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[Introduction to] Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects

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Introduction

Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica

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John Steinbeck once said, perhaps when feeling like Hemingway, that critics are the eunuchs of literature, grouped around the bed in envious awe, while a complete man and his partner demonstrate the art of loving. Neither Steinbeck nor Hemingway is as much esteemed now as he has been, neither taken as an exemplar of intellectual precision, nor even as a writer of the first rank in much of his oeuvre. And today when "literature" here and in Europe is viewed as a setting for invention or artistry, the names that surface are Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, perhaps Susan Sontag or George Steiner, each of whom gladly plays the eunuch (*pace* Sontag), but with such grace and energy that literature itself seems left behind. The ascendancy of critique, of observation—in literature, philosophy, and social science—and the supplanting of traditional work in the bed of creativity, have become an ordinary fact of life, not only in France (where Sartre's Flaubert outshines Flaubert), but in the Anglo-American sphere as well. Notable critics, like Wayne Booth, Denis Donoghue, Gerald Graff, Geoffrey Hartmann, Frank Lentricchia, and W. J. T. Mitchell, satisfy a felt need by gently guiding former readers of literature through today's surrogate, academic criticism.[1] E. M. Forster is remembered as a *theorist* of the novel, Balzac's short stories as fitting subjects for Barthes's scalpel. The world is upside down, again, and our book does nothing to right it.

One need no longer apologize, then, for moving with so many in the *Geisteswissenschaften* toward overt concern for interpretive, hermeneutic theory, leaving temporarily aside what before was confidently called "substantive" work. For example, essays included here treat Foucault and Barthes as themselves substantial, as primary intellectual forces. That neither has created a system of philosophy or

work of literature as usually defined matters little, for what they have achieved currently means more. Along with Emilio Betti, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Derrida, and others, they have long labored in hope of *reducing* confusion, of rationalizing somewhat the irrational, not enlarging it—as great artists inevitably must. Whether respecifying the nature and history of the social sciences, or, with Barthes, penetrating mass culture through semiotics, the goal has consistently been to illuminate the hermeneutic act, by exemplifying it, at its most universal.

It may seem specious to view Derrida (who hangs over this volume unacknowledged, the absent but necessary guest) as dedicated to systematically reducing confusion or perplexity among readers. The same might be said of Foucault. Yet aside from the autochthonous tangles of their metatheories, their linguistic reconstructions, the desire remains to clear a new opening, free of classical debilities, in the *ultimate* interest of improved knowing; a twist upon Heidegger's gambit. This is particularly, even doctrinally, true of Betti and, despite his own hesitations regarding Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's "Romantic" hermeneutics, also of Gadamer. Ricoeur, as Gadamer notes in his essay here, seeks a middle ground between textual clarification and ontological query. Even Jacques Lacan's unique intervention within psychoanalytic theory, as captious as it appears to some, can be seen as an addition to a new hermeneutical literature, bridging the cultural sciences with ambitions suppressed since the nineteenth century. All are remorseless theoretical voyagers, and as such alienate and antagonize readers more accustomed to "readable," Arnoldian criticism.

The suspicion persists, even among the sophisticated, that "substance" is often played with strictly for show; that while Eliot actually illuminated Dante for readers lacking medieval Italian, de Man uses the *Iliad* to test his prowess, to prove rather than to clarify.[2] The critic as artist is heavily upon us, which, more to the point here, also means that hermeneutics becomes artful, if not art itself. Even though Hartmann argues that "literary criticism is neither more nor less important today than it has been since the Renaissance," he can shortly add, without irony, "there are, we sometimes feel, too many sources, and they are not as pure and distinct as they seemed to be."[3] Eliot refused to the end to grant critical genius equal ranking with literary creation, and turned the tables by insisting that the only indispensable critical activity took place as the artist selectively mixed his own im-

pulses with those of the past. Yet who would ask today if de Man or Derrida write with any less calculating virtuosity or density than Samuel Beckett, John Hawkes, or Thomas Pynchon?

