CHÂTEAU DE COPPET – A SITE OF MODERNITY?

Jelka Kernev Štrajn

Ljubljana, Slovenia

821.133.1.09"17"

Coppet, as a public and modern space, represents the peak of the 18th century salon tradition, although at the same time, it surpasses it. The Coppet discourses in some respects rose above the Romantic understanding of literature, and thereby drew close to modern concepts of art and society.

Key-words: Mme de Staël / the Coppet group / modernity / national identity / cultural identity / Romanticism / organicism / public space vs private space

Karyna Szmurlo, a theoretician and historian of literature, and an excellent connoisseur of French woman writers of the 18th and 19th century, defined Coppet as a space that "after two hundred years of rethinking this ideology, built not upon coercion, but on mutually supportive yet antagonistic principles, remains an inspiration for us; we still recognise in its philosophical tone – irrevocably bearing the marks of the Revolution – the reality of our own modernity." (Szmurlo 1991: 3). About the work of Madame de Staël, the central personality of the Coppet circle, she writes: "Geo-graphics infiltrate the titles and tables of contents of her work, illustrating how deeply her thought organized itself around ideas of wanderings, passages, crossings and transgressions. This corpus of the voyage, governed by a metonymic logic of spatial continuity, also functions as a metaphoric index /.../ As for the great novels, they can be classified as fictions of transgressed boundaries par excellence." (Szmurlo 1991: 1) In addition to the transgressions discovered by Karyna Szmurlo, de Staël's discourse can be attributed other similar features, such as intermediateness, marginality and the reflection. These must be pointed out, because they may not be immediately obvious.

Consequently, it may be proper to think that de Staël's work cannot be approached without taking into consideration the entire context in which

they were created, and that its temporal and particularly spatial coordinates must be explored. It is well known that the period in question is the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. With regard to space, we could speak of Europe, if this term were not so loose and at the same time weighed down by numerous connotations. For this reason, we can use a rhetorical figure, a synecdoche, and say that the space in question is Coppet.

Château de Coppet is an old castle named after an idyllic town on Lake Geneva. The castle was known as early as the 11th century, its first proprietor being Pierre de Savoie (died 1268). After him, it was owned by the poet and knight Othon de Granson among many others. In 1784, the castle was bought by Jacques Necker.[1] It became Madame de Staël's country home and gained in importance particularly after her irreconcilable dispute with Napoleon Bonaparte's regime, after which she was exiled from Paris. She was forced to close her famous Paris literary salon in Rue du Bac and leave the capital, which under Napoleon's rule became increasingly constricted. She moved her salon to the countryside and direct vicinity of the crossroads of three cultures: the French, German and Italian.

Between 1792 and 1815, although with short breaks, a special group of European humanists met at Coppet, which in literary history is known simply as "the Coppet group". Its legacy is discussed at symposia that are nowadays periodically organised at the castle. The group, whose central figure was Madame de Staël, cannot be defined as a philosophical circle, nor as a literary school that existed within a single predominant trend. Neither did it resemble a codified academic society. And it was a far cry from a political party or a religious sect. Still, it was significantly different from traditional literary salons of the *ancien régime*. (Balayé 1994) The specific character of this space, which on the one hand continued the tradition of 18th century salons, while on the other greatly surpassing their aristocratic classicistic culture and aesthetics, is the very reason the phenomenon "Coppet" is discussed in this paper.

It is fascinating and significant that moving the salon from the capital to the countryside not only changed its location; it also greatly transformed its function and, consequently, its identity. This change was predominantly brought about by specific historical circumstances: the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period at the meeting point of two centuries and its cultures, which was undoubtedly a tectonic break in the history of western civilisation. Admittedly, Europe had experienced crisis periods before, but the feeling of profound change brought about at that time had never been so powerful (Hauser 1969: 193) It caused those European intellectuals who frequented Coppet for over two decades gradually to redirect their attention from the finite, transparent and hermetic past to the indefinite, opaque and open present, which can be discerned from the Coppet discourses. The term discourse is here used in Benvenisto's sense, as a language adopted by an individual as their oral or literary practice. It is used in the plural because, due to its ideological, religious, linguistic and national heterogeneity, there was a special atmosphere of discoursive plurality at Coppet. This plural and multi-national context gave rise to cosmopolitanism, within which there were differences

in mutual interdependence that were reflected in the discursive practices of the Coppet circle, comprising all the guests of Madame de Staël. The French were mostly emigrants, but there were also others: Germans, Italians, Swiss, Austrians, etc. They were part of a group on the margins, seemingly excluded from the mainstream historical current of events, but in reality the group had a tremendous influence on European culture. This is not surprising, since it was there that a completely new, modern view of history gradually emerged.

The modernity of de Staël's discourse, and the modernity of Coppet as the cultural historical context of this discourse, are concepts in the light of which should be reconsidered some implications connected with the topic of the eluded identity and the transgressions of space mentioned by Karyna Szmurlo in the quote at the beginning of the paper. Consequently, the first question is how we should understand modernity.

Above all, modernity should not be mistaken for modernism, the prevalent aesthetic trend of the first half of the 20th century. Modernity is a much broader category that should not be associated with the general opinion that what is modern is anything new. Neither should the expression be given the meaning that emerged from the famous French dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns (*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*) in the second half of the 17th century. In this dispute, modernity was viewed as the opposite of the old and traditional. Contemporary definitions of modernity vary (cf. Weber, Habermas, Foucault, Calinescu, de Man, Vattimo, Touraine, among others), although none declares modernity to be the opposite of the old and traditional.

