The aesthetics of reception is one of those theories which has established itself so successfully with a new approach that, looking back, it is difficult to understand why the problems surrounding it were ever really regarded as problems. After 1950, ‘reception’ appeared for the first time as a methodological concept in jurisprudence, theology and philosophy. In those fields it signalled a reorientation of historical research, freed from the dogmatic premises of positivism and traditionalism and on the way to developing a new theory of history following analogous hermeneutic principles. Since 1967 there has been a comparable reorientation in traditional philologies arising from the new concept of an aesthetics of reception (Rezeptions- und Wirkungsästhetik). It required the history of literature and the arts to be seen henceforth as a process of aesthetic communication in which the three logically distinguishable entities – author, work and recipient (reader, listener or observer, critic or audience) – participate in equal measure. This involved reinstating the recipient in his own right as receiver and mediator, in short: as the bearer of all aesthetic culture – a right which had been denied as long as the history of the arts had been dominated by the traditional aesthetics of the work of art and its function of representation. Reception theory posed once more the problems of defining the work by its effect, of the dialectic of effect and reception, of canon formation and restructuring and of dialogic understanding through the distance of time (mediation between different horizons). In short, it renewed the question of what aesthetic experience could mean when viewed as a productive, receptive and communicative activity. It is quite justified to speak of a paradigmatic shift in literary theory when we consider the worldwide repercussions of reception theory conceived by the Constance School, for this new theor-
etrical approach opened up a field of research that had lain fallow for a long time. After all, an attempt to represent the problems of reception through its history requires a process of reconstruction and confirms the hermeneutic principle that the prehistory of a significant shift of events can only be fully recognized by looking at its post-history.

II

In the European tradition, prehistories are only truly considered worthy if they can trace their origins to Homer or the Bible. Disregarding for a moment the late appearance of the concept of receptio and looking to the hermeneutic problem which arose much earlier, the theory of reception could invoke both these sources. For the problem of reception was first posed in the interpretation of Homer and then again in the exegesis of the Bible, when temporal distance from the original text was so great that Homer's poetry and the revelations contained in the Holy Scriptures had ceased to be immediately understandable; indeed, when for the time being their canonic meaning had become obscure, if not displeasing or offensive. What is to be done when an authority, distant in time and preserved only in writing, has forfeited the immediacy of living speech or address which it had in the oral culture whence it originated when, more particularly, its doctrine or message is no longer in tune with the world view, the attitudes and morals of a later time?

An authority which has grown out of date in this way may simply fall victim to criticism and be replaced by new authorities. But if not, there are two ways in which it might be salvaged, as tested in the case of Homer in the Hellenistic philology of the Alexandrian and Pergamine schools. These are grammatical interpretation and allegorical exegesis. The foreign-sounding wording of the old text can be explained in contemporary language and thereby be retrieved from obscurity. However, through a new interpretation it is also possible for this wording to be given a double meaning by distinguishing between sensus literalis and sensus allegoricus, if the first, literal meaning is transposed into a second, allegorical one and the old sense of the text is thus adapted towards a new understanding.

These two procedures reciprocally imply the oldest form of reception theory. They serve to salvage a diminished authority, and are, by their very nature, conservative and modern at the same time. For both procedures, both grammatical and allegorical exegesis, have the same goal of hermeneutic application: to forge a link between the past and present, between the canonic sense of the text and the sense ‘for us'. Reception in this form goes by the motto 'From the Old, create the New'. But such an approach is still far distant from modern, historical thought. Grammatical interpretation seeks to save the literal meaning, but not yet in a ‘historical' way, still less for its own sake. Instead, it seeks to reconstruct the past meaning in order to translate it into a form understandable in the present. Allegorical exegesis,
The Theory of Reception

Hans Robert Janss

III

The word μεταφορά (metaphora) has a wide range of meanings in the context of scholarly work on reception theory. It can refer to the transfer of ideas, the adoption of forms, or the transformation of texts. In the work of Derrida and de Man, the concept of metaphor is central to the understanding of textual interpretation. The term "metaphor" is used to describe the way in which texts are read and understood, rather than as a literal translation or direct quotation. This approach allows for a more flexible and nuanced understanding of how texts are received and transmitted over time.

The concept of reception theory is closely related to the work of Hans Robert Janss, who has made significant contributions to the field. Janss argued that the process of reception is not just a matter of transmitting ideas from one generation to the next, but involves a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. This interaction is shaped by a variety of factors, including the historical and cultural context in which the text is read.