The appeal is different, of course. But how different? Is there not a response to *Gravity's Rainbow* and, say, to de Man's *Blindness and Insight* or Barthe's *S/Z* that, taken together, can be contrasted with the joint effect of Wolfe's *Of Time and the River* and Eliot's *Sacred Wood*? We draw no substantive parallels, but do see in these older works (even Eliot's) an almost lyrical form of exposition striving to embrace and sustain the reader. The newer stream has no such aims. Beginning with Hawkes's earliest novellas thirty-five years ago, serious fiction sets out to capture an audience by baffling it. And given the rationalization of culture, no one could have been much surprised when literary critics dropped the pose of avuncular, all-knowing helpmate, and took on the robes of mystagogue or poet-pretender. If Bloom's solo through new terrain, or old ground renewed, is the extreme case for criticism as baffling, autogenic act, he is not that far afield from many others. He has as much in common as a critic and intellectual with, say, R. P. Blackmur, as has Walter Abish (*Alphabetical Africa*) with E. M. Forster. Is it too early to know who, if anyone, will profit from this efflorescence of critical innovation—the artist, the critic, the reader in search of aid, or the publisher, riding waves of academic euphoria? And the waves roll in more quickly all the time. Before structuralism was assimilated in this country, poststructuralism had become the byword. Given the heated search for the new, will "posthermeneutics" soon be with us, before an even rudimentary grip on the elements of the approach have been managed? Perhaps this volume, as varied as its essays are, can help brake premature dismissal of a field introduced by Aristotle and, today, inescapable in social theory, epistemology, axiology, philosophy of history, aesthetics, and literary criticism. Hermes has arrived here now, so we must let him speak.

Philosophical hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is not as rigorous a philosophical method as Husserlian phenomenology or linguistic analysis are thought to be. It is more a philosophical movement or tendency—though not a school—not unlike existentialism, in that it designates a set of general concerns rather than a body of doctrine. Though absorbed with the

theory and practice of interpretation, it offers no determinate criteria for the achievement or recognition of apodictic understanding. Following Gadamer (who revived philosophical hermeneutics in Europe, then America), we view hermeneutics as a type of philosophical activity or praxis, the effort to understand what is distant in time and culture (like Plato's *Dialogues*), or obscured by ideology or false consciousness (like the sexual or economic roots of human behavior). The broad hermeneutical aim is to make such understanding meaningful for life and thought.

Affinities exist between hermeneutics and Dewey's pragmatism, as well as with Wittgenstein's novel remaking of language. Richard Rorty suggests that we think of hermeneutics as edification rather than construction:

> The attempt to edify (ourselves or others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline which seems to pursue incommensurable aims in an incommensurable vocabulary. But it may instead consist in the "poetic" activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new disciplines, followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics: the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions.[4]

From another tradition Karl-Otto Apel sees pragmatism, Marxism, and existentialism as "the three philosophies that really function" since each has "taken up as a topic of thought the great problem of humanity thrust into an unfinished world, the mediation of theory and praxis with regard to an uncertain future."[5] Hermeneutics might seem less vital than these philosophies because of its interest in the past. Yet this tendency is modified by efforts to understand the past in light of the present's exigencies, with an eye toward emerging values. Heidegger's deep hermeneutic of early Greek philosophy illustrates such excavation of the past for the sake of an orientation to the unknown. He believed that the ancients saw the world as untransparent to knowing, since what makes it up is the knowable *and* the absent or concealed. Probing the inescapable tension between the two is what gives the Greek intellect its permanence. Heidegger applies this insight toward correcting the hubris of Western thought, forever seeking total knowledge and control.

Some of the liveliest issues currently before philosophical hermeneutics are examined in these essays. They form a rough sequence,

including an argument for the necessity of a hermeneutic approach (Betti), reflections on the unity of the hermeneutic enterprise (Gadamer), questions about the limits of hermeneutics (Dreyfus and Palmer), and an inquiry into its phenomenological roots and affiliations (Mohanty). Emilio Betti's *Teoria Generale della Interpretazione* (2 volumes) is a monument in the field, though its author is known to English readers mainly through reports of his differences with Gadamer. Betti insists that interpretation must seek objective validity. He views Gadamer's as a dangerously relativistic approach since, for him, present and practical concerns ("application") must always govern hermeneutic work. Gadamer's account of interpretation, in contrast, is descriptive, not prescriptive; he is trying "to envisage in a fundamentally universal way what *always* happens."[6]