For the purposes of this paper, we should concentrate on the understanding of modernity as distinctly historical and based on the principle of otherness, while at the same time, it does not permit any form of totalising. The closest to this understanding are the post-structuralist insights of Paul de Man, although admittedly the author has still not fully articulated the difference between modernity and modernism (Škulj 1991: 42). Moreover, he has never completely revealed his understanding of modernity. Most of his statements on this topic can be found in his essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity" in *Blindness and Insight*, 1971. According to de Man, modernity can only be understood in correlation with the historical, which at first may seem paradoxical, since modernity and the historical seem to be contradictory terms. But they only "seem to be"; de Man points out that in reality modernity always represents a new beginning, a new origin: "Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure." (De Man 1971: 148). Therefore, modernity "trusts in the power of the present moment as an origin"; the origin and the beginning are historical notions, which means that on the one hand modernity does indeed deny history, but on the other it justifies itself by it. History cannot be avoided, as Nietzsche already discovered, but de Man attempts to rethink Nietzsche's theory through the concept of modernity. Namely, modernity is not the opposite of the historical; it is in correlation with it:

"Considered as a principle of life, modernity becomes a principle of origin and turns once into a generative power that is itself historical." (De Man 1983: 150) The historical is its essential component, which is not fixed; it is changeable and fluid. Thus, modernity implies that the historical is an interpreted and ever re-interpreted fact.[2]

But considering the fact that the Coppet group is a phenomenon that cannot be compared with anything in the history of western culture and literature, for the purpose of shedding light on all its dimensions, it seems reasonable to combine de Man's views with the understanding of modernity as a process of radical differentiation between the world of objectivity and the world of subjectivity as defined by the French philosopher Alain Touraine, who formulated his extensive, and also somewhat problematic, interpretation of modernity under the influence of Habermas and Weber, among others. According to Touraine, this discourse excels in a balanced combination of two lines of thought and two discursive strategies: rationalisation, or objectification, and subjectification: "La modernité a rompu avec le monde sacré, qui était à la fois naturel et divin, transparent à la raison et créé. Elle ne l'a pas remplacé par celui de la raison et de la sécularisation, en renvoyant les fins dernières dans un monde que l'homme ne pourrait plus atteindre; elle a imposé la séparation d'un *Sujet* descendu du ciel sur terre humanisé, et du monde des objets, manipulés par les *techniques*. Elle a remplacé l'unité d'un monde, créé par la volonté divine, la Raison ou l'Histoire, par la dualité de la *rationalisation* et de la *subjectivation*. (Touraine 1992: 13) Thus, modern democratic discourse is a result of a dialogue between rationalisation and subjectification. This dialogue is indispensable, because according to Touraine, subjectification can become too obsessively focused on one's own identity, whereas rationalisation without subjectification can become merely an instrument of power: "Il n' y a pas une figure unique de la modernité, mais deux figures tournées l'une vers l'autre et dont le dialogue constitue la modernité: la rationalisation et la subjectivation. Gianni Vattimo cite des vers de Hölderlin: *Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnet / der Mensch auf dieser Erde*. Les succès de l'action technique ne doivent pas faire oublier la créativité de l'être humain." (Touraine 1992: 265) For the consideration of the role of Coppet as a domain of art, Touraine's interpretation of modernity is suitable as long as it evokes the balance between the thought of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, seeing that Coppet is not merely a cultural, historical and literary phenomenon, but also a political and sociological one.

Modernity "disenchanted the world" through a process of rationalisation. As a consequence, disintegrating representations of the world created a secular culture in Europe. But this process lasted only until modernity turned away from western rationalism, so that today, the process of rationalisation is no longer regarded as a "historical objectification of mental structures". Moreover, Habermas claims that Weber does not merely address the secularisation of western culture, but also the development of modern society. (Habermas 1988: 7) In this sense, modern society can be defined as the context in which modern democratic discourse emerges.

This discourse is a manifestation of the modern democratic society, which is supposed to have defined extremely strict limits to the influence of political authority on an individual, thereby facilitating the subordination of state authorities to personal freedom. And this was the goal to which Madame de Staël and the entire Coppet circle aspired.

Coppet Castle was open to individuals of any nationality, conviction and religious belief. It was open to supporters of the Revolution and to some Royalists. But the lively and fiery confrontation of opinions there never caused any serious intolerance, although almost everybody who entered the castle was politically engaged. They rejected despotism and militarism, cherished freedom of thought and speech, and believed in the ability of the human spirit to constantly improve itself (Balayé 1994). Gradually, Coppet became one of the centres of the opposition to Napoleon's regime. Even in religion, there was a spontaneous and unrestrained dialogue between Protestants and Catholics at Coppet. Here, and nowhere else, there was interaction between philosophy, politics, morality, religion and literature, because the members of the Coppet circle not only took an interest in literature and criticism, but also in politics, philosophy, religion, linguistics, science and history, which gave the group its special interdisciplinary character and, in addition to its religious and national diversity, it significantly contributed to its elusive identity. Considering the fact that the phenomenon cannot be completely defined and that it is contradictory – here, I must point out the contradiction between the aristocratic *habitus* of Madame de Staël and her distinctly democratic convictions – Coppet undoubtedly exceeded the limitations of its socio-political and cultural historical context by becoming a site of a modern democratic discourse and thereby of modernity.

