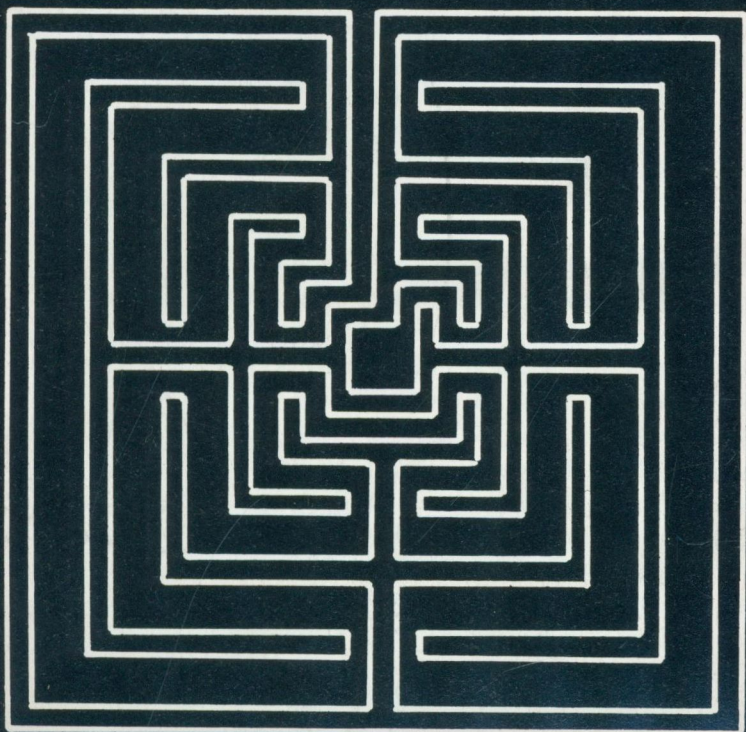


EXPLORING POSTMODERNISM

**Edited by
Matei Calinescu
and Douwe Fokkema**



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Teleology in Postmodern Fiction

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák

1. *The definition of Postmodernism*

Some definitions of Postmodernism seem to echo the thesis of *Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, that history repeats itself as farce. The innovations of the early twentieth century, the argument goes, are employed tongue in cheek by certain contemporary writers. Their strategies imply distancing, demystification, eclecticism — the death not only of individual styles, but also of local traditions and of a sense of history — as well as a cult of pastiche, miming, deconstructive montage, grafting, superimposing one text on the other, self-reflexive or self-referential metafiction, and parody.

In many cases a sociological or ideological interpretation is attached to this description. It is assumed that the social context of Modernism was a bourgeoisie whose solid values were inimical to the anarchistic message of the avant-garde, while Postmodernism is faced with a huge mass society which “presents nothing approximating the stubborn resistance to cultural innovation” (Graff 1984: 60). Far from being elitist, postmodern culture is popular (Fiedler 1975: 157, 161), it “is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism” (Fredric Jameson, in Foster 1985: 125), and it represents the “dissolution of art into the prevailing forms of commodity production” (Eagleton 1985: 60).

What I want to suggest is that such definitions are more problematic than they seem to be. First of all, the term “postmodern” has a clear and accepted meaning only in a few countries. If we wish to extend its use to the whole Western world, we cannot bypass a terminological problem. Postmodernism is always defined in opposition or at least in relation to some-