In this newly translated selection from the beginning of Betti's treatise, a more fundamental level of hermeneutics is disclosed, upon which he and Gadamer might concur. Betti criticizes naturalistic and behavioristic accounts of signs and signification in grounding a hermeneutic "understanding" which is more than "explanation." Among Continental hermeneutic theorists, Betti's use of such Anglo-American ideas is unusual. Unburdened by the immanent critique lodged against such ideas by Wittgenstein and others, Betti proceeds in connecting his traditionalist, almost Diltheyan approach to interpretation with streams of thought for which Gadamer found no use. Susan Noake's forthcoming translation of Betti's complete *Teoria* should stimulate interest in a thinker who masterfully joins his own tradition with that more familiar to Anglo-American philosophers.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion" clarifies the history and current state of interpretive theory. Unlike Paul Ricoeur, he does not recognize two antipodal tendencies in interpretation: a "hermeneutics of respect," preserving the richness and integrity of its subject, and a "hermeneutics of suspicion" that demystifies cultural phenomena distorted by ideologies of class, sexual repressions, or the will to power. Gadamer argues that Ricoeur's hermeneutical technique can well be joined with Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian thought. In *Truth and Method* he identifies the interpreter's goal as achieving a fusion of horizons with the examined text, a fusion that is possible despite anomalies of emphasis or structure. Gadamer proceeds with this project of reconciliation, in contrast to his mentor, Heidegger, by minimizing the uncanny (*unheimlich*) dimension of interpretive experience. Heideg-

ger sees human beings as "always already" hermeneutical, with individual existence and one's relation to the past fissured by uncanny alterations between authentic understanding of *Dasein* and the impersonal standpoint of "they say" (*das Man*); or between the conventional reading of a text and the way it may challenge one's whole life. Gadamer contains this irruption of the uncanny through the security of tradition and a shared moral concern, watched over by an Aristotelian practical wisdom.

Hubert Dreyfus explores a darker Heideggerian development in "Beyond Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Late Heidegger and Recent Foucault." He distinguishes two levels of hermeneutics in *Being and Time*. The first articulates the essential structures (care, equipment, and so on) of everydayness in human existence, while the second tears away the disguises we use to avoid the sensation of being ungrounded, uncanny, and radically finite. This second hermeneutic is directed especially toward guilt, death, and the chance for resolute or authentic existence. Dreyfus believes Heidegger abandoned his earlier view that all human beings understand preontologically that we are shaped by our social practices, but are otherwise ungrounded. An existential hermeneutic would therefore be of no value for those who lacked this preontological understanding of existence, which in *Being and Time* is attributed to *Dasein*. According to Dreyfus, Heidegger later saw the modern world as dominated by technological reality and its social practices. Since this technological consciousness is determinant, modern life cannot be saved by a hermeneutic like Gadamer's. Dreyfus asks: "How can there be a dialogue between the living and the dead? How could a fusion of horizons be possible when the only horizon that works now and determines truth for us is the technological horizon?" He sees Foucault's work as complementing Heidegger's by distinguishing between the overall structure of social discourse and the incomplete views held by those caught up in it, as in its social practices.[7]

Dreyfus forces us to re-examine Gadamer's departure from Ricoeur, in seeking continuity throughout hermeneutic practice, and in assimilating Heidegger to an ancient rhetorical tradition. Dreyfus confronts once again the uncanny, unsettling features of existence as framed by Heidegger. Yet Dreyfus's approach, perhaps owing to its schematic clarity, leads to other questions. As Richard Palmer suggests, interpretation as practiced by the older Heidegger and by Foucault is not altogether different from the hermeneutics of *Being and*

Time, or from that which Gadamer found in the rhetorical and humanistic tradition. Something may also have been omitted from Dreyfus's social interpretation of both early and late Heidegger. Surely the assimilation of Heidegger with Foucault seems feasible, since the latter has proposed a broad analysis of our social discourses and practices regarding medicine, insanity, punishment, and sexuality. Yet Heidegger speaks as if technological domination is part of Being itself, a long, fateful development in which man is not the only agent. His prophetic readings of Hölderlin and Trakl, and the posthumously published interview in which he declares that "only a god can save us," focus on Being, rather than man, as the likely agent of change. Maybe Dreyfus is taking Gadamer's approach by interpreting Heidegger vis-à-vis the pressing concerns of those in advanced industrial society, who live under technological domination and other accoutrements of one-dimensionality. Thus one enters into dialogue with a thinker or text in hope of illumination, but only after the interpreter articulates the limits of his own approach with respect to what is interpreted.