Coppet became a refuge in 1792. The first regular visitors began frequenting the castle in 1794 (Constant, Bonstetten, Meister). In 1798, they were joined by the linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt, who taught German to the hostess, two years later by Simonde de Sismondi, and in 1804 by August Wilhelm Schlegel. Other visitors were Mathiew de Montmorency, Bouterweck, the Danish poet Oehlenschlager, Friedrich Schlegel, Chateaubriand and many others. The Coppet group was never a static entity; de Staël's guests came and left, and frequently returned. The most intensive intellectual activity took place between 1805 and 1810. During that time A.W. Schlegel wrote a comparison between the Greek and French Phaedras and finished his famous *Lectures on Dramatic Art* (*Die Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*); Charles Victor de Bonstetten wrote an essay on imagination (*Recherches sur les lois et la nature de l'imagination*); Prosper de Barante explored 18th century French literature (*Table de la littérature française pendant le XVIIIe siècle*); Simonde de Sismondi wrote his extensive history of southern literatures (*De la littérature du Midi de l' Europe*); Constant adapted Schiller's *Wallenstein* for the French stage; and de Staël wrote her novel *Corinne ou l'Italie,* and her extensive work *On Germany (De l'Allemagne)*. In addition to an incessant emphasis on the equality of national literatures, the innovation of group activities at Coppet was the articulation of a

realisation that European literature must be seen in the context of the connection between northern and southern literatures. In this light, in her work *De la littérature,* de Staël introduced the question of the plurality and equality of individual national literatures and reached a similar conclusion to A.W. Schlegel's in his *Briefe über Poesie, Silbenmass und Sprache*, where he observed that it was impossible to speak either of superior or lesser national poetries.

There was also lively translation activity at Coppet. The most prolific was A.W. Schlegel, who translated Shakespeare and Calderon. Madame Necker de Saussure (Madame de Staël's cousin) translated A.W. Schlegel's lectures into French, whereas A.W. Schlegel translated de Staël's essay *Considérations sur la révolution française* into German. De Staël incorporated many translated passages in her book *On Germany*, and so did Sismondi in his work on south European literatures. The members of the Coppet group saw translation as one of the main tools of communication among different cultures.

In view of all this, Remi Forycki's theory, although extremely roughly presented, may not seem exaggerated. Forycki declared that Coppet was a public space in terms of the Habermasian *Offentlichkeit*. This notion denotes "the public and private sphere of political activity within civil society." (Forycki 1998: 48) Through the Staëlian context, Forycki explained what had happened to the Czech philosopher, and Husserl's student, Jan Potocka (1907-1977). He attempts to prove that cultural identity is what enables the individual to resist manipulation by authorities, and consequently it is undoubtedly part of the process that constitutes a modern subject. In the 18th century, the public and the private were not yet differentiated, although the process of differentiating and establishing a relationship between them started before the French Revolution. It was a long and complex development, so here we must focus on a particular aspect of this development, which was significantly connected with literature.[3]

In the mid-18th century, a literary public emerged from a certain stratum of the middle class, mostly reading literature, but also attending theatres, concerts and exhibitions. But the most important role in this phenomenon was played by literature, particularly by the novel. This literature was, namely, both from the point of view of reception and of subject matter, closely connected with private space, the most intimate family sphere. In bourgeois society, the centre of this sphere was the patriarchal nuclear family.[4] Here, new, intimate relations among family members began to emerge. These relations were generated by new, humanism-based values that facilitated the emergence of a new type of subjectivity. The most suitable form for "experiments with subjectivity" was the letter, which was no longer merely a means of communication. Through its first-person narrative, it became a medium for "imprints of the soul". Gradually this subjectivity became public, since some examples of correspondence were intended for publication from the very beginning. (Habermas 1989: 65) This gave rise to a new type of literature: the epistolary novel (Richardson, Rousseau, Goethe, Madame de Staël). In these novels, subjectivity was an

important subject matter, reducing the "distance between the subject and the object" to the minimum. In this way, the "reader became the author's confidant", and both intimately relived the fate of the novel's heroes in their own way. For example, Richardson "directly calls on the reader to stand in the place of the novel's hero". (Hauser 1969: 82) Consequently, fictional reality in a way spilt over the edges of the novel, and the reader was able to blend it with his or her own reality. Thus it could be said that the most significant component of these novels was "reality-illusion" or the fictional. Therefore, it is no coincidence that according to Habermas, who quotes Hauser and Kayser, in this period – in the late 18th century – the term *fiction* finally became accepted in connection with literary prose, and that something similar also happened in theatre, where, with the introduction of the "fourth wall", drama became fiction as well. (Habermas 1962, 1989: 66) It is probably no coincidence, either, that at Coppet guests used to retire to their quarters after lunch and write letters to one another. As their hostess keenly observed, they thus became real "sujets de fiction". Indeed, fiction is one of the most frequently discussed notions in de Staël's work. In her treatise *Essai sur les fictions* (1795),[5] for example, she tries to convince writers that the reader finds the greatest joy in being able to identify with the heroes of a novel, in other words, that the thematisation of the reading public represents the most attractive dimension of literature for this same public. This is why de Staël champions the novel, particularly the epistolary novel, which most successfully captured the most mundane human feelings: *"Mais dans les romans tel que ceux de Richardson ou de Fielding, ou l'on s'est proposé de côtoyer la vie en suivant exactement les gradations, les développements, les inconséquences /.../ les événements sont inventés, mais les sentiments sont tellement dans la nature, que le lecteur croit souvent qu'on s'adresse à lui avec le simple égard de changer les noms propres."* (De Staël 1871: 68) The experience of heroes in a novel must therefore be similar to the experience of the reader, because only in this way is the reader prepared to cooperate directly with the author while following the story of the novel. In the second half of the 18th century, the best form for the thematisation of these feelings was the epistolary novel. But the intimate relationships that were the subject matter of these novels gradually expanded outside the living room of the nuclear family and began to emerge in the salon, the most important room in the bourgeois home. There, apart from family friends, a broader circle of people met, which in salons evolved into the reading public. Gradually, it became increasingly socially engaged and critical towards politics, and as a consequence, the private entered the political sphere through the literary public, becoming critical and even polemical. Therefore, the political and literary public, as two images of the public, intertwined in these salons. (Habermas 1989) At Coppet, this phenomenon was manifested in the fact that although this space could be clearly declared the undisputed peak of the salon tradition, it must be pointed out that from the point of view of cultural history, it surpasses this tradition. This fact manifests itself in the distinct plurality of this space, which is significantly connected with its unique historical context,