In legal history, the concept of reception theory has been applied to the study of how legal ideas and practices are transmitted and transformed over time. The process of reception is not a simple linear process, but rather involves a complex interplay of factors, including the social, political, and economic contexts in which the law is produced and received.

IV

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The work of Janss and others in this field has helped to broaden our understanding of how texts are received and transformed over time, and has provided a more nuanced understanding of the role of reception in the development of legal and religious ideas.
forth one's own creation, either as a continuation or as a revision of authoritative tradition. On this basis, the reception of an earlier or foreign culture (Greek through Roman, classical through medieval) could be described in comparable phases: the adoption of civilization (luxury goods, writing, measures, coinage, elementary schools), religion (denomination, ritual, sacred art) and law clearly precedes the appropriation of spiritual goods (philosophy, sciences, arts). The adoption of literature, on the other hand, often has three phases: dependency (translations), independency (classicism) and emancipation (modernity). 16

After 1950, a further concept of reception took its place as part of legal hermeneutics: concretization (as opposed to subsumption), seen as a progressive (also legally creative) interpretation of legal norms, which may be required in judging a particular case. 17 A judge who has to pass judgment on a dispute is often unable to make a decision based on the scheme of case and rule, that is, by subsuming the issue under the appropriate norm. There are often legal problems to be solved for which the law originally had no answer, where there is a gap in legislation or where various regulations, sometimes even contradictory ones, have to be taken into consideration. To solve such cases, the law itself must be reinterpreted; that is, in considering the case, we must concretize a meaning of the legal norm which was not yet acknowledged or foreseen when the law was first formulated. Thus the judgement itself can become an act which creates a legal precedent if the particular case does not fall under the given general norm, but instead demands a further concretization of what it prescribes in a new or different way, so that one decides through the judgement what should be considered law now and in the future. 18

There is a certain analogy between particular case and norm in the application of law and individual work and aesthetic norm in literary hermeneutics: if a literary work is to be defined in its capacity as an event, as an innovation on the horizon of tradition, an aesthetic judgement of it necessitates grasping the particularity and norm-setting achievement of the work in relation to the aesthetic norms pertaining up until that time. The canonic rules of genre and models of style are always varied and modified by a new work and are therefore concretized in an equally new or different way. 19 For this reason, it is not by chance that, subsequent to Roman Ingarden, both the Prague literary theorists and the Constance School, though in ignorance of legal hermeneutics, made concretization a key concept in literary semiotics and the aesthetics of reception. By concretization the Prague structuralists since 1969 (Felix Vodička, following Jan Mukafárovsky) understand the representation of the work in the consciousness of those for whom the artifact becomes an aesthetic object; it is only the reception of the work which, in progressive interpretations, brings its structure within the infinite range of concretizations and forms of reception to historical life. Meanwhile, in a critical continuation of Roman Ingarden's phenomenological aesthetics, the Constance School has since 1967 been investigating and systematically describing the constitution and development of meaning which takes place in the appropriation of the aesthetic object and in the history of its reception. The aim of this School is to describe the nature of aesthetic activity, firstly in the realm of the implicit reader, and secondly in the realm of the historical reader, which involves a continuous change of horizon in and through understanding and interpretation. (This brief formula is intended to indicate to what extent Wolfgang Iser's theoretical approach and my own complement one another.) 20

V

The interest shown by philosophers in the history of their authorities' reception arose at a later date. Aristotle, who wrote a first doxographic account, was interested only in the doctrines of his predecessors and not in the acceptance and influence which they had had. And even Hegel, who in the history of philosophy, sought to reveal within it the logic behind its succession of systems, declared in a sweeping statement at the beginning of his lectures: 'I shall not dwell on the dissemination of a doctrine, its fate and those who merely passed it on.' 21 It was Hans Blumenberg who brought the concept of reception into the history of philosophy and science in 1958. 22 His interpretation of the supplanting of ancient philosophy by the Christian theology of late antiquity deconstructs the substantialist view of tradition together with the mythicized concept of event. The shift from old to new is not recognizable just by looking at historical junctures, but only by looking at the dividing line of 'epoch thresholds' which come about almost imperceptibly in re and only become discernible post rem. We must look at the reallocation of functions in the organization of the former world model against which the new doctrine must impose itself with its own answers to old questions. An event like the 'Copernican Revolution' only became 'epoch-making' when considered in the light of the historical work of its preparation and reception; a myth gains its historical power from the beginning through the interpreting activity of reception which denies the primacy of its origin and constantly enriches the meaning of the myth by telling it in new ways. 23 In his analyses of historical zones of transition, decline and reformation of meaning Blumenberg discovered a historical dynamics at the base of the history of science, an approach which is not discussed in Thomas S. Kuhn's later theory of paradigmatic change, which has subsequently become so successful. 24 Hans-Georg Gadamer, meanwhile, based his philosophical hermeneutics on the analysis of the authority of tradition and on what he called the consciousness of the history of influence or effect (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein). 25 Literary hermeneutics extended his principle of the history of effect by which the work cannot be understood without regard for its effect, to the correlative principle of the history of reception, which does not have as its starting-point the presumed objective truth of the work but rather the comprehending consciousness seen as the subject of aesthetic experience. Such an approach requires differentiating
the horizons in an active sense (instead of the fusion of horizons in a passive sense). Today, the interaction of effect and reception is commonly defined in such a way that effect is the name given to the element of concretization determined by the text, while reception is the element determined by the person to whom the text is addressed. Thus the implication of the text and the explication of the addressee, the implicit and the historical reader, are dependent on one another, and the text itself is thus able to limit the arbitrariness of interpretation, guaranteeing the continuity of its experience beyond the present act of reception.