J. N. Mohanty, at some remove from Dreyfus, asks whether in philosophical hermeneutics there is anything absent from classical phenomenology. Mohanty's "Transcendental Philosophy and the Hermeneutic Critique of Consciousness" assays the complex relation between Husserl and Heidegger, which was also a task for Gadamer. Mohanty clarifies that relation by proposing Heidegger's critique of Husserl as analogous to Hegel's of Kant. He refuses to construe continental philosophy as a series of "overcomings," Hegel over Kant, Nietzsche over Schopenhauer, and so on. Instead he shows that the unsettled issues between Kant and Hegel adumbrate those between Husserl and Heidegger regarding hermeneutics, such that "phenomenology and hermeneutics stand in a peculiar dialectical relationship to each other." From this perspective Mohanty analyzes three questions about that relationship: the constitution of temporality, the problematic project of total objectification, and what Gadamer has called the "relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment."

The last of these issues has prompted the most comment within contemporary hermeneutics. Betti rejects such a tension since it endangers a hermeneutics capable of yielding "valid" meanings. Gadamer accepts the tension, yet finds relief from its uncanniness in certain continuities and the fruits of practical wisdom, while Dreyfus

explores its tragic implications. As a phenomenologist, Mohanty asks how the principle can be legitimated. He rejects that hermeneutic circle (and Heidegger's associated obsession with *aletheia* in the pre-Socratics) that would ground the principle by hermeneutic reference to early Greek thought, revolving around the idea of truth as "undisclosedness." For Mohanty phenomenology is an open, self-revising project, like hermeneutics, and each can find stimulus and correction in the other. Whatever happens to be momentarily invisible to the phenomenologist (such as "operative" concepts or practices) can later become a fitting subject of hermeneutical reflection, which might in turn prepare the way for further phenomenological analysis. Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences,* partly a response to Heidegger on the question of the *Lebenswelt,* would be especially susceptible to such an approach. Mohanty thus reminds us that the major philosophical movements of this century, including linguistic analysis, have described themselves as forms of philosophical activity and practice, not as closed systems. Husserl claimed that phenomenology was a "strict science," not because it led to unimpeachable results, but because its methods, like those of the natural sciences, allowed for constant revision and reflection. Thus he saw himself as a "perpetual beginner."

Mohanty's qualified defense of phenomenological method may remind us that Gadamer used the title *Truth and Method* ironically, to contrast hermeneutical openness to the truth with the arbitrary limitations of all precise methods. As T. W. Adorno argues in his critique of Husserl, methodical thinking is always a variant of a metaphysics of presence (or what Anglo-American philosophers might call a "foundationalism"): "method, the regulated 'way,' is always the lawlike consequence of a successor to something earlier. Methodical thinking also demands a first, so that the way does not break off and end up being arbitrary. For it was devised against that. The procedure was so planned from the beginning that nothing could disturb it."[8] Is the self-enclosured impermeability of rigorous method compatible with a hermeneutics inclusive of historically and culturally divergent sources? Other doubts about Mohanty's optimism surface, perhaps analogous to those Dreyfus expresses about Gadamer's "fusion of horizons."

Phenomenological reflection seeks absolute forms of experience. Hermeneutics evaluates "texts," either actual writings or the sort embedded in social practices—what Foucault calls "discourses." The

true heir to Heidegger's concern with the uncanny may be Jacques Derrida. His departure from classical phenomenology *and* hermeneutics pointedly occurs in his two books on Husserl, *Speech and Phenomena* and *The Origin of Geometry*, where he identifies the gap between pure thought and text in Husserl's work as emblematic of a general, untameable uncanniness. For Derrida, Husserl's need to embrace writing, textuality, and the historicity they make up reveals a basic ambiguity in his thought. A fruitful dialectic between phenomenology and hermeneutics—oriented toward the fusion of horizons—may be jeopardized by a fundamental difference beyond reconciliation.