which was determined by many factors, the most decisive being the following: the direct impact of ideas that led to the French Revolution, the rejection of the absolutism embodied in Napoleon's regime, opposition to Napoleon's efforts at the unification of Europe, classical German philosophy – particularly Fichte and Kant – the aesthetics and poetics of the early Romantic period and, last but not least, the personality of the proprietor of Coppet, Madame de Staël. In addition, special mention must be made of English philosophy (Hume), whose empiricist ideas probably to a certain extent influenced the specific Coppet subversion of the conception of organicism, among others.

The fact that Madame de Staël is a long-canonised author is indisputable, because it is well known that she has long occupied a specific place within the curriculum of literary history. But at the same time it cannot be ignored that gradually a considerably ambiguous attitude towards her texts has emerged, particularly in connection with her style. The hybrid genre and style that is an important characteristic of her writing has been understood by some (for example by Fontanes, Touchard) as a flaw, whereas others discover the beginnings of modern writing (Forycki) and even the first traces of *l'écriture féminine* (Marie-Claire Vallois, Margaret Higonnet) in her works. Moreover, it is a known fact that her book On Germany became world-famous immediately after its publication and was adopted by her contemporaries both in Europe and in the United States as a kind of cult text. Critics probably forget that certain contradictions in her essays may be a consequence of her conviction that literature must always be understood in the context of social relationships, which undoubtedly influenced her attitude towards rhetoric and style. This may also be why she consciously overlooked the laws of classic, academic style, contributing to its dethronement from its pedestal as an eternal and absolute value in that very period (at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century). Consequently, she developed a special spontaneous way of writing that was supposed to contribute to clarity of thought, but in the process, she often went to the other extreme and in certain passages obscured her discourse. Nevertheless, sometimes this obscurity is a result of introducing new values, Romantic ones, at the expense of the old, Classicist ones. With de Staël, this introduction never takes place in the form of a complete break with tradition. She is more interested in how to harmonise tradition with the demands of the new era. She advised writers, her contemporaries, to modify their view of Antiquity and begin to take an interest in recent history. She was convinced that literature must open up to modern experience, which was completely irreconcilable with the strict laws of French Classicist tragedy (the demand the three unities). For this reason she recommended plays with subject matter and motifs from modern history and proposed that alexandrine verse be abandoned. (De Staël 1968: I/256) With these and other similar proposals she paved the way later taken by the French Romantics that was most explicitly outlined by Hugo in his introduction to 'Cromwell' (1827). Similarly, she did not see the French Revolution as a turning point, although she was probably more aware than many that the Revolution had ushered in a new age. In an ana-

logous manner, we can interpret her implicit poetics: an attempt at balancing respect for tradition with the introduction of the new. For this reason, she is in favour of expressing passion, although in the process she never forgets philosophical reflection, which must confirm with reason what sentiment reveals to us: "*Il faut une philosophie de croyance, d'enthousiasme; une philosophie qui confirme par la raison ce que le sentiment nous révèle.*" (De Staël 1968: II/138) Accordingly, she even attempted to adjust her role in her circle – in the group that gathered at Coppet – to the demands of the new time and co-create a discourse of the emerging modern democratic society.

All this considered, it might not be redundant to rethink the place of her work in the literary canon. This issue is particularly interesting because it is about a system that at the time she helped to create, since her critical work, like the work of most members of her circle, was much more exhaustive than her literary work. Therefore, Paul de Man in his essay, *Mme de Staël et Jean-Jacques Rousseau* probably with good reason defined de Staël's place in the literary canon as distinctly reflective. Here, this expression has two meanings: reflection as a distance in thought (the distance adopted by the narrator from the narrative) and reflection as a mirror image (the relationship of her work towards other works in the canon). This double meaning can be further extended with the evocation of this notion's third dimension of meaning, which in de Man's essay is merely implied, although it can be deduced because of de Man's broad theoretical context, which is significantly based on Kant's philosophy (Norris 1988), particularly Kant's *Third Critique.* According to Kant: "Judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given, then the judgment which subsumes the particular under it is determinant. This is so even where such a judgment is transcendental and, as such, provides the conditions a priori in conformity with which alone subsumption under that universal can be effected. If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgement is simply reflective." (Kant 1790: BXXVI)[6] Unlike the determining judgement (*bestimmende Urteilskraft*), the reflecting judgement (*reflektierende Urteilskraft*) is connected with the subjective, particular and contingent, which is the reason it can be presented as the third dimension of the meaning of de Man's notion of reflection, and at the same time be connected with the issue of an organicist understanding of art and society.[7]