VI

In the history of the arts there was little investigation into reception. The canon of works and authors was extended to their posthumous fame, passing over in silence their impact on recipients, the very bearers of tradition. The topic of reception was of interest first and foremost in rhetoric, for a while in the anti-art polemics of the Church fathers, later in moralities, in the doctrine of affects and the norms of taste, and finally in the sociology of art, but not in classical aesthetics. Classical aesthetics saw any inquiry into the effects of art as outside the purview of art. The great exception to this in the philosophical tradition is Aristotle’s poetics in antiquity and Kant’s Critique of Judgement in the modern age. Yet neither Aristotle’s doctrine of catharsis nor Kant’s important turn towards an aesthetics of reflective judgement set up a theory of reception as the experience of the receiving subject which could form the basis of a tradition. There are only sporadic traces of its ‘prehistory’ — the first of these, as we would expect, in Montaigne.

VII

Un suffisant lecteur découvre souvent des perfections autres que celles que l’auteur y a mises et appercevues, et y prête des sens et des visages plus riches. An intelligent reader often discovers in texts perfections other than those which the author put in or noticed, and thus the reader endows the old text with richer meanings and aspects. With this step from the passive act of receiving to an active, meaning-extending and therefore self productive reception, Montaigne simultaneously created the essay genre and marked it as a literary form of productive reading which conveyed text and self-experience. The testimony of Montaigne from his tower room that he arranged for solitary reading presupposes the invention of printing, the setting up of a private library, and thus the liberation of the secular reader from institutional reading. Before this time, in the age of rare manuscripts, all reading was controlled by the Church, the University, and the judiciary, and was limited to compulsory interpretation of canonic texts. In a review of his Principle Features of the Present Age (1804–5), Fichte traced the dawn of the modern age to the changes brought about by printing and the Reformation. He emphasizes the high value placed on the written word in Protestantism: ‘it became the almost indispensable means of achieving salvation, and without being able to read, one could no longer justifiably be a Christian’. In Fichte’s view, it was not only the written word, but also one’s own understanding of it, following the maxim that ‘one should not be convinced by anything except what one understands’, a thesis which contributed to the belief in the dignity and merit of the person, the most important result of the Enlightenment.

Yet as early as 1804, Fichte had recognized the fatal consequences of printing with regard to the never-ending flood of documents it produced, and envisaged the end of all writing and reading ‘which by its highest effect cancels its effect’. Since no one had the time to read everything any more, ‘in this system books would merely be printed so that they could be reviewed’ by scholars, and the receiving party, the readers, would always be trying to get hold of the newest things without remembering the old, so that reading would become a permanent narcotic. ‘Anyone who has tasted only once the sweetness of this state wants to enjoy it for ever more and may do nothing else in life; he now reads without drawing on any literary knowledge or progression with the age, merely so that he reads and spends his life reading and represents the pure reader’. Yet the extent to which today’s reader risks drowning in the sea of material produced at book fairs, which nobody could ever hope to wade through, may have exceeded Fichte’s ironic prediction.

