a variety of stylistic strategies that stressed that the "truth" of human experience was not accessible through simple documentation because it was not a well-ordered, rational machine waiting to be cataloged.

Barth adds to Graff's list two more features that he sees as central to modernism: the role of the artist as self-exiled hero; and the foregrounding

of language and technique, not as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves, the real "content" of art. These latter two characteristics are vitally important to Barth because they involve not just the stylistic/ideological features of modernism, but also the eventual fate of modernist art. The willful self-marginalization on the part of the artist class, coupled with its fascination with purity of technique, led to the self-enclosure of experimental art within the rarefied realms of the museum and the university. This process culminates in the "metafiction" of the 1960s, in which the problems involved in the act of creation become the primary content of the work—for example, in texts like William Gass's "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" or Barth's own *Lost in the Funhouse*, Federico Fellini's *8½* or Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*.

Charles Jencks makes a similar argument about modernist architecture, specifically about what is called the International Style, which was developed by Mies van der Rohe and others in the 1920s.[3] Jencks sees the same insularity in these stark geometric structures, constructed of glass-and-steel I-beams, which banished any trace of the nineteenth century or of specific regional characteristics. The International Style resulted from the same fetishizing of technique as an end in itself; it contended that by changing structural conventions one could alter consciousness and produce social change, even if the inhabitants of these glass towers were unable to comprehend the political significance of these radical innovations.

Barth and Jencks both emphasize the paradoxical development of modernism, wherein the need to develop radically different styles that would provide the shock of the new, and thereby transform consciousness, depended on the rejection of the familiar (specifically nineteenth-century realism and twentieth-century mass culture). Yet that very rejection led to a semiotic/ideological impasse. The avoidance of the familiar and the celebration of innovation produced bold new forms of personal expression, but these styles failed to be very effective forms of communication. In trying to keep their distance from the familiar, modernists also kept their distance from the public they hoped to transform. The failure of modernism, according to this argument, can be traced directly to the collision of two priorities—the cultivation of radical forms of personal expression on the one hand, and the need to bring about sweeping social change by developing a revolutionary mass consciousness on the other. These priorities proved to be mutually contradictory, primarily because the former was founded on a romantic conception of the artist as an enlightened outsider who minimized or ignored the masses, whereas the latter depended on a socialist conception of the state that made the masses (and not the

genius-artist) the agent of historical change. These conflicting priorities resulted in the abandonment of modernism's political agenda and the development of ever more daring forms of radical formal expression. By the 1960s, modernism was thoroughly institutionalized, no longer "revolutionary" except within the self-enclosed worlds of the art market and academia.

Postmodernism was, in varying ways, a reaction against the self-enclosure, the profitable marginalization that provided modernist artists with a guaranteed but increasingly smaller audience and orbit of influence. The alternative advocated by Jencks and Barth was not simple revivalism, in which modernism would be abandoned and older styles reinstated. The effort to reconnect with an audience outside galleries and scholarly journals involved a number of different strategies. One of the most common was to destabilize the relationship between high art and mass culture, primarily through the appropriation of signs drawn from mass media.

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's *Learning from Las Vegas* was massively influential in this regard.[4] They called for a new architecture that would communicate with contemporary audiences through the use of signs that were decidedly "impure," inartistic, and mass-produced. The "pop art" phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s, specifically the work of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Richard Hamilton, and others, likewise depended on the appropriation of popular icons and symbols (Campbell soup cans, Marilyn Monroe, etc.) and their "rearticulation"—giving them different significance within the context of museum art. In the process, pop art contested the limits of both museum art and popular art. This process of appropriation involved a fundamental shift with regard to the production of meaning, in which meaning was not a matter of pure invention on the part of the individual artist but more a matter of customizing or rearticulating previously existing signs. The combination of signs drawn from different periods, styles, and institutions has been called *radical eclecticism*, in which a text, whether a building by Charles Moore or a popular song by Living Colour, tries to represent the discontinuity of the messages that surround us but also their simultaneity.

Although it is possible to list the tell-tale stylistic features of postmodern design—the move away from abstraction and geometrics to the overly familiar and mass-produced; the replacement of purity with eclecticism, internationalism with cultural specificity, and invention with rearticulation—the cultural significance of these changes and their ideological ramifications remains a matter of intense debate. It is also especially difficult to relate television to these debates in any kind of one-to-one correspondence. Television, unlike architecture, literature, or painting, never had a

modernist phase that could serve as a point of departure for postmodern television. The emergence of postmodernism is decidedly an "uneven" development; its appearance and eventual impact vary from one medium to another.

Because neither an etymology, nor an evolutionary schema, nor an all-encompassing theoretical paradigm can provide an adequate working definition of postmodernism that allows for diverse applications to television, I will set forth a series of recurring themes developed by theoreticians working in different media that, in aggregate, provide a sense of the conflictedness but also the potential cohesiveness of postmodern theory. These themes, considered together, allow for a reconsideration of the semiotic, technological, and ideological dimensions of television.

A Semiotics of Excess: "The Bombardment of Signs"

One of the key preconditions of the postmodern condition is the proliferation of signs and their endless circulation, generated by the technological developments associated with the information explosion (cable television, VCRs, digital recording, computers, etcetera). These technologies have produced an ever increasing surplus of texts, all of which demand our attention in varying levels of intensity. The resulting array of competing signs shapes the very process of signification, a context in which messages must constantly be defined over and against rival forms of expression as different types of texts frame our allegedly common reality according to significantly different ideological agendas.