Reflection, detected in critical texts by Madame de Staël, for example, even in her first essay on Rousseau (*Lettres sur les écrits de Rousseau*, 1788), her favourite author, although it can also be found in some of her literary works, is closely intertwined with passion and enthusiasm (De Man 36). In this context, Georges Poulet states that de Staël's discourse is a combination of the "reasoning spirit" and "suffering heart". When suffering becomes unbearable, the individual finds the strength to become cool-headed, which enables one to think about one's pain, although the suffering does not cease. (Poulet 1971: 19) The establishing of a distance between the observing and the suffering parts of the self makes the senti-

ment more profound. In other words, each work of art contains elements that surface only when evoked by a distanced critical insight: "*Il n' y a que Rousseau (et Goethe) qui a su peindre la passion réfléchissante, la passion qui se juge elle-même sans pouvoir se dompter. Cet examen de ses propres sensations, fait par celui-la même qu'elles dévorent /.../ Mais rien n'émeut davantage que ce mélange de douleurs et de méditations, d'observations et de délire, qui représente l'homme malheureux se contemplant par la pensée, et succombant à la douleur, dirigeant son imagination sur lui même, assez fort pour se regarder souffrir, et néanmoins incapable de porter à son âme aucun secours.*" (De Staël 1871: 329) What we have here is a contact between the directness of experience and the indirectness of thought reflecting on this experience. According to de Staël, this contact was best presented by Goethe and Rousseau. Following their model, she also reflects on passion: "Je me transporterai donc à quelque distance des impressions que j'ai reçues, et j'écrirai sur Héloïse comme je ferais, je crois, si le temps avait vieilli mon coeur." (De Staël 1871: 5) We find a similar approach in the introduction to the book De l'Allemagne, where the author explains: "Je m' était cependant interdit dans ce livre, comme on le verra, toute réflexion sur l'état politique de l'Allemagne; je me supposais à cinquante années du temps présent; mais le temps présent ne permet pas qu' on l' oublie." (De Staël 1968: 38)

What this distance is about was very precisely expressed by Paul Valéry in his verses from *Fragments de Narcisse*, where he says:

> Cette tremblante, frêle, et pieuse distance
> Entre moi-même et l'onde, et mon âme, et les dieux [8]

Reflection is therefore a much more complex term than it may appear at first glance, because on the one hand, through de Man's concept of Modernity, it extends to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, whereas on the other, through this same approach, as it turns out later, it questions one of the basic concepts of Romantic poetry: the concept of organism.

Regardless of whether she writes from the point of view of literary or social criticism, De Staël invariably establishes a distance from what is nearest to her. In the essay on Rousseau, it is the author of *Nouvelle Héloïse* himself. In the space of this distance, created with an act of reflection, the subject of enunciation of de Staël's discourse is constituted. (De Man 1966: 38) From the historical perspective, this region seems distinctly intermediate, situated between two centuries and their cultures and, moreover, during the time of the Revolution and the following years. Madame de Staël's position is invariably the point of view of a witness to historical events, observing them from a highly personal perspective, although it is history that always speaks through her testimonial discourse. (Omacini 1982) In other words, her subjective discourse constantly transcends rationality (Compare Forycki 1998: 54, 55). At least in the case of her work *On Germany*, this discourse can also be read as a complex dialogue between 18th century Enlightenment ideas and the Romantic sensibility that emerged at the turn of the century and became fully developed in the 19th century, or, in more radical terms, as the dialogue between French

and German cultural identity. Identity is here meant as something that facilitates self-identification, while at the same time opening the nation or the individual and allowing them to establish a relationship towards the other. Because of this specific role of her discourse as both an intermediary and a connecting link, de Staël's place in the world literary canon can be defined as peripheral and not yet completely fixed, as fluid and transgressive, in terms of breaking through the borders of a fixed definition of a certain cultural entity or else as open to the historical, heterogeneous, the contingent and variable, in other words, for those very elements that according to Kant refer directly to the reflecting power of judgement. The latter is also "understood as an articulation of the experience according to which the demand for totality and universality implied by the logic of the universal explanation cannot be fully implemented by definition", and is therefore always open, "recording the irreducible heterogeneity of the specific and the inaccessibility of the universal". (Riha 1993: 89) According to Kant, this openness of the reflecting power of judgement enables the recognition of the "a-subjective Other" or, in other words, it facilitates openness to otherness, openness of the self to the non-self: "*C'est un moi insatiable de non-moi …*" as Baudelaire put it in "*Le peintre de la vie moderne*".[9] (Baudelaire 1980: 795)

Openness to the non-self or openness to the other is a prerequisite for any dialogue, including that between different cultures. This is also the reason that openness to the non-self, which is theoretically based on the reflecting power of judgement, is also the only appropriate defining feature of any inter-cultural dialogue. Thanks to this defining feature, the Coppet discourses at least here and there reveal elements that confirmed the theory that Coppet as a place of inter-cultural dialogue was not only a public but also a modern space. This means that it transcended the borders of its own time and space, which were decisively marked by the emerging national myths. What happened at Coppet was not only a break with the Classicist poetics and views of the Enlightenment period, but also a breakthrough – although only faintly indicated – the conceptual framework of Romantic poetics. These elements manifest themselves particularly in the Coppet treatment of fundamental Romantic notions, such as irony, longing, chaos, genius, organism etc. To create a true image of Coppet and how it outgrew its own milieu we should study the use of all these notions, a task beyond the scope of the present paper. For this reason, we focus on only one notion: the organism.

The organism as a fundamental concept of Romantic poetics and aesthetics, as an element of the Coppet discourses, is pivotal in the context of transcending cultural-historical definitions and for the issue of cultural identity. Moreover, in literary criticism, it has kept a more or less important role late into the 20th century. It is included in our discussion of Coppet because, on the one hand, among all Romantic concepts, it has the most powerful ethical and political connotations, which are not connected merely with and do not transcend only the Enlightenment and Romanticism, but are also correlated with de Man's and Baudelaire's concept of modernity[10] as well as with Habermas' concept of the modern democratic

discourse; and on the other hand, because A.W. Schlegel was one of the main members of the Coppet circle and one of the most important theoreticians to solidify this concept. In addition, the organicist understanding of art and, above all, the criticism of this understanding in de Man's and – in a sense – even Baudelaire's insights of literary criticism, significantly marked the contemporary understanding of art.