VIII

With the Enlightenment turning towards the aesthetics of effect in the eighteenth century, there is more evidence of a new interest in the receiving subject’s experience of art and the active imagination of the beholder and reader. The first piece of evidence is the belated reception of the pseudo-Longinean text On the Sublime. There we can read that the truly great work which goes beyond impeccable mediocrity and even the appearance of perfect beauty, ‘sets the spiritual powers of the beholder in motion since it contains more than has been stated’. From this one may conclude that the receiver is completing a process that had begun with the producer. Furthermore (in chapter 7, 2): ‘for by its very nature, our soul is lifted up by the truly sublime, and in the process of taking this happy impetus, it is filled with joy and pride, as if it itself has produced what it has heard.’ There is an echo of this sentiment in the view of art after 1750: ‘To the “fiction that the beholder does not exist”, this time responds with a second, equally productive fiction, the “fiction that the picture does not exist”’. What is meant here is a restructuring of the beholder’s attitude, a phenomenon for which the Pygmalion myth, popular at the time, is symptomatic. As the
artist Pygmalion attempts to bring the dead marble of the work to life, so too now the enthusiastic beholder wishes to transcend the boundary between art and nature, to forget its artistic character, in order to grasp a piece of true nature in the picture—like Diderot, who transported himself directly into Vernet’s landscapes as a beholder. If now the beholding of art could become a medium of self-experience for the receiving subject, this shift in aesthetic experience could occur because of the awakening self-awareness of the bourgeois individual. Work and observer enter henceforth into a reciprocal relationship, which Hegel expressed in appropriate terms: the work takes on its substantial truth only for and through the beholding subject because ‘beholder and work can each attain awareness of themselves only through the other’.33 The rise of the bourgeois reader who, as a ‘common reader’—not as the trend-setting person of professional criticism—affirms the public claim to self-determination, is testified by Samuel Johnson’s concession: ‘By the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetic honours.’34 The beginnings of a readers’ aesthetics are found in theories of the nature of the human mind in the Age of Sensibility. Lessing demands a self-judging reader; Schlegel even a reader who is also creative: ‘The synthetic writer constructs and creates for himself a reader as a reader should be; he imagines his reader not as passive and dead, but as alive and interactive. The writer allows what he has invented to grow in stages before the reader’s eyes or entices him to invent himself. He does not set out to have a particular effect on the reader, but rather he lets the reader into the sacred relationship of deepest sym-poiesis and sym-poetry.’35 However, the emancipation of the bourgeois reader reaches its peak and a temporary end in the autonomous art of German idealism, in a sphere of contemplation which once again excluded the question of effect and the part played by reception. The autonomous work of art is allowed to have only ‘inner expediency’ and may not serve any external purpose. According to Adam Müller, with every observer which this type of work of art draws into the ‘workshop of genuine art’ it extends its own sphere to a free world behind historical reality: ‘thus any poetry, any picture, and after that any cycle of poetry and pictures form a little aesthetic state around them from their readers and beholders. The beholders are as it were the free subjects of the work and its master; with each newcomer, the dominion or the importance of this small sovereign increases.’36

much it may seem to form a cohesive and rounded world, the work of art nevertheless does not exist as a real, individualized object for itself, but for us, for a public which looks at the works of art and appreciates it.37 The aesthetic historiography of the nineteenth century followed Hegel’s insight into the historical progression of the arts, at the same time adopting those elements of hermeneutic insights which had begun to emerge in the theory of history since Chladnius. His insight into the hermeneutic function of the ‘point of view’ was the beginning of a theory of historical perspective which saw in the point of view of eye witnesses or historians not only their necessarily limited horizons, but at the same time a chance to put the increasing wealth of facts into perspective; in other words, to represent them in an abridged and rejuvenated form by means of fiction and thereby to renew their meaning for the present time. In the words of Reinhard Koseleck: ‘The doctrine of historical perspective legitimates the historical change in cognition by ascribing a cognitive function to the passage of time. Historical truths, when seen from a temporal perspective, become superior truths.’38 Yet the historical theory of an ever-changing point of view also required and allowed history to be constantly rewritten. Goethe provides the clearest evidence of this. For history, he admitted the principle of the unity of work (or event) and effect which he denied to autonomous poetry, when he stated that history had to be rewritten from time to time ‘because a person living in advancing time is placed in standpoints from which the past can be viewed and judged in a new way’.39 The idea of a progressive reception of past art is found again in Heine’s Travel Pictures: ‘Every age, when it gets new ideas, gets new eyes and sees a lot of new things in the old works.’40 The same idea is taken up by Karl Marx in the concept of appropriation, which can be applied equally to nature and history. This is also evident from an observation which he first explains with reference to Roman law and later with reference to the three unities of classical drama, the putative misunderstanding of Greek drama. When considering historical processes dialectically, later modifications are not at all to be seen as incorrect interpretations, but rather as interpretations appropriate to the new time or its artistic needs: ‘Otherwise it could be said that every achievement of an older period which is appropriated by a later one, is a misunderstanding of the old.’41