Paul de Man's "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" offers a perspective on just such a radical form of interpretation. Well known as a senior member of the Yale or deconstructive school of literary criticism, de Man's program has differed from many of his American colleagues who have been primarily interested in applying deconstruction to literary works. De Man himself has stressed the philosophical importance of deconstruction. Moving from writers whose work has an obvious literary component (like Nietzsche and Rousseau) to others whose writings appear more explicitly philosophical (like Hegel and Kant), de Man aims to show that even classic texts made up of explicit philosophical logic are based upon a linguistic or tropological structure. To suggest that this is so in the case of Kant and the sublime, as he does in his essay here, is rich in implications. First, it casts doubts on the success of the champion of "normal" philosophy in having used and developed a strictly autonomous form of philosophical discourse. De Man's claim is that we can make sense of significant transitions in Kant's work only by appealing to an implicit tropological scheme. Second, by focusing attention on the topic of the sublime, de Man reminds us that the stress that he and others of his school have placed on discontinuity and difference is not a completely novel development in aesthetics and criticism. As the antithesis of the harmonious experience of beauty, the Kantian sublime, like deconstructive difference, articulates a model for understanding art quite distinct from the traditional (Aristotelian to New Critical) paradigm of organic unity.

De Man's project of deconstructing the philosophical text is an ambitious one bound to be controversial. Kant scholars may want to raise questions about the details of his reading; for example, one might try to undercut de Man's questioning of the transition from the

mathematical to the dynamical sublime by claiming that the latter represents Kant's most fundamental concern, the former being added as an afterthought. Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the larger issue that de Man raises—the question of whether philosophy's claim to an autonomous rationality and coherence can be supported even on the immediate level on which its basic documents are produced and read. This question, raised in modern times by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, shows signs of becoming a central issue in the current form of philosophy's traditional need to reflect upon its own practices and products. These signs are also evident in contemporary concerns with literature.

Literature and hermeneutics

Until recently, literary criticism in the English-speaking world honored the purity of its object while resisting the demands of theory, especially if it were foreign. New Criticism, for a time the paradigmatic form among Anglo-American academics, ritually warned its followers to attend "the poem itself," to turn to it repeatedly for nourishment and inspiration. It distrusted peripheral sources, holding the integrity and autonomy of the work itself as paramount. Though overtly denying a philosophical grounding, its critical practice followed several theoretical fashions prevalent in the early part of the century; treating the object of inquiry as pristine, for instance, is hoary empiricist dogma. European theorists also adopted this methodological atomism, reinforcing an aversion to easy classifications (as in Benedetto Croce's denial of the reality of genres). Or, like Kant, they held absolute the irreducibility of the aesthetic to the conceptual. Concern with the isolated text gave the critic a trim field of inquiry, handily lending itself to the search for metaphor, image, or irony.

Of course, the critical world was hardly monolithic. For instance, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and Ernst Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* located literature within history, which gave these books their "European" flavor. Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* argued powerfully for applying as generic concepts romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire. Moreover, Frye saw the text under analysis as related to others, while also expressing a specifiable tie with the social world. Nevertheless, it was still possible to do "normal" criticism—like Kuhn's "normal science"—with barely a glance at historical or systematic forms of literary awareness.

By the 1970s all was changed. Incursions of foreign enthusiasms—hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, and others—seriously challenged the critical hegemony of the "pure" text. Today this heterodoxy itself forms the traditional, having been assimilated to older patterns of criticism. The need for synthesis may have arrived. Geoffrey Hartmann tried demonstrating how Arnold, Pater, and Eliot might join Nietzsche, Lévi-Strauss, and Derrida in a new republic of letters. Like that earlier republic, the new one hopes to educate broadly, combining the Anglo-American penchant for teachable technique with the European devotion to *Bildung*, or formative culture. Such catholicity may fail, but excitement runs high when responsible writers dare to sidestep the weakening excesses of either Anglo-American empiricism or European esotericism.

The essays here put to use some of the strongest voices now heard in the new republic of letters. They include a call to re-evaluate the usefulness of biblical hermeneutics (Bruns), a debate on breaking down the barrier between literature and criticism (O'Neill and Spivak), and a postmodern meditation on the banality of some contemporary revivals of rhetoric (Stonum).