The organism concept was developed by German Romantics: the concept in its metaphorical application broke through the framework of scientific discourse and became anchored in the humanities, particularly in literary criticism. Nevertheless, it did not become limited to it; it also significantly affected ethics and politics. Within Romantic poetics, the organism concept evokes a harmonious whole that allows aesthetic pleasure in the presence of a perfectly organised work of art, and is based on the Kantian difference between the artificial and natural whole. This difference was supposedly also decisive in the solving of the old opposition between content and form. Romantics maintain that these are more closely connected than had been generally believed. While the mechanical form is external, the organic form is internal and thereby ingrown in the content of a work of art. This means that it is not only content that carries messages, but also the form of a work, which is artistic in as far as it is a result of spontaneous inspiration. A work of art that is intended and understood as an organism is defined primarily by the constant unification of typically Romantic oppositions between spirit and matter, the infinite and the finite, oneness and variety, attraction and repulsion, revolution and tradition, etc. These oppositions in Romantic poetics "are no longer only logical correlates or moral alternatives to be chosen from, but also potentials that man attempts to turn into reality at the same time". (Hauser 1969: 208) According to A.W. Schlegel, the most exemplary works of art are Shakespeare's plays, because their dissonances and consonances and contrasts within harmony represent true Romantic works of art *avant la lettre*. (A.W. Schlegel 1966)

These tenets of organicist aesthetics were also recognised by the Coppet authors, undoubtedly under Schlegel's influence. Schlegel's idea of bringing together opposites in a harmonic whole was adopted by S. Sismondi, who in his exhaustive work on south European literatures wrote that the laws of symmetry according to which all elements are arranged in the direction of a single goal, allow a level of unity and perfection in each of these elements, invariably leading from unity to variety. In addition to this, he initiates the reader into the secret of creation by facilitating the view of a single thought that guides a broad variety of actions and interests. (Becq 1994: 831) Variations of this thought on the inner dynamics of a work of art can also be found in de Staël's works, particularly *On Germany*: "*L'âme est un foyer qui rayonne dans tous les sens; c'est dans ce foyer que consiste l'existence; toutes les observations et tous les efforts des philosophes doivent se tourner vers ce moi, centre et mobile de nos sentiments et de nos idées*", (De Staël 1968: II/196); whereas somewhere else in the book, she says: "*L'idéalisme intellectuel fait de la volonté, qui est l'âme, le centre de tout.*" (De Staël 1968: II/169) They also appear in

the work of P. de Barante, another author who mentions a centre that is equal to the soul, and in the work of Bonstetten, who speaks of unity in variety. (Compare Becq 1994: 825-830) From *On Germany*, however, it is evident that the author connects Romanticism with attributes such as the organic, modern, multi-layered, and varied; whereas she associates classicism with the mechanical, conservative, single-layered, and uniform. (De Staël: 1968/II) At the same time, she compares Romantic principles with the democratic bourgeois order, and Classicist principles with absolutist authority.

The Coppet authors in a sense adopted Schlegel's concept of organism, which is based on the opposition between mechanism and organism, but in the process, they nevertheless expressed a certain reservation that is far from insignificant from today's perspective. What stands out is the fact that the Coppet authors avoided the expression as such and, instead of the term organism, preferred to use the expression organisation, probably because they detected certain implications of this term which are connected with absolutism and totalitarianism and which in German Romanticism could not be expressed at the time. German Romantic authors did not understand society in terms of the activity of individuals who enter into contractual relationships with one another. They (Schleiermacher, Schelling) compared the state with an organism living according to its own needs, independently of the arbitrary will of the legislator.[11]

They speculated that there exists a centre that, on behalf of the whole, manages the individual parts that are subordinated to it. Complete subordination to the whole is not only a characteristic of an anatomically perceived organism, but also of a mechanism, a system that all Romantic authors categorically rejected. It appears that at this point Romantic poetics produced a certain inherent contradiction that probably resulted from an anatomical perception of the organism. The Coppet authors, each in their own way, drew attention to the mechanistic aspects of the perception of an organism. In this sense they warned also against the powerful influence that Paris as a centre had on the periphery. For example, in her essay on the French Revolution (*Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*), de Staël lucidly, although with considerable sarcasm, states that the French capital plays the role of the state, while the court plays the role of the capital. Constant even more critically and explicitly addresses the problem of the relationship between the periphery and the centre: *"...dans les états, ou l'on détruit ainsi toute vie partielle, un petit état se forme au centre; dans la capitale s'agglomèrent tous les intérêts; la vont s'agiter toutes les ambitions. Le reste est immobile. Les individus perdu dans un isolement contre nature, étranger au lien de leur naissance, sans contact avec le passé /.../ se détachent d'une partie qu'ils n'aperçoivent nulle part, et dont l'ensemble leur devient indifférent, parce que leur attention ne peut se reposer sur aucune de ses parties."*[12] (Constant 1957: 1193)