Television is obviously a central factor in this information explosion. Many critics on both the left and the right insist that television is likewise instrumental in the devaluation of meaning—the reduction of all meaningful activity to mere "non-sense," to a limitless televisual universe that has taken the place of the real. Such critics as Allan Bloom and Jean Baudrillard have made grandiose claims about the destructive power of mass culture (most especially television).[5] The former has claimed that television has brought about the ruination of true learning and morality. The latter has claimed that contemporary culture *is* television culture —endless simulations in which reality simply disappears. In Bloom's view, the culprit is not television alone, but the more general democratization of culture, which threatens the elite values that once formed the basis of real learning: the acquisition of Truth. But to Baudrillard (who is no more a postmodernist than Bloom), television is cause as well as symptom, alleg-

edly constructing a seamless realm of simulations that hinder our acquisition of the *really real*.

The problem with these critiques is their contention that all signs are encoded and decoded according to exactly the same logic, or encoded so differently that, as a whole, they produce one and only one effect. They insist that the technological developments of the recent past have made "meaning" an antiquated concept, because all signs are supposedly exhausted, mere electronic pulses disconnected from any referent. The chief limitation of these critics who are so anxious to demonize television is that they insist on making dire predictions about the devastating effects of this technological explosion (which alters everything, everywhere, in the same way), but they fail to recognize that the rate of absorption of those technological changes has increased commensurately. The medium may indeed be the message, but twenty minutes into the future the technological novelty is already in the process of being absorbed. In the same way that a figure of speech enjoys a certain novelty at its initial appearance but then begins to become absorbed into the category of the already familiar, the "figures of technology" that produce an initial disorientation are quickly made manageable (*secondarized*) through different strategies of absorption as they are worked over by popular texts and popular audiences. This absorption/secondarization process involves the manipulation of the array by texts operating within it—television programs (as well as rock songs, films, bestsellers, and so forth) that demonstrate an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the conditions of their production, circulation, and eventual reception.

A recent episode of *Northern Exposure* illustrates this absorption process quite clearly. When Holling, the local tavern owner, acquires a satellite dish that receives two hundred worldwide channels, his girlfriend Shelley quickly becomes a television addict, her entire life suddenly controlled by the new technology. She becomes maniacal in the process, and we see her calling the shopping channel to order thousands of dollars worth of kitsch items. The determination of her character by television programs is stressed repeatedly, as she dances to music videos or dresses up as a Vanna White wannabe to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. But by the end of the program she has confessed her televisual sins, in a mock confessional to the local disk jockey–priest, and resolves to watch selectively. Meanwhile the central character, Dr. Joel Fleischmann, envisions his failed love affair in terms of old black-and-white Hollywood films, including a silent-movie version of the final scene from *The Graduate*, with himself as the star. Other characters recognize his need for what they call "closure" in his

relationship, and they decide to provide this by enacting a movie fantasy of how his relationship should have ended. The closure of both plot lines epitomizes the absorption of media culture, not just through parody but through its secondarization by texts and audiences that rearticulate it according to their own needs, a process thematized by the program itself.

Irony, Intertextuality, and Hyperconsciousness

The all-pervasiveness of different strategies of rearticulation and appropriation is one of the most widely discussed features of postmodern cultural production. Umberto Eco has argued that this ironic articulation of the "already said" is the distinguishing feature of postmodern communication. In his often-quoted example, he insists that we can no longer make innocent statements. A lover cannot tell his beloved, "I love you madly," because it would very probably produce only a laugh. But if he wants to make such a declaration of love, he could say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, 'I love you madly.'" The latter indicates a mutual awareness of the "already said," a mutual delight in ironically manipulating it for one's own purposes.[6] This emphasis on irony is often written off as mere "camp" recycling, but such a view fails to account for the diversity of possible strategies of rearticulation, which range from the simple revivalism found in the buildings of Robert Stern, the interior design collections of Ralph Lauren, or the clothing of Laura Ashley to the more explicitly critical reworking of the "already said" in films like *Thelma and Louise*, the photographs of Barbara Kruger, or the radicalized cover versions of pop standards by the Sex Pistols or The Clash, in which the past is not just accessed but "hijacked," given an entirely different cultural significance than the antecedent text had when it first appeared. What is postmodern in all of this is the simultaneity of these competing forms of rearticulation—the "already said" is being constantly recirculated, but from very different perspectives ranging from nostalgic reverence to vehement attack or a mixture of these strategies. Linda Hutcheon argues very convincingly that what distinguishes postmodern rearticulations of the past is their ambivalent relationship to the antecedent text, a recognition of the power of certain texts to capture the imagination, but at the same time a recognition of their ideological or stylistic limitations (this ambivalent parody will be discussed in more detail below).[7]

There is no other medium in which the force of the "already said" is quite so visible as in television, primarily because the already said is the

"still being said." Television programming since the fifties has depended on the recycling of Hollywood films and the syndication of past prime-time programs. The proliferation of cable channels that re-present programs from the past four decades of television history marks the logical extension of this process, in which the various pasts and presents of television now air simultaneously. Television programming as accessing of the accumulated past of popular culture ranges from K-Tel offers for old *Honeymooners* and *I Love Lucy* episodes to the explicitly parodic demolitions of television programs to be found on *In Living Color*, *David Letterman*, and *Saturday Night Live*. This diversity in the forms and motivations of televisual rearticulation is even more apparent in the simultaneous but conflictive "re-presentations" of early sitcoms on rival cable networks. The Christian Broadcasting Network and Nickelodeon both broadcast series from the late fifties and early sixties, but whereas the former presents these series as a model for family entertainment the way it used to be, the latter offers them as fun for the contemporary family, "camped up" with parodic voice-overs, super-graphics, and reediting designed to deride their quaint vision of American family life, which we all know never really existed even "back then."