Bruns is closest to hermeneutics in Gadamer's sense. The thinkers of his concern interpreted the Bible, viewing accomplished interpretation as essential to understanding Scripture. Since the Bible has prompted the largest single hermeneutic enterprise, the history of that venture may aid analysts of other texts. We should note that Philo, Origen, and Augustine did not pursue a *method* of analysis (the goal of New Criticism *and* structuralism), but rather practiced textual meditation. As Bruns says, they cared less about a text's meaning than its teaching. They submitted to the authority of a text on the basis of their faith. Yet faith (like Heidegger's "fore-understanding") is not irreducible; it, too, enters the hermeneutic circle, seeking deeper understanding from the text. Bruns believes contemporary critics could well pursue truth rather than method. Gadamer would seem to agree, given the irony of the title *Truth and Method*, his repudiation of the facile certainty that comes from applying a strict method to every text. Proponents of a nontheoretical (even antitheoretical) *Geisteswissenschaften*, such as Roger Shattuck, are dismayed by the worship of analytical technique. They should be pleased with Bruns's reminder about textual meditation, since it counteracts the blind scientism that has accompanied the Americanization of semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and so on. American literary critics have too often ridden

the new wave of European thought in vain hopes of replacing stale methods.

But the concepts of "method" and "methodology" can be treacherous. Methodology as unvarying procedure may wrap the critic protectively, shielding him from serious challenges the text might make to his established views. The etymology of "method," on the other hand, points to a way or path to which a logos (or logos barbarized, as "science") has not been attached. A responsible critic will follow a selected path even if hacked out of the woods uncertainly. As Heidegger noted, many paths through the forest may cross, or strangely disappear into the brush, at that point when they yield illumination. The reactionary response to these European ideas—the belief that no help can come from "dialogue" with the text—undercuts the most vital current thinking. Threatened traditionalists will refuse to acknowledge the major concerns and questions of the day; those attracted by the prospect of universal methodology will be suspicious of alleged eclecticism. If, as Bruns suggests, our engagement with texts is a matter of faith seeking understanding, methodologists are ignorant of faith as such, while traditionalists refuse to employ understanding in more complete form.

John O'Neill's "Homotextuality: Barthes on Barthes, Fragments (RB), with a Footnote" stands out in form from the other essays. O'Neill's is a tribute to Barthes, an attempt to re-create the style of the very personal *Roland Barthes* by Barthes himself. After experimenting with various critical approaches to literature, Barthes focused on the plurality and undecidability of the text (notably in *S/Z*), and described reading as analogous to bodily and sexual experience (in *The Pleasure of the Text*). These two themes were combined and personalized in *Roland Barthes*, a work of aphorisms and musings, exploring the tension between a conventional unitary personality (the standard formula for autobiography) and the pluralizing activities of reading and writing which lead to constant shifts in perspective and emphasis.

O'Neill explores the interconnections of desire and language, of public writing and private life, by referring to *RB*. Barthes's writing and O'Neill's homage to it (both in his "Fragments" and "Footnote") are realizations of Marx's materialism and Freud's questioning of the autonomous, idealized Western subject. Beyond the antinomies of production and consumption, of rational and irrational, Barthes finds the play of writing and of the body. Play, as Gadamer has also observed,

cannot be localized in an isolated subject; we say that we are "in play," not that play is in us. O'Neill distances himself in play, from the lofty seriousness of most hermeneutic work. Breaking down the distinction between the readerly and writerly text (which Barthes discusses in *S/Z*) is taken as a creative, liberating transgression of restrictive dualisms and outmoded categories. Fragmentation, such as O'Neill's, following Barthes's, refuses to concoct a false unity, assimilable to conventional perspectives. Writing becomes a series of pleasures, an alternation of *plaisir* (pleasure) and *jouissance* (bliss), as the eroticized body experiences that which lies outside the numbing economics of everyday life.

So Barthes and O'Neill deconstruct traditional, rigid modes of reading and writing. This may be the comic branch of deconstruction, cousin to Hegel's "Bacchanalian revel where not a member is sober" and Nietzsche's joy in the Dionysian. It proposes a liberated praxis, nearly within our reach if only the old ways can be set aside. And doesn't the history of literary criticism *and* of social mores (especially those regarding bodily pleasure) document an accelerating tendency to overthrow all rigid codifications? To this vision Gayatri Spivak replies rather soberly. She is suspicious of a leap into a textual and sexual utopia which may reproduce, in new forms, some of the same problems that inspired the escape. Spivak's critique is reminiscent of Marx and Engels's response to utopian socialism. They saw it as a premature attempt to realize a goal requiring work, dedication, and a grappling with resistant materials (what Hegel called "the labor of the negative"). Moreover, such prematurity runs the danger of all idealism, even when carried out in the name of the bodily and the material, i.e., to rely upon a privileged category that can blind us to the true heterogeneity of the world and the conflicts that make it up. Her deconstruction does not plot an escape from all oppositions, but offers "a morphology for disclosing complicities in place of oppositions." Rather than privileging the body over the mind, for example, such a practice will aim at showing what is false and misleading in the opposition of the two, unmasking their unsettling dialectic.