With their anti-centralist and anti-totalitarian approach, the Coppet group went beyond certain implications, not only those of the enlighten-

ment, but also of romantic poetics. Although not completely intentionally, they succeeded in this, because the concept of organism as proposed by these authors is closer to modernism or to a physiological, rather than anatomical, understanding of the organism. With a modern or, if we use a somewhat paradoxical expression, with a non-organicist or non-anatomical understanding of organism, we aim at the understanding of this notion that was developed by the French philosopher G. Canguilhem on the basis of Claude Bernard's cell theory.[13] It was he who pointed out that in the early 19th century, an organism was perceived from the point of view of anatomy, individual parts being formulated in accordance with the purpose of the whole: "*C'est donc la physiologie, qui donne le clé de la totalisation, celle que l'anatomie n'avait pas su fournir. Les organes, les systèmes, d'un organisme hautement différenciée n'existent pas pour eux-mêmes, ni les unes pour les autres en tant qu' organes ou systèmes, ils existent pour les cellules, pour les radicaux anatomiques innombrables, leur créant le milieu intérieur /.../ qui leur est nécessaire. En sorte que leur association, c'est-à-dire leur rapport de type social, fournit aux éléments le moyen collectif de vivre une vie séparée /.../ La partie d'un tout dépend d'un tout, qui ne s'est constitué que pour son entretien.*"[14] (Canguilhem 1970: 330) Therefore, it is not only the cell that exists because of the organism; the organism also exists because of the cell. If Bernard's theory of the cell is applied either to the structure of society or the structure of a work of art, we find that communication within such an organisation flows not only from the centre to the periphery, but also contrariwise. Therefore, the whole does not have precedence over the individual part, and similarly the state does not have precedence over the individual. With a certain reservation we can say that at Coppet, the first examples of the anti-organicist view of society and art emerged, because in their own way the authors exposed the illusory nature of organicist metaphors. This not only challenged the organicist view of society and art, but also of language.

The Coppet authors largely focused on the latter, both in theory and practice. As we have already pointed out, there was very lively translation activity going on at Coppet, because of which the practical problems of various languages also needed to be solved. Difficulties with the translation of poetic language arose in the process. The specific nature of the latter was tackled by everybody alike, not only the linguist W. von Humboldt. He was particularly interested in the problem of the relationship between poetic and everyday language, or how the universal reality of a language as a sensory medium that facilitates thinking can be brought into harmony with the particular demands of poetic creativity. He discovered that this contradiction could not be solved with logic or through deduction. Instead, it had to be synthesised through the act of poetic creation, because: "Everything in a language is based on an obvious or concealed analogy; its structure is consistently *organic*." (Humboldt 1903-1904: III/315) (Italics added by J.K.Š.)[15]

A similar conclusion was reached by A.W. Schlegel, who in his *Briefe über Poesie, Silbenmass und Sprache* analysed distinctive features of the

poetic language relying on Herder's and Rousseau's statements. Although he perceived poetry as a generating force, in other words in terms of the organicist approach, his linguistic theory is transcendent because it contains rudimentary the beginnings of the structuralist linguistic theory According to the lucid observations of Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, an expert on the romantic's linguistic theory, A.W. Schlegel anticipated the arbitrary character of the linguistic sign and formulated a theory that does not merely directly concern the object, but also the idea of the object or its representation (Kurt Mueller-Vollmer 1967). For this reason, an individual can assume a reflective attitude towards the self and the world only through language. But Kurt Mueller-Vollmer failed to notice that through his theoretical insights, A.W. Schlegel contradicted both Humboldt's theory of the organic structure of language and his own claims about the organicist nature of language and literature. The theory of the arbitrariness of the sign and the theory of language as an organic structure are namely mutually exclusive.

The beginnings of the anti-organicist understanding of art and society in Coppet discourses are significant because they prove that, in the early romantic period, there already existed elements revealing that from the very beginning romantic thought contained a certain sense of a plural reality that clearly shows that the organicist myth of the nation as a fixed and sealed totality can be surpassed and that its mythological nature can be exposed or rather demystified; this is despite the fact that, as it is generally known, the early Romantic period was a time when the process of the forming of nation states, national awarenesses, and national identities began, a process that in its present-day version is more important than ever.

The life and work of Madame de Staël (1776-1817) almost completely coincide with the period of the emergence of the first foundations of the formation of national states – Benedict Anderson places this period between the years 1776 and 1838 – in the period when national awarenesses began to emerge in Europe; when the "blend of capitalism, press technologies and unavoidable differences between human languages created the possibility for the emergence of a new form of imagined community that through its basic morphology set up the stage of the modern nation". (Anderson 1999: 56) This unavoidably gave birth to the thought and social processes that from the French Revolution, during the Napoleonic Wars and the Spring of Nations in 1848, and through the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, brought humanity to the implementation of a host of nationalisms, including well-known catastrophic consequences in the 20th century.

NOTES

[1] Jacques Necker (1732-1804) was Minister of Finance under Louis XVI and the father of Madame de Staël.

[2] For more on the topic, see Škulj 1991, 2, 42-46 and 1995, 2, 17-30.

[3] For more on the topic, see Habermas, 1989.

[4] These characteristics of the private sphere were among the reasons for the appearance of feminist literature in tis period, warning against the patriarchal nature of the public sphere that emerged from the reading public. As we know, the latter was mostly composed of women.

[5] Goethe translated the text into German and published it in *Die Horen* magazine.

[6] Urteilskraft überhaupt ist das Vermögen, das Besondere unter dem Allgemeinen zu denken. Ist das Allgemeine (die Regel, das Prinzip, das Gesetz) gegeben, so ist die Urteilskraft, welche das Besondere darunter subsumiert, (auch, wenn sie als transzendentale Urteilskraft a priori die Bedingungen angibt, welchen gemäss allein unter jenem Allgemeinen subsumiert werden kann) bestimmend. Ist aber nur das Besondere gegeben, wozu sie das Allgemeine finden soll, so ist die Urteilskraft bloss reflektierend. (Kant 2001:19, 1795: BXXXVI)

[7] This interpretation of the third dimension of de Man's "reflection" is not meant as completing his understanding of modernity, but only as one more view of modernity that could shed more light on this complex phenomenon.