In contrast to this hermeneutic position, the later view of literature taken by the materialists as well as by their opponents in the history of ideas is characterized by reciprocal one-sidedness after the decline of aesthetic historiography. Franz Mehring’s The Legend of Lessing (1892) separated the ‘true’, materialistically reconstructed Lessing from the history of his reception in order to show this reception to be nothing more than a ‘legend’ of bourgeois interpretation. Mehring’s paradigm lives on in Marxist theory in as much as it reduces the history of reception to the critique of ideology and claims that its way of analysing works of art is the only true way.42 Conversely, according to Julian Hirsch’s The Genesis of Glory (1914), in the tradition of Nietzsche, it was precisely the appearance, that is, the changing

IX

While the aesthetics of autonomous art in this way severed the connection between the work and its effect on the public, Hegel maintained the idea of a ‘progressive development of art’ to existence for others. "However
image of a work in the eyes of contemporary and subsequent generations, which was the real essence of the work and the object of a kind of 'phenography' with which he sought to replace positivist biographies. Afterwards, in Nietzsche's *Essay on Mythology*, Ernst Bertram surpassed all historicism and perspectivism with a radical concept of reception. In his view, a legend originates first of all in the act of always reading in a different way, for us as 'witnesses of a past which never appears in the same way'. Yet the act of reception is here not merely an arbitrary act of positioning on the part of the interpreter, but it is bound to the historical moment in the awareness that this image of the work 'only “appears” in this way today, for us, momentarily'.

X

Compared with the high-flown German history of ideas, the evidence from outside Germany seems more modest. For the aesthetics of Saint-Simon, the only thing of interest in art was its didactic and rhetorical function. The renewal and systematization of the historical method by the positivists followed the rigorous standard of the natural sciences, but it was by no means limited to research into those data-rich sources and influences, that could be corroborated in fact. The educational authorities, Gustave Lanson in France and Wilhelm Scherer in Germany, subordinated actual literary history to a canonization of literary evolution, a concept which was also intended to subsume the correlation of writer and public, literary work and social reality. Yet Lanson's demand, 'Le livre, donc, est un phénomène social qui évolue', was to remain unfulfilled as long as the biographical individual had to act as an intermediary and assume sole responsibility for the diversity of cultural, social and class factors. Likewise, in Scherer's *Poetics* (published posthumously in 1888), there is a chapter entitled 'Writer and Public' which seeks to combine economics, the aesthetics of effect and rhetoric with astonishingly modern-sounding observations on the 'exchange value of poetry and literary intercourse' and the 'aesthetic threshold' of the public's receptiveness ('It is only possible to appreciate what one could also, if need be, have oneself produced'). Yet Scherer's poetics with its postulate: 'The variety of the public must necessarily have an effect on the production' had no consequences for the official canon of literary theory for at least 50 more years.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a critique based on the psychology of reception (J. M. Guyon, E. Hennquin) constituted a revolt against the positivist history of literature, and particularly against the paradigm of the unity of life and work. Later, Charles Pégy, A. Thibaudet and others, inspired by Bergson's philosophy of life, postulated even a 'lecture créatrice', which sought to consider the work no longer as the end point of biographical and social determinants but as the starting-point for creative reception. But these still impressionistic approaches are eclipsed by the poetic theory of Paul Valéry, who recognized the indispensable gulf between the aesthetics of production and the aesthetics of reception. With his provocative dictum 'mes vers ont le sens qu'on leur prête' he promoted the merely contemplative reader of the past to the level of co-creator of the *open work* in modern literature. According to Valéry, it was Edgar Allan Poe who first shed light on the relationship between work and reader and made it one of the fundamentals of poetry. But he also demanded an 'histoire vraie de la lecture. Une histoire réelle complète de la littérature – histoire des livres les plus vraiment lus – et leur influence.' This postulate was taken up first by the sociology of literature: by L. L. Schürcking (1931) with an inquiry into the functions and types of readers in the formation of literary taste; by A. N. Vseselovski (1939) with the postulate of exposing converging tendencies in the thinking and the image worlds of the receiving side; by R. Escarpit (1961) with research into the reading habits of social groups, involving distribution and consumption, whose new tastes can be a 'creative betrayal', committed against the intention of great literature; and lastly, by G. Grimm (1977), who had already appropriated the aesthetics of reception and effect, albeit critically, with the intention of analyzing empirically the activity of subjects in the history of reception.