In this respect, as in others, deconstruction owes something to Nietzsche's "genealogy": the patient tracing of manifold links and incestuous connections, in place of the idealistic search for origins, or revolutionary delusions that the totally new is possible. Thus Spivak draws attention to problems of power, domination, and institutional forces vis-à-vis Barthesian writing, leading to a reading of his texts

quite different from O'Neill's, and to a critique of the images of male and female implicit in the latter's essay. She believes O'Neill has produced a "homogenized" version of Barthes's text (consider the title, "Homotextualities"), eliminating the tension, struggle, and sense of institutional realities that she finds there. Thus, the darker version of deconstruction compels one to locate Barthes's seductive texts within the larger social and sexual economies of the era, and in so doing to resist his charms.

Both tragic and comic deconstruction partake of Heidegger's insight, that inquiry into texts is at once the analyst's self-inquiry. This is also the theme of Gary Stonum's "Surviving Figures" which analyzes the romantic tenet that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." If literal meaning is common and conventional, the romantic poet and his critical followers (Stonum names Ricoeur, de Man, and Bloom) contradict convention, seeing figurative language as a vital antidote to the banal. (This has much in common with O'Neill's portrayal of mind and body, and the continuous versus the erotically fragmented text.) A trope, or figurative expression, is etymologically a turning away or deviation from the usual, and as such offers us the chance to avoid or transform the mundane. But Stonum wonders if critics who so value linguistic deviation might not be caught by a dialectic destructive of just what they esteem. Tropes are classified, systematized, and explained. What was vibrant is thematized and analyzed; as a romantic poet wrote, "we murder to dissect." Tropology, as a universal science of figurative discourse, will transform the glorious anxiety of poetry into the merely calculable. To counter this, Stonum holds that figurative language is by its nature underdetermined by language and context. He illustrates this with an alternative to de Man's reading of a richly figurative passage from Proust.

Accepting Stonum's argument, one wonders what the alternative might be to modern tropology. Perhaps a negative theology of the figurative could be devised, limited to observing that any given trope is always "not this and not that." Yet here a historical, hermeneutic treatment of critical forms and styles is surely needed. How else to evaluate the long supremacy of rhetoric, its rapid demise after romanticism, then its new life as tropology? Here are hints of Bruns's opposition between a meditative approach to texts and the wish to master them. But these are less timeless modes of literary perception as forms of human activity, arising within particular social and intellectual contexts. This rage for order that Stonum detects in modern tropology is

part of Heidegger's world of *Gestell*, that is, the form of life that regularizes, calculates, and controls all being. If so, the hope of reviving poetic language or practicing a negative theology of the figurative may be sadly quixotic. We must be mindful of this, not because Heidegger's dissection of social life (or the present manifestation of Being) is beyond question, but because hermeneutics's grander task finds itself there—the attempt to understand ourselves through dialogue with history. As the contributors to this volume variously point out, literary interpretation will be informed by history, or merely become a repeated technique, indifferently applied.

Social science and hermeneutics

Anthony Giddens writes: "Today . . . real and profound convergences of interest and problems are occurring across broad spectra of intellectual life. Social theory is at the very center of these convergences, having both to contribute to and to learn from them." If social theory is taken to mean the type advanced by Giddens—and many today would argue that his style of theorizing is the most propitious—then he is probably correct. For the last dozen years, in nearly as many books, Giddens has charted a new course in his field. He has served as the major single conduit of relevant ideas between the Continent and England, and thus to the United States. Before other social theorists knew much about Habermas, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Gadamer, Paci, Lacan, and now Derrida and Kristeva (to name but the most famous), Giddens had already devised ways to include them in social theory, in addition to the unprecedented incorporation of Heidegger. Though the comparison may not withstand close scrutiny, since the two diverge in certain key enthusiasms (e.g., for Freud), one is apt to think of Giddens as England's answer to Habermas. Just now, for instance, both are engaged in dissimilar critiques of historical materialism.