[8] Quoted from de Man 1966: 38.

[9] For more on the topic, see Škulj 1991 and 1995.

[10] With his understanding of modernity, Baudelaire questioned the notion of an art work as an organism (Compare Škulj 1995:22)

[11] For more on the topic, see Becq 1994: 809-851.

[12] Quoted from Becq 1998: 90.

[13] Claude Bernard (1813-1878), the French physiologist who discovered nerve centres, independently of the central cerebral nerve-center.

[14] Quoted from Becq 1994: 828.

[15] Quoted from Kurt Mueller-Vollmer 1998: 211.

REFERENCES

ANDERSON, Benedict, 1998: *Zamišljene skupnosti. O izvoru in širjenju nacionalizma.* Ljubljana: SH. (*Immagined Communities*, 1983)

BALAYÉ, Simone, 1994: *Madame de Staël: Écrire, lutter, vivre*. Genève: Droz.

BAUDELAIRE, Charles, 1980: "Le peintre de la vie moderne". In Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*. Paris: Robert Lafont.

BECQ, Annie, 1994: *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne,* 1680-1814: De la raison classique à l'imagination créatrice, 1680-1814. Paris: Albin Michel. (First ed. 1984)

BECQ, Annie, 1998: "Politique, esthétique et philosophie de la nature dans le Groupe de Coppet". In *Le Groupe de Coppet et le monde moderne: conceptions, images, débats.* Actes du VIe Colloque de Coppet (Liège, 10-11-12 Juillet 1997) François Tilkin ed. Genève: Droz, p. 83-98.

CANGUILHEM, Georges, 1970: "Le tout et la partie dans le pensée biologique". *Études d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences*. Paris: Vrin.

CONSTANT, Benjamin, 1957: *Oeuvres*. Paris: Gallimard. (Pléiade).

DE MAN, Paul, 1971: *Blindness and Insight*. New York: Oxford University Press.

DE MAN, Paul, 1966: "Madame de Staël et Jean-Jacques Rousseau". In *Preuves*, 190, décembre, 1966, p.35-40.

FORYCKI, Remi 1998: "Madame de Staël et l'espace publique moderne". In *Le Groupe de Coppet et le monde moderne: conceptions, images, débats.* Actes du VIe Colloque de Coppet (Liège, 10-11-12 Juillet 1997) François Tilkin ed. Genève: Droz, p. 47-57.

GUTWIRTH, Madelyn, GOLDBERGER, Avriel and SZMURLO, Karyna ed., 1991: *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders.* New Brunswick (N. J.): Rutgers University Press.

HABERMAS, Jürgen, 1988: *Filozofski diskurs moderne.* Zagreb: Globus. (*Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne,* 1988).

HABERMAS, Jürgen, 1989: *Strukturne spremembe javnosti.* Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis. (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit,* 1965).

HAUSER, Arnold, 1969: *Socialna zgodovina umetnosti in literature.* Ljubljana: CZ. (Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur).

HUMBOLDT, Wilhelm von, 1903-1904: *Gesammelte Schriften.* III/321.

KANT, Immanuel, 2001: *Kritik der Urteilskraft.* Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag (First ed. 1790).

KANT, Immanuel, 2004: *The critique of judgment.* Books Adelaida (Translated by James Creed Meredith).

MUELLER-VOLLMER, Kurt, 1967: *Zur Poesie und Einbildungskraft. Zur Dichtungstheorie Wilhelm von Humboldts.* Stuttgart: Metzler.

MUELLER-VOLLMER, Kurt: "From Poetics to Linguistics: Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Romantic Idea of Language". In *Le Groupe de Coppet et le monde moderne: conceptions, images, débats.* Actes du VIe Colloque de Coppet (Liège, 10-11-12 Juillet 1997). François Tilkin ed. Geneve: Droz, p. 195-215.

NORRIS, Christopher, 1988: Paul de Man. *Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology.* London: Routledge.

OMACINI, Lucia, 1982: "Pour une typologie du discours staëlien: les procédés de la persuasion". In *Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël et le Groupe de Coppet.* Oxford-Lausanne, p. 371-391.

POULET, Georges, 1971: *La conscience critique.* Paris: José Corti.

RIHA, Rado, 1993: "Problemi postnacionalne identitete". In *Problemi. Eseji.* Ljubljana 31/7, p. 85-100.

SCHLEGEL, August Wilhelm, 1966: *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur.* (*Kritische Schriften und Briefe;* 5, 6) Stuttgart (etc): Kohlhammer. (First ed. 1801–1804).

STAËL, Madame de, 1968: *De l'Allemagne.* Paris: Flammarion. (First ed. 1813).

STAËL, Madame de, 1871: "Essai sur les fictions". In *Oeuvres complètes de Madame la Baronne de Staël- Holstein.* Paris: Didot. I/62-72.

STAËL, Madame de, 1871: "Lettres sur les Écrits et le caractère de J.J. Rousseau". In: *Oeuvres complètes de Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein.* Paris: Didot, p. 1-24. (First ed. 1788).

STAËL, Madame de, 1956: *De la littérature, considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales.* Genève: Droz. (First ed. 1800).

STAËL, Madame de, 1871: "Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution Française". *Oeuvres complètes de Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein.* Paris: Didot.

ŠKULJ, Jola, 1991: "Paul de Man in pojem modernizem". In *Primerjalna književnost* XIV/2, Ljubljana, p. 41-49.

ŠKULJ, Jola, 1995: "Modernizem in modernost". In *Primerjalna književnost* XVIII/2, Ljubljana, p. 17-30.

TOURAINE, Alain, 1992: *Critique de la modernité.* Paris: Fayard.