I do not want to report specifically on the methodological debate in literary theory over the past two decades. It could be portrayed as a resumption of the 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes', in which henceforth author and reader have adopted the earlier opposing positions. With respect to the still unwritten 'literary history of the reader' there has been a rejection principally of those paradigms which – being mistrustful of the reader's aesthetic experience – had denied the dialectic unity of text and reception, and thus the communicative or even society-forming function of literature. We see this opposition, in the first place, in the idealism of an aesthetics of the self-sufficient work (which, in the case of the purist New Critics, required the one, ideal reader); secondly, in the substantialism of self-perpetuating tradition (above all the 'afterlife of antiquity' in the wake of Ernst Robert Curtius); thirdly, in structuralism, with the proclaimed 'death of the subject' and the enthroning of self-sufficient écriture; and finally, in the neo-materialism of the critics of ideology who one-sidedly and dogmatically proclaimed the precedence of production and revelation in the history of the Arts.

If today poststructuralist literary theory dates the beginning of this debate back to the denial of logocentrism, or more exactly, to Derrida's *De la gramma tologie* (1967), we should remember that, at the same time, the ontological precedence of the work as the place where given truth manifests itself was being disputed not only in Germany but also in Italy. While in the wake of Derrida the theory of textuality, defined as 'the play of differences', remained one-sidedly orientated towards the productive side of aesthetic activity, there was an initial effort of semiotic criticism to rediscover and evaluate the process of communication within the domain of aesthetic experience. Taking serial music as his starting-point, it was primarily
Hans Robert Jauss

Umberto Eco who, in *Opera aperta* (1962), drafted the first theory of an open, constantly progressing constitution of meaning, a theory by which the making of works of art is an open structure, requires the active co-production of the recipient and brings about a historical variety of concretizations without the process ceasing to be one work. I must mention two other important figures who paved the way for the historical-hermeneutical paradigm of reception theory. In his *Essay on Edward Fox* (1937) Walter Benjamin demanded that historians break the continuity of history in order to ‘set in motion the experience with history, which for every present time is an original one’. Benjamin’s theory of the ‘now of discernibility’ was achieved through the ‘Now of readability’. He expects the competent reader to abandon ‘the calm, contemplative attitude towards the object in order to become aware of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past is found with relation to precisely his present time’. For Jean-Paul Sartre, the chance of hope lay not in delving what is past but in the productive reception of whatever the present offers, that is, of a possible sense of our world revealed by literature in the reciprocal act of writing and reading: ‘Ecrire, c’est donc à la fois voiler le monde et le proposer comme une tâche à la générosité du lecteur’. Thus in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), literature is justified as being the communicative act in which the human drive towards freedom is able to prove itself by appropriating and changing the world.

**XI**

Even in the history of science new paradigms do not immediately fall from heaven: the new which has yet to establish itself must set itself apart from the old and legitimate itself before tradition so that the very attitude to the world can change simultaneously with the new view of the object. This revision of the work of art is particularly true for paradigm change in aesthetic experience, which – according to Paul Ricoeur – concerns in equal measure the relationship between work (text) and world, the communication between man and man and man’s understanding of himself. It is not by chance that the shift towards the aesthetics of reception happened in a one – the 1960s – when there was a noticeable change in the perspectives literature, the arts and the new media: the gradually apparent, epochal threshold between the great authors of the beginning of the twentieth century, now considered as henceforth remote modern classics, and the preponderance of an as yet diffuse ‘postmodern period’. One of the fundamental literary figures of this time is Jorge Luis Borges. His work *Ficciones* (1941), and particularly his text *Pierre Ménard* – *Author of Quixote* (written in 1939), demonstrates in an exemplary way that between reception theory and concomitants and competitors, like reader research, textual linguistics, miotics and deconstructionism on the one hand, and the practice of postmodern aesthetics on the other, there are in fact analogies worthy of consideration. For his programmatic text, Borges chose the doubly reflective form of a commentary on a fictitious text made up by himself but supposedly written by Ménard, a second-rate French symbolist. Ménard’s ambition was to write a *Don Quixote* appropriate to his own time. Not by transferring the former-time hero to Wall Street (naive actualization) nor by combining knight and squire, as Daudet had done in *Tartarin De Tarascon* (productive reception), but instead through total identification (apparently postulated by Newalists) with his predecessor, in the form of a word-by-word repetition of his spontaneously created work! The paradox of this undertaking is the crux of reception theory: the non-identity of what is repeated in the temporal distance of repetition. The identical text has become incomparably richer and more complex after 300 years. A sentence such as the one from chapter 1, page 9 of *Don Quixote*: ‘truth whose mother is history, the rival of time, the conserver of deeds, witness of the past, example and explanation of the present, warning for the future’, was in Cervantes’ time just another rhetorical listing in praise of history. Yet, for Borges, this statement had taken on the proportions of a stupendous idea by Ménard’s time, a contemporary as he was of William James. For history was defined henceforth as an origin, and thus not merely as an investigable aspect of reality! Anyone who sets out to reconstruct a past ‘as it really was’ and to show it in its ‘couleur locale’ – like Flaubert in *Salammbo* – is on the wrong track. However, Ménard’s experiment did not just reveal new meaning in the supposed identity of old and new, in literal repetition; but, at the same time, it made us aware of the fictitious nature of our existence. What are the conclusions to be drawn for postmodern aesthetics? Fiction and reality no longer constitute an ontological opposition: the real itself turns out to be potentially fictitious or fantastic, the supposedly original turns out to be merely a postscript to a previous text, a kind of palimpsest on which appear the traces of what the ‘doctor universalist’ had already thought but which in theory any person could think. Thus the final logical step in Ménard’s experiment is that, after he has filled thousands of pages with a reproduction of Quixote, he destroys the manuscript itself: he can only escape the fate of his predecessor – the diffusion of his fame in the inexorable process of possible reception – if his own work does not survive by means of another text, but by discovering a way of suspending history within itself.

**XII**

Finally, I should briefly point out that Borges with Pierre Ménard did more than anticipate the shift from the classical aesthetic production to the modern aesthetic reception. As John Barth shows in *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967), the first document of the American post-modern era, Borges’ *Ficciones* marks the end of the classical modern era of the twentieth century while at the same time showing the way for the departure of new avantgardes. For, firstly, Ménard’s discovery of consciously anachronistic
reading opens the way for an overdue rehabilitation of the reader, the boom in theories on reading and reading traditions and reader types, the project of a 'literary history of the reader' — all of which leads to the poetic and poetological peak of an already widespread movement represented by Italo Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979). Secondly, Ménard's contemporary *Quixote*, seen as a palimpsest or pre-text of the old one, largely anticipates the theories of intertextuality established in the 1970s. It started from the premise that it is not the singularity of a text which defines its literary character but the potential presence of other texts (its 'transintertextuality') — a theory which Gérard Genette systematized in his significantly entitled: *Palimpsestes — La littérature au second degré* (1982). Thirdly, it anticipates the now prevalent deconstructionism. In opposition to the secular logocentrism of Western metaphysics, deconstructionism exhibits the invertebrate allegorical difference by which any text can say something other than it intends, so that for example *Allegories of Reading* of Paul de Man is a work that constantly reveals the indispensability of misreading. At bottom, deconstructionism, as popular as it is today, has come no further in dismantling all constitution of meaning than Borges has with his paradox of the non-identity of what is repeated and with the self-erasure of aesthetic representation in the experiment carried out by his Pierre Ménard. Fourthly, if this experiment ends by refuting all originality in the consciousness of the completed *post-histoire*, then this favourite theme of the post-modern era scarcely produced a more grandiose poetic vision than Borges had done with his library of Babel which, thanks to ingenious combinations of 25 letters, makes it possible to present all extant books and all possible books either in their entirety or to include them in a single book with an infinite number of pages.

Yet indulging in new myths about the final state of our world, the death of the subject and the self-destruction of reason is not the last word in Borges' *Ficciones* or *Labyrinths*, and no longer even an object of fascination for literary post-modernism. In 1979 in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, Borges' most important successor, Italo Calvino, thematized the new change of horizon in a way which no longer sees the dawn of the new looking backwards, in epigonic awareness of the *post*, of 'afterwards', of what has come 'too late'. 'I too would like to erase myself and find for each book another I, another voice, another name, to be reborn; but my aim is to capture in the book the illegible world, the world without centre, without ego, without I.' The much-invoked loss of the 'I', of the Cartesian certainty 'I think therefore I am', turns out an unrecognized reverse. The project of a book consisting of 'what the world has not yet said of itself', reveals the benefit of a delimitation of the subject and of language, a new chance to regain the potentiality of the beginning. That is why *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* consists of ten beginnings of novels, thereby raising the expectation of the reader for the manifold variety of possible worlds. It is not the loss of the 'I', but the loss of the 'You' which would be the real catastrophe. That is why Calvino allows the 'You' of the reader to become the protagonist of his books, a 'You' which cannot become the 'He' of a fixed character, but instead can be an ever-changing 'I' of a narrator, can be erased and reborn and can be unified lastly, contrasting with the stories which cannot find their end, with the 'You' of a female reader. Yet, as the ideal reader, Ludmilla is the real, sympathetic hero of this novel of the novel. In Calvino's Utopia of the complete police state, even the completely self-regulating system of thought-crest founders on 'her always curious, always inextinguishable reading', when the almighty, but sensitive director of the state police archive is forced to admit 'in reading something happens over which I have no power.' He has to allow himself to be taught by Calvino's reader that, although he can hinder reading, he cannot prevent it by the decree that itself forbids reading, there will still be read something of the truth that he would wish never to be read. Calvino's reader is able to evade the power of the censor and at the same time win over Ernes Merana, the genius malignus of the falsified world, because she follows a hermeneutic maxim which can be interpreted as Calvino's final word and as the quintessence of all reception theory, that which long went unrecognized and which the Constance School gave a name to, and that which, presumably, is still valid in the postmodern era: 'I expect readers to read in my books something I didn't know, but I can expect it only from those who wish to read something they didn't know.'

Notes

1 Thus far, the writings of the Constance School have been translated into 15 languages. See the works by Iser, Jauss, Stierle, Warning and Weber in the Bibliography following. W. Kroll's *Bibliographie deutscher Arbeiten zur Rezeptions- und Wirkungsgestaltung* (in *Wirklichkeit*, special edn, 1977) lists 437 titles for the ten years following 1967.


3 Note the absence of an article on *Rezeption* in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.


W. Kemp, Der Betrachter ist im Bild (Cologne, 1985), esp. p. 184, with respect to research by Neil Flax and Michael Fried.

O. Bättschmann, 'Pygmalion als Betrachter' (in Kemp, Der Betrachter, pp. 183–224, esp. p. 193) draws on Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. R. F. Brow, ed. Peter C. Hodgson vol. 1, Introduction and Concept of Religion (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984) p. 236 n.137: 'The form, the subjectivity, which the artist has given his work, is only external, not the absolute form of self-knowing, of self-consciousness. Consummate subjectivity is lacking in the work of art. This self-consciousness belongs to subjective consciousness, the intuiting subject. In contrast, therefore, with the work of art, which inwardly is not something that knows, the moment of self-consciousness is the other, but a moment that knows what is portrayed and represents it as the substantial truth.'


Heine, Die Nordsee (1826), in Sämtliche Werke (Munich, 1972), vol. 2, p. 79.


Ibid., p. 164ff.


The following can be found in F. Wolfzeitt, Einführung in die französische Literaturgeschichtsschreibung (Darmstadt, 1982), pp. 228-36 (on Lansonism), and pp. 237–42 (on Bergsonism). On Scherer, see Poetik, ed. G. Reiss (Tübingen, 1977), chap. 2, esp. pp. 84, 127, 132, 125.


For more information on this debate, the reader is referred to the recent American research by R.C. Holub, Reception Theory (London, 1984).
49. H. Weinrich, 'Für eine Literaturgeschichte des Lesers', in Merkur, 21 (1967), pp. 1026-38. Recently Weinrich has diagnosed a return swing in the pendulum from reception theory back to a theory of production, which once again prioritizes the author with regard to the reader (Autor des Lesers) as the 'first witness to the super-individual meaning of a text – the second is the reader himself'. Der Autor des Lesers, in the literary supplement of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 13-14 October 1984, p. 65.

50. The question of the impact of a work is here rejected as 'affective fallacy' and thus I. A. Richards' theory of the aesthetic experience (Principles of Literary Criticism, 1924), which separated the act of reception from its historical setting, conceiving to the act purely psychologically, is laid to rest.


56. I am very grateful to my friend Alan Paskow of the University of Maryland for the many helpful suggestions which he made during my revision of the English translation of this chapter.

Suggested Reading


H. Blumenberg, Epochenschnur und Rezeption.


C. Dahlhaus, Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte (Cologne, 1977), in particular pp. 237-59 (Probleme der Rezeptionsgeschichte).


G. Grimm, Rezeptionsgeschichte.


P. U. Nebendahl, Socialgeschichte und Wirkungsästhetik (Frankfurt, 1974).

R. C. Holub, Reception Theory.


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