The foregrounding of intertextual references has become a marker of "quality television" (for example, prime-time network programs like *Hill Street Blues* and *St. Elsewhere*, which reflect a more sophisticated "cinematic style," feature ensemble casts, etc.) as well. Jane Feuer has traced this self-conscious intertextuality as it developed in the MTM style, but more recently, as "quality television" has developed across production companies and networks, the explicit referencing has played a vital role in situating a given program in relation to other forms of quality and nonquality programs.[8] During the 1990 fall season, for example, Michael and Hope of ABC's *thirtysomething* referred to watching *L.A. Law*, while on NBC's *L.A. Law*, attorney Anne Kelsey spoke of wanting to get home and watch *thirtysomething* because it was "responsible television."

This sort of referencing-as-positioning is not restricted to quality TV. On a recent episode of *Knots Landing* (a nighttime soap that airs opposite *L.A. Law* and makes no claims whatsoever to be quality television), two minor characters argue about their favorite TV programs. One states that he has to turn down a dinner invitation because "I forgot to set my VCR. I gotta see what Corbin Bernsen is wearing tonight." When his friend states that he "never watches that show" because he's a "newshound," the *L.A. Law* fan says derisively, "News my foot. You're crazy about Diane Sawyer." When his colleague protests that "she's very intelligent," his friend

responds, "Right, you're in love with her mind." The referencing here, within the context of an evening soap, presupposes three important factors: (1) that viewers will possess a televisual literacy developed enough to recognize programs from the actors' names and that they will know the television schedule well enough to appreciate the reference to the programs that air opposite *Knots Landing* on the two other major networks (*L.A. Law* and *Prime Time Live*); (2) that VCR time-shifting is now commonplace, especially for dedicated viewers of *L.A. Law* but also for those fans who exist within the fictional world of programs that air on competing channels; and (3) that the "irresponsible," nonquality program informs us why viewers *really* like quality television—for the wardrobes and the sexiness of the stars involved, which, as the characters of *Knots Landing* know, constitute the *real* pleasure of the televisual text.

These intertextual references are emblematic of the *hyperconsciousness* of postmodern popular culture: a hyperawareness on the part of the text itself of its cultural status, function, and history, as well as of the conditions of its circulation and reception. Hyperconsciousness involves a different sort of self-reflexivity than that commonly associated with modernist texts. Highly self-conscious forms of appropriation and rearticulation have been used by postmodern painters, photographers, and performance artists (David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Anderson, and others), and their work has enjoyed a great deal of critical attention. In the "metapop" texts that we now find on television, on newsstands, on the radio, or on grocery store book racks, we encounter, not avant-gardists who give "genuine" significance to the merely mass cultural, but a hyperconscious rearticulation of media culture by media culture.[9]

The self-reflexivity of these popular texts of the later eighties and early nineties does not revolve around the problems of self-expression experienced by the anguished creative artist so ubiquitous in modernism but instead focuses on antecedent and competing programs, on the ways television programs circulate and are given meaning by viewers, and on the nature of televisual popularity. A paradigmatic example of this is the opening scene of *The Simpson's Thanksgiving Special* (1990), in which Bart and his father, Homer, are watching television in their living room on Thanksgiving morning. *The Simpsons*, as a concept, is already a mean-spirited parody of the traditional family sitcom, and this particular scene adds an attack on the imbecilic chatter of "color commentators." But the scene goes beyond simple parody. As they watch the Thanksgiving Day parade, Bart keeps asking Homer to identify the balloon float characters, complaining that they could use some characters that "were made in the

last fifty years." His father tells him that the parade is a tradition, that if "you start building a balloon for every flash-in-the-pan cartoon character, you'll turn the parade into a farce." At this point the television-within-the-television depicts a Bart Simpson balloon floating by while the "real" Bart Simpson looks on. Thus Bart watches himself as a popular phenomenon on television. *The Simpsons* television program thereby acknowledges its own characters' status as popular icons whose circulation and reception are worked back into the "text" itself.

Subjectivity, Bricolage, and Eclecticism

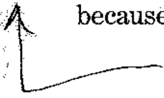
The "Bart watches Bart" example may be emblematic of a postmodern textuality, but what are the effects of this hyperconscious irony on television viewers? Is its ultimate effect emancipatory, leading to a recognition that television's representations are social constructions rather than value-neutral reflections of the "real" world? Or does this irony produce a disempowering apathy, in which no image is taken at all seriously? John Caughie has described this problem very effectively:

> The argument, then, is that television produces the conditions of an ironic knowingness, at least as a possibility . . . [which] may offer a way of thinking subjectivity free of subjection. . . . Most of all, it opens identity to diversity, and escapes the notion of cultural identity as a fixed volume. . . . But if it does all this, it does not do it in that utopia of guaranteed resistance which assumes the progressiveness of naturally oppositional readers who will get it right in the end. It does it, rather, with terms hung in suspension . . . tactics of empowerment, games of subordination with neither term fixed in advance.[10]

The crux of the matter here is the notion of the subject that is presupposed. Caughie's insightful point about irony vis-à-vis subjectivity suggests that television viewers are individual subjects neither completely programmed by what they are watching nor completely free to choose as self-determining individuals, captains of their fates, masters of their souls.[11] One of the significant developments in postmodern theory (put forward in an increasing number of disciplines) is the recognition that a new theory of the subject must be developed, one that can avoid the deterministic conception of the individual as programmable android without resurrecting a romantic "Self" that operates as a free agent, unfettered and uninfluenced by ideology.