The essay in this volume speaks more compactly to the nature of a "hermeneutically informed social theory" than much of Giddens's recent work, though he began explicitly using contemporary hermeneutics in the mid-1970s. He followed intently the Habermas-Gadamer debate of the late 1960s, concluding that Gadamer probably surfaced in better shape but with ideas too "historicized" to benefit social theory as much as they have. In fact, Giddens evaluated Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Betti as a preliminary to sidestepping them, finally re-

turning for his interpretive canons to Peter Winch's Wittgenstein, in very modified form. Giddens is not as interested in the problem of "prejudice" as was Habermas when he read *Truth and Method*, and neither did he fully accept Ricoeur's idea that social action could be interpreted as a text. Rather he harked back to Winch's intervention, that language and the social rules it facilitates must be taken seriously, that social actors are not dopes, but repositories of complex linguistic and interactional knowledge. This is the root of Giddens's interest in hermeneutics, and as such is quite apart from Gadamer's or even Habermas's. What is special, though, about Giddens's approach to theories of interpretation is his skillful adaptation of various fragments to his own purpose. For instance, from Ricoeur he took the interesting (and, as Dallmayr suggests, potentially problematic) notion of "virtual" reality; from Heidegger came the importance of "presencing" and incorporating time-space explicitly in social theory in a way not recently done; and from Derrida, a virtuoso hermeneuticist in his own right, he thematized the Husserlian fascination with the Other, with *differance* as a creative force in understanding.

"Hermeneutics and Social Theory" is a handy summary of Giddens's theory of structuration, something he assembled over a decade. In marching toward his own goal, he has tried to overcome many hindrances: the "orthodox consensus"; Winch's special hermeneutic of social life; Dilthey's alleged shortcomings, as well as Gadamer's, in defining hermeneutics in social thought; needless rigidities in Lévi-Strauss, Schutz, Weber, and many others. He quite consciously practices *Aufhebung*, which ties him to Habermas in that their bibliographies are equally vast. But Giddens refuses to use idealized models of life, and presents social existence in unvarnished terms, as the "play of differences" among contending forces, full of their own subjectivity and unresponsive to universal norms. He sees social actors as individuals, as capable and sophisticated. In fact in his effort to "recover the subject," even after its de-centering, he theoretically downgrades, de-hypostatizes social structure and social institutions radically. Structure becomes "rules and resources instantiated in social systems, but having only a 'virtual existence.'" That is, they exist only in the doing, just as "language" exists (for Ricoeur) only virtually, while speech carries on in fact, aware of its dependence upon rules, but always threatening their hegemony as it moves its own way in suiting ephemeral needs of speakers. Although fitting unintended consequences of action into his theory—which includes the uncon-

scious, though not psychoanalytically taken—he rejects "function" and "systemic needs" completely. One might ask if he protests too much in distancing himself from earlier structural-functionalist thinkers, to whom, it is clear, he owes something.

But Giddens's real contiguity with others in this volume comes in the form of his "double hermeneutic." The first part of hermeneutic labors, in the social theory he favors, involves interpreting social action as the result of forces, needs, intentions, and cultural processes, in a Weberian sense. The subtler half comes in realizing that the language one uses in categorizing observable action is itself a human product, and as such full of its own wishes for what one might call intellectual supremacy. Giddens cannot accept either Winch's or Schutz's comments on this problem, but neither does he offer a definitive solution to the question of "adequacy" between theory and action, posed by Weber and others. Happily, though, he is aware that social theory, as part of a hermeneutic dialogue between social action and theories used to construe it, can contribute either to "forms of exploitative domination," or in "promoting emancipation."

In Fred Dallmayr we find an ideal respondent to Giddens's ideas. Dallmayr's *Twilight of Subjectivity: Contributions to a Post-Individualist Theory of Politics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981) carefully dissects many of the writers who also interest Giddens. What makes Dallmayr's questioning of Giddens so stimulating is his very different goal: first, to supply political science, not sociology, with a general theory, and second, to discover if in the latest ideas from Europe lie hope for an emancipatory understanding and restructuring of the polity. Dallmayr seems fully aware of Giddens's general purpose, "incorporating the lessons of ontology and post-structuralism *without* abandoning concern with the 'knowledgeability' and accountability of actors; . . . of moving beyond subjectivist metaphysics *without* relinquishing some of its insights, and especially *without* lapsing into objectivism and determinism." These thorny traditional antinomies have not put Giddens off the scent of a theory capable of resolving them, and Dallmayr seