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Literature as Subversion: Potentials and Aporias of Contemporary Political Writing

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Structure

1. Literature as Subversion. An Introduction [00:10]
2. Discourses of Subversion and Literature as Subversion. Towards a New Methodology in Analyzing Political Writing [04:30]
 - 2.1. Literature and Subversion. Towards a New Methodology [06:52]

→ [Additional information:] The Four Discourses of Subversion

And here they are, the four discourses of subversion.

In the *political-institutional discourse of subversion*, subversion is understood as a revolutionary overthrow of the state. This is the oldest use of the term and for a long time has been its principal meaning (and still is today in dictionaries). Subversion is used in the police and legal discourse to label the activities of terrorists or political movements, which aim for an overthrow of the ruling authority, and governmental institutions, its secret services and defensive authorities.

In the *artistic-avant-garde discourse of subversion*, subversion is understood as an artistic-processual movement. This discourse of subversion has developed at the beginning of the 20th century when the historic avant-gardes transferred metaphors of war to the field of art. In the 1960s the group "*Subversive Aktion*" – "*Subversive Action*" – transfers the concept of subversion to the artistic-avant-garde discourse. Since the 1990s, in the German-speaking cultures subversion is used more often in the artistic-avant-garde discourse than in the political-institutional discourse.

The *subcultural discourse of subversion* takes the meaning of subversion as a movement that distincts itself from a minor position as a starting point. Subcultures occur on the one hand as a reaction on discriminations in categories as class, ethnicity, gender, sex, religion, disability, age or appearance, but also as distinctive youth and countercultures (like hippies and punks), which draw their subversive strength from fashion, music, drugs, sexuality and a collective political practice. Especially, since the punk movement and the 'pop leftists', which use and disseminate the concept of Cultural Studies, the concept of subversion has also been established in this discourse in the 1980s.

In the *poststructural discourse of subversion*, subversion can be understood as deconstruction. This is the most recent discourse, growing out of the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the intellectual history of the occident and its categories, theoretical approaches like Gender Studies, Queer Studies or Postcolonial Studies describe knowledge, culture and identity as formations which are constructed by hegemonic discourses. These discourses can only be described as performative and hybrid entities. Stereotypes, binary matrixes and identity models can be deconstructed through strategies as travesty and parody.

2.2. Literature and the Four Discourses of Subversion [08:45]

2.3. Literature and Subversion. Towards a Model of Literary and Cultural Analysis [14:40]

3. Aporias and Studies of Subversion. Conclusion and Outlook [16:52-19:51]

Contact and information

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- ⇒ **Book information**: Thomas Ernst: *Literatur und Subversion. Politisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart*. Bielefeld: transcript 2013. See also: www.thomasernst.net/lus; the book will be accessible in an OA-version from January 2015 on.