The most productive attempts to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between identity and cultural determination have argued that, within postmodern cultures, identity must be conceived as an intersection of conflicting subject positions. Chantal Mouffe asserts that accounting for the complexities of subjectivity is not a question merely of moving away from the notion of a unitary "free" self to a unitary determined self, but rather "the problem is the very idea of the unitary subject. . . . [W]e are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities . . . constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions."[12] The emergence within the past decade of "antiessentialist" or postmodern feminism has played a key role in these debates. Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser argue that "postmodern feminist theory would dispense with the idea of the subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of 'women' and 'feminine gender identity' with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation."[13]

The concept of the postmodern subject as multiple and contradictory, acted upon but also acting upon, has also led to reconsideration of the "effects" that popular culture, most especially television, has on its viewers. The *hypodermic* model of media effects (in which mass media allegedly "injects" values directly into passive viewers) has been challenged by John Fiske, Ien Ang, and others who share a cultural studies perspective.[14] Many of them use de Certeau's concept of "poaching" to characterize audiences' skillful abduction of televisual texts, focusing on the ways in which audiences make the meanings they want or need out of television programs.[15] It is at this point that British cultural studies begins to share a number of concerns with postmodern theory per se, positing a subject who operates as a technologically sophisticated *bricoleur*, appropriating and recombining according to personal need. The term *bricolage*, developed by anthropologists to describe the ways primitive tribespeople piece together a meaningful cosmogony (or simply a way of operating) out of random elements they encounter in their day-to-day lives, has recently been applied to the behavior of individuals in contemporary media cultures. The culturalist and postmodernist positions differ, however, in regard to "mass culture." The former presupposes that mass culture may still be pernicious and homogeneous, but that it may be transformed into something resembling a genuine folk culture at the moment of reception because viewers tend to disregard the intended effects of television and



take from it what best fits into their lives. This is a very attractive political position in that it allows for the continued demonization of capitalism and mass culture while it celebrates the resourcefulness of ordinary people. However, it fails to recognize the eclecticism of postmodern cultural *production*.

Many television programs, films, popular songs, and other manifestations of popular culture are already the result of sophisticated forms of *bricolage*, already conscious of the multiple ways they might be understood. As I have mentioned above, Charles Jencks insists that one of the distinguishing features of postmodern architecture is "radical eclecticism."[16] The work of Charles Moore, James Stirling, and Hans Hollein juxtaposes styles, materials, and conventions hitherto thought to be thoroughly incompatible. Michael M. J. Fisher and George Lipsitz contend very convincingly that this eclecticism, this creation as *bricolage*, is also a feature of the ethnic and racial subcultures that are so prominent in American popular culture. "It is on the level of commodified mass culture that the most popular, and often the most profound, acts of cultural *bricolage* take place. The destruction of established canons and the juxtaposition of seemingly inappropriate forms that characterize the self-conscious postmodernism of 'high culture' have long been staples of commodified popular culture."[17]

The eclecticism associated with postmodernism takes on a more complicated dimension in regard to television. Individual programs like *Pee-Wee's Play House*, *Max Headroom*, and *Twin Peaks* are as radically eclectic in their use of diverse stylistic conventions as any postmodern building. Furthermore, the eclecticism of television textuality operates on a technological/institutional level as well because it has been institutionalized by cable television and the VCR, which together produce infinite programming variations. Postmodernist eclecticism might only occasionally be a preconceived design choice in individual programs, but it is built into the technologies of media-sophisticated societies. Thus television, like the postmodern subject, must be conceived as a *site*—an intersection of multiple, conflicting cultural messages. Only by recognizing this interdependency of *bricolage* and eclecticism can we come to appreciate the profound changes in the relationship of reception and production in postmodern cultures. Not only has reception become another form of meaning production, but production has increasingly become a form of reception as it rearticulates antecedent and competing forms of representation.

Commodification, Politics, Value

Another major concern of postmodern cultural analysis has been the impact of consumerism on social life. Fredric Jameson argues that postmodernism is best understood as the end result of capitalism's relentless commodification of all phases of everyday existence. He sees pop culture's radical eclecticism as mere "cannibalization" of the past and as "sheer heterogeneity" without "decidable" effects.[18] For Jameson, all such cultural activity is driven by the logic of "late" capitalism, which endlessly develops new markets that it must neutralize politically by constructing a vision of success and personal happiness, expressible solely through the acquisition of commodities.

The relevance of Jameson's work for television studies has already been explored by a number of critics, not surprising given the advertiser-driven nature of the medium in the United States, where commercials not only interrupt programs but have actually emerged as a form of programming. The blurring of the distinction between programs and commercials has become even greater with the development of "infomercials," shopping channels, product lines generated by Saturday morning cartoons (as well as by evening soaps like *Dynasty*), and so on. If television is defined by its semiotic complexity, its intertextuality, and its eclecticism, it is also just as surely defined by its all-pervasive appeals to consumerism.

The problem for television studies, as it tries to come to terms with postmodernism, is how to reconcile the semiotic and economic dimensions of television. Stressing the semiotic to the exclusion of the economic produces only a formalist game of "let's count the intertexts," but privileging the economic to the point that semiotic complexity is reduced to a limited set of moves allowed by a master system is just as simplistic. The attempt to turn television into a master system operating according to a single logic is a fundamentally nostalgic perspective; the culture of the 1990s, though judged to be the sheer noise of late capitalism, is nevertheless expected to operate according to nineteenth-century models of culture as homogeneous totality.

Making postmodernism coterminous with late capitalism offers a theoretical neatness by providing an all-purpose, master explanation: postmodern culture is a symptom of more fundamental economic and political trends. But this position is fraught with a number of problems. The limitations of this view of postmodernism become especially apparent in Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping."[19] He argues that a new aesthetics that will make sense of multinational capitalism has yet to emerge and that

there exists as yet no way of mapping the chaotic spaces of postmodern cultures. But the "map" he hopes will be drawn will not be acceptable to him unless it envisions this space according to the contours of traditional Marxist theory.[20] Jameson doesn't entertain the notion that mere mass culture may itself provide a mapping function or that television is not just a chaotic terrain in need of mapping but is itself a proliferation of maps. Lifetime, MTV, Black Entertainment Television, and the Family Channel all envision contemporary cultural life from specific generational, racial, and gendered perspectives. Taken together, they don't coalesce into one big picture but rather a composite of overlapping views that visualize the terrain of contemporary life in reference to its specific uses. The desire to formulate one master map, despite the multiple ways that the terrain can be envisioned and put to use by individual subjects as *bricoleurs*, exposes not just the limitations of traditional Marxist paradigms, but also the need to develop far more sophisticated forms of materialist analysis that recognize the multiple uses and effects of consumerism.[21]

The question of whether postmodern cultures may be conceived of as totalities and therefore may operate according to a set of predictive "laws" involves another major issue in postmodern philosophy—specifically, the debate between foundational and antifoundational modes of critical analysis. *Antifoundationalism*, most often associated with Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, involves the rejection of "master narratives," or any set of all-embracing laws governing human behavior, the science of history, or the ways and means of capital.[22] The antiessentialist feminism discussed earlier is likewise antifoundational in its move away from an absolute reliance on any universal metanarratives or "covering laws" to explain gender difference. Unfortunately, the move toward the relative and provisional (rather than the universal and predictive) as a way to formulate new notions of subjectivity and political effectivity has been mistaken for an abandonment of all value.

Christopher Norris, for example, contends that postmodern theory, specifically in the form Baudrillard presents, may be effective in diagnosing the simulated nature of contemporary life but becomes "muddled" and politically irresponsible when the postmodern condition is used "as a pretext for dismantling every last claim to validity or truth."[23] But Norris takes Baudrillard's nihilist abandonment of the issue of value and generalizes it into *the* postmodern theory of value and political action, a position allegedly held by all practicing postmodernists. Norris fails to make any mention of such postmodern political theoreticians as Chantal Mouffe or Ernesto Laclau or of postmodern feminism in this context. Dick Hebdige

makes the crucial point that, in Baudrillard's universe, "postmodernity is associated with the annihilation of difference in the media age, the end of politics altogether," but on the other hand, "in those circles where politics of race and sexuality are taken seriously, critical postmodernism is identified with diversity and difference, a politics of contestation and change."[24]

Within this politics of diversity and difference, "value" is not abandoned —only absolute "truth values," or what Herrnstein Smith has called the automatic "axiomatics" of traditional critical theory that relied on transcendent, universal qualities as proof or verification for all evaluation. She insists that both value and evaluation are radically contingent. "That which we call 'value' may be seen neither as an inherent property of objects, nor an arbitrary projection of subjects but, rather, as the product of the dynamics of some economy or, indeed, of any number of economies (that is, systems of apportionment and circulation of 'goods') in relation to a shifting state, of which an object or entity will have a different (shifting) value."[25]

The ramifications of this point for television study—specifically for developing a theory of postmodern television—are far reaching, because Smith argues that we need to continue to debate the value of any given text but also insists on the contingent nature of those judgments. Evaluation always depends on criteria that are culturally determined and therefore culturally specific rather than transcendent. This is a vitally important point, because it allows for an analysis of television that recognizes the variable nature of televisual signs. Their value cannot be explained in reference to one logic but will be channel-, program-, and audience-sensitive. Even more important, by focusing on the dynamics of the economies that determine these shifting values, we can begin to understand the interconnectedness of the semiotic and the economic dimensions of postmodern television.

Twin Peaks

In order to demonstrate how the various themes of postmodern theory might be considered together in reference to a single television series, I will focus on *Twin Peaks*, because it became a cultural phenomenon that epitomizes the multiple dimensions of televisual postmodernism. *Twin Peaks* was not "postmodernist" just because it involved David Lynch, a bona fide postmodernist filmmaker, or because it depended on a number of postmodern stylistic conventions, or because it generated so many com-

modity intertexts (*The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, *Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes*, and a soundtrack album, among other things). Rather, the circumstances that allowed for its development and the ways in which it circulated are emblematic of postmodern culture and represent the confluence of a number of factors that give postmodern television its historical specificity.

The appearance of *Twin Peaks* on prime-time network television was due in large part to the impact of cable and VCR technology. The advent of cable systems that offer dozens of alternatives to the "big three" networks and the ubiquity of the VCR, which offers an even broader range of entertainment, led to a significant decline in the networks' share of the total viewing audience. In 1979, 91 percent of viewers were watching network programs during prime time, but by 1989 the number had dropped to 67 percent.[26] This viewer migration to cable and videocassettes has been portrayed in near-catastrophic terms by the networks, because those households that are able to afford cable and VCRs are precisely the households network advertisers most want to reach. Particularly prized within this audience segment are "yuppie" viewers, who not only purchase expensive consumer goods but also tend to consume other forms of entertainment—on broadcast television, videotape, cable, and pay-per-view and at movie theaters.

The development of *Twin Peaks* reflects a fundamental change in the way the entertainment industries now envision their publics. The audience is no longer regarded as a homogeneous mass but rather as an amalgamation of microcultural groups stratified by age, gender, race, and geographic location. Therefore, appealing to a "mass" audience now involves putting together a series of interlocking appeals to a number of discrete but potentially interconnected audiences. The promotion of *Batman: The Movie* by the various components of Warner Communications serves as the paradigmatic example here. D.C. Comics were used to secure the preteen and early teen audience, while MTV and Prince helped to lure the female teen audience. The original development of *Twin Peaks* involved exactly this sort of appeal to a number of distinct audiences. As producer Mark Frost himself acknowledged, he hoped the series would appeal to "a coalition of people who may have been fans of *Hill Street*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *Moonlighting*, along with people who enjoyed the nighttime soaps"—along with, of course, the people who watch neither anymore, now that cable and VCR have become household fixtures.[27] The emergence of "coalition audiences" as a marketing strategy parallels the development of "coalition politics" in contemporary political theory. Culture industries and

"'Twin Peaks'– the series that will change TV."

—CONNOISSEUR MAGAZINE

"Something of **a miracle.** The most **hauntingly original** work ever done for American TV." —TIME MAGAZINE

"The year's best show! **Grade: A+**" —ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"'Twin Peaks' **extends the boundaries** of network television." —GQ MAGAZINE

"'Twin Peaks' will **change television history.**" —LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

"**Unprecedented.** 'Twin Peaks' easily out-dazzles all the new network shows...this you gotta see." —TOM SHALES, THE WASHINGTON POST

"**Intelligent, gorgeously filmed** and highly stylized. TV has never seen a small town like 'Twin Peaks'." —NEWSDAY

"'Twin Peaks'...**like nothing else** on television." —LOS ANGELES TIMES

New Series

▲TWIN PEAKS▲

Special Preview Tonight

9/8:00 Central

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political activists both recognize the fragmentary nature of "the public" and realize that effective mobilization of "public opinion" is possible only through strategies of amalgamation.

The media blitz that surrounded the premiere of *Twin Peaks* is quite literally a textbook example of the skillful manipulation of the discourses of cultural legitimation that have hitherto been used to attribute value to media other than television. The full-page ad that appeared in the *New York Times* the day the pilot premiered (6 April 1990) is a case in point. In bold, oversized letters we are told: "Twin Peaks—the series that will change TV," according to *Connoisseur* magazine. Two evaluative criteria are reiterated throughout the glowing reviews quoted in the ad—a romantic-modernist glorification of originality and the shock of the new it produces, and an all-purpose notion of connoisseurship (see fig. 9-1). Throughout this initial wave of reviews in the popular press, *Twin Peaks* is valorized in cinematic terms, a medium that, judging by these reviews, enjoys a far higher degree of cultural status than television, especially when it involves David Lynch, already promoted as a genius director.

Many reviews bestowed automatic status on the program because it was the product of an *auteur*—a filmmaker with a recognizable signature. Richard Zoglin's review in *Time* (9 April 1990), entitled "Like Nothing Else on Earth: David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* may be the most original show on TV," describes the "Lynchian touches" and the director's art school training. The notion that great television might be made only by a great filmmaker also pervades Terence Rafferty's review in *The New Yorker* (9 April 1990). After referring to Lynch as an "all-American surrealist," Rafferty states that "within five minutes of the opening of *Twin Peaks* we know we're in David Lynch's world—unmistakable even on a small screen." The reliance on this evaluative criteria appears in its most bald-faced form in *Newsweek*'s cover story (1 October 1990) on Lynch, in which an "avant-garde" portrait of the director is accompanied by the graphic, "David Lynch—The Wild at Art Genius Behind *Twin Peaks*."

The discrete filmlike nature of the pilot was emphasized explicitly in an ad quoted in the television spot that ran during the week of the premiere: "It's must-see, must-tape television," a statement that stresses the singularity of the program. After the first few episodes had appeared, however, the avant-garde *auteur* mode of evaluation began to dissipate as *Twin Peaks* came to be conceived no longer as a discrete cinematic pilot, but rather as a television serial. The next major article in *Time* (7 May 1990) concerns the *Twin Peaks* "mania," how it has become a topic of "coffee wagon" conversation around offices. The article refers to the show's "trend-

iness" and includes a chart detailing the character configuration, complete with cutesy hearts and coffee cups, all of which emphasize its soap opera dimensions. The article features, interestingly, this quote from a regular viewer: "It's only a TV show, but you feel like a cultural idiot if you can't quote it on Fridays." At this point, when *Twin Peaks* is no longer being described as "hauntingly original," it returns to being just TV.

The issue of "cultural literacy," raised indirectly by the viewer's statement, involves this very shift in evaluative criteria. What does it mean to be "culturally literate" about *Twin Peaks*? Should one regard it as an unprecedented *auteurist*/avant-gardist incursion into the vast wasteland of mere TV? Or should one adopt a sense of knowing detachment that asserts, "I know it's just all TV trash, but I enjoy it ironically"?[28] The answer is not a matter of either/or but *both*, because a postmodern cultural literacy recognizes exactly this kind of variability. *Twin Peaks* is a polysemic phenomenon alternately valorized as would-be cinema and would-be soap opera. The cover stories on *Twin Peaks* that appeared in *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Soap Opera Weekly* (16 October 1990) reflect the polysemic nature of signs that constitute this program. The *Newsweek* "Wild at Art" cover features only Lynch as mad genius, whereas the *Rolling Stone* cover shows three of the program's stars vamping it up. *Soap Opera Weekly* features a large photo of Lynch with smaller inset photos of the stars, but surrounds both with other soap stories and photos—"Behind the scenes at *The Bold and the Beautiful*," "It's not all Romance at *Lovings* Dual Wedding"—in addition to the "Curious Revelations" from *Peaks* cast members. In each case, the significance or cultural resonance of the series changes fundamentally in accordance with the evaluative criteria employed by each magazine as it frames the phenomenon according to its own discursive agenda.

Although the press coverage of the *Twin Peaks* phenomenon accentuates its polysemic, multiaccentual nature, the semiotic variability of the program is not restricted to the diverse ways it is given significance at the point of reception. The style of *Twin Peaks* is aggressively eclectic, utilizing a number of visual, narrative, and thematic conventions from Gothic horror, science fiction, and the police procedural as well as the soap opera. This eclecticism is further intensified by the variable treatment each genre receives in particular scenes. At one moment, the conventions of a genre are taken "seriously"; in another scene, they might be subjected to the sort of ambivalent parody that Linda Hutcheon associates with postmodern textuality. These generic and tonal variations occur within scenes as well as across scenes, sometimes oscillating on a line-by-line basis, or across

episodes when scenes set in paradigmatic relationship to one another (through the use of the same character, setting, or soundtrack music) are given virtually antithetical treatments. The movement in and out of parodic discourse is common in all of the episodes. For example, in the pilot, when Dale Cooper and Harry Truman are going through Laura Palmer's diary and personal effects, the dialogue, delivery, and soundtrack music all operate according to the conventions of the Jack Webb police procedural. But the "just the facts, ma'am" tone of Cooper's discourse about cocaine, safety deposit boxes, and court orders is shattered by the concluding line of the scene, which is delivered in exactly the same manner: "Diane, I'm holding in my hand a box of chocolate bunnies."

This sort of tonal variation has led a number of critics to conclude that *Twin Peaks* is mere camp, an ironic frolic among the rustic bumpkins and the TV trash they devour along with their doughnuts. But the series is never just camp; the parodic perspective alternates with more straightforward presentation, encouraging an empathetic response rather than the ironic distance of the explicitly parodic. In the third episode, for example, when Dale Cooper explains his "deductive technique involving mind-body coordination"—complete with a blackboard, a map of Tibet, and rock throwing (fig. 9-2)—the scene becomes a thoroughgoing burlesque of the traditional final scene of detective novels, films, or television programs when the detective explains how he/she solved the crime, usually through a hyperrational deduction process. The introduction of the Dalai Lama, dream states, and rocks transports ratiocination (crime solving by rational deduction) into the realm of irrational spirituality, thereby parodying one of the fundamental "givens" of detective fiction. The absurd misuse of conventions defies the viewer to take the scene seriously. However, the scene at the end of episode fifteen in which Leland, possessed by Bob, brutally murders Maddie is one of the most horrifying murder scenes ever to appear on prime-time television; it defies the viewer *not* to empathize with the innocent victim, not to be deeply disturbed by the insanity and violence, which are intensified by the editing and sound distortions.

The death of Leland at the end of episode seventeen exemplifies not just this scene-to-scene variation but also the paradigmatic variation mentioned above, in which the same textual elements from earlier episodes are repeated but given completely different inflections. As Leland dies in Cooper's arms, he realizes that he has killed three young women, including his daughter Laura, and in the moments when he is dying, the framing, dialogue, acting style, reaction shots, and nondiegetic music all contribute to the pathetic nature of the scene, encouraging the viewer to

9-2

empathize wholeheartedly with the horrified father (fig. 9-3). Particularly interesting here is that two key elements contributing to this pathos were used parodically in earlier episodes: Cooper's Tibetan spiritualism, previously used as a signifier of his goofiness, is here given integrity as something that comforts the dying man, describing what he apparently sees at the point of death; and "Laura Palmer's Theme," previously used parodically to accompany any number of "soap opera" love scenes, here accompanies a scene of tragic paternal love.

It could be argued that this tonal oscillation and generic amalgamation, in which viewers are encouraged to activate ever-shifting sets of expectations and decoding strategies, is simply one of those "Lynchian tricks" —that in *Twin Peaks*, as in *Blue Velvet*, Lynch labors to catch his viewers *between* sets of expectations, producing the shock of the newly juxtaposed. Although this oscillation in tonality is undeniably a characteristic of Lynch's more recent projects, it is also reflective of changes in television entertainment and of viewer involvement in that entertainment. That viewers would take a great deal of pleasure in this oscillation and juxtaposition is symptomatic of the "suspended" nature of viewer involvement in television that developed well before the arrival of *Twin Peaks*. The ongoing oscillation in discursive register and generic conventions describes not

9-3

just *Twin Peaks* but the very act of moving up and down the televisual scale of the cable box. While watching *Twin Peaks*, viewers may be overtly encouraged to move in and out of an ironic position, but watching other television soap operas (nighttime or daytime) involves for many viewers a similar process of oscillation in which emotional involvement alternates with ironic detachment. Viewing perspectives are no longer mutually exclusive, but set in perpetual alternation.[29]

What distinguishes *Twin Peaks* from, say, *Dallas* or *Knots Landing* is not that it encourages this alternation in viewing positions but that it explicitly acknowledges this oscillation and the suspended nature of television viewing. In other words, *Twin Peaks* doesn't just acknowledge the multiple subject positions that television generates; it recognizes that one of the great pleasures of the televisual text is that very suspension and exploits it for its own ends.

If the postmodern condition is one in which we as individual subjects are constantly engaged in the process of negotiating the array of signs and subject positions that surround us, *Twin Peaks* and other forms of hyperconscious popular culture address themselves directly to this condi-

tion, situating themselves exactly in the arcs and gaps that result when these positions don't coalesce. By taking the array as their "setting" and redefining "narrative action" in terms of the exploitation of the array, these texts redefine the nature of entertainment in contemporary cultures. The concerns of postmodern television and postmodern theory, then, are thoroughly intertwined, because both are responses to the contingent, conflicted set of circumstances that constitute cultural life at the end of the twentieth century.

NOTES

I would like to thank Ava Preacher Collins and Hilary Radner for their contributions to the completion of this manuscript.

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2. John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment," in *The Friday Book* (New York: Putnam, 1984), pp. 193–206.

3. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 5th ed. (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).

4. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

5. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Jean-Louis Baudrillard, "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and the Information of the Social in the Masses," in *Myths of Information: Technology and Post-Industrial Culture*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Madison, Wis.: Coda Press, 1980), pp. 137–48.

6. Umberto Eco, postscript to *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

7. Linda Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism, Parody, and History," *Cultural Critique* 5 (Winter 1986–87): 179–207.

8. Jane Feuer, "The MTM Style," in *MTM: "Quality Television,"* ed. Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi (London: British Film Institute, 1984), pp. 32–60.

9. Jim Collins, "Appropriating Like *Krazy*: From Pop Art to Meta-Pop," in *Modernity and Mass Culture*, ed. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 203–23.

10. John Caughie, "Playing at Being American: Game and Tactics," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 54–55.

11. For a detailed analysis of the changes in theories of the subject, see Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

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13. Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 34–35.

14. John Fiske, "Popular Discrimination," in *Modernity and Mass Culture*,

ed. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 103–16; Ien Ang, *Watching "Dallas": Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Della Couling (London: Methuen, 1985).

15. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

16. Jencks, *Language of Post-Modern Architecture*.

17. George Lipsitz, "Cruising around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles," *Cultural Critique*, no. 5 (Winter 1986–87): 161.

18. See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July/August 1984), and "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 111–25.

19. Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347–57.

20. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

21. See especially Hilary Radner, *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Will to Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

22. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

23. Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism?* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 182.

24. Dick Hebdige, "After the Masses," *Marxism Today*, January 1989, pp. 51–52.

25. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Value without Truth Value," in *Life after Postmodernism*, ed. John Fekete (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 1.

26. *Entertainment Weekly*, 4 March 1990.

27. *Time*, 9 April 1990, p. 97.

28. Ang, *Watching "Dallas."*

29. Jane Feuer, "Reading *Dynasty*: Television and Reception Theory," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 443–60.

FOR FURTHER READING

The most useful introductions to postmodernism as it first developed in architecture are Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 5th ed. (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); Paolo Portoghesi, *After Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980); and Jencks's more recent *Postmodernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), which makes many of the same arguments as his earlier work but adds substantial analysis of painting in its delineation of the various forms of "free-style classicism." Although Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), doesn't present a detailed account of postmodernism per se, it has been massively influential in providing a theoretical framework for the shift from the International Style to more vernacular styles. Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966) was also a landmark work in redefining the aesthetic and ideological criteria for determining the value of different architectural styles. The journal *Architectural Design* is a useful reference point for following the development of postmodernism. See especially the issue entitled *Postmodernism on Trial*, no. 88 (1991).

Outside of architecture, seminal works that defined postmodernism in other media and disciplines include Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); John Barth, *The Friday Book* (New York: Putnam, 1984); Umberto Eco, postscript to *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) and *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986); Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987); and Jean-Louis Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983) and *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotexte, 1988). More recently, Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Methuen, 1987) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990) develop the importance of parody and intertextuality in contemporary literature, photography, and architecture.

The ideological aspects of postmodernism, as a style and as a condition, are explored in Fredric Jameson's seminal essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July/August 1984); and more recently by David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), and Henry Giroux, *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). There are also a number of useful anthologies that give a good overview of the development of the "politics" of postmodernism: Hal Foster, ed., *The*

Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983); Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism and Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). For a discussion of the philosophical as well as the political dimensions of postmodern debate, see John MacGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism?* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1990); and Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Zeitgeist in Babel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

For more specific discussions of the relationship between postmodernism and popular culture, see Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); and Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Studies of postmodern television have begun to appear only recently, and the number of titles is still limited. For useful, if somewhat preliminary, investigations of the relationship between postmodernism and television, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987); *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1986), special issue on music videos; and Jim Collins, "Watching Ourselves Watch Television, or Who's Your Agent?," *Cultural Studies* 3, no. 3 (October 1989): 261–81. See also Lynne Joyrich, "Critical and Textual Hypermasculininty," and John Caughie, "Playing at Being American: Game and Tactics," both in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 156–72, 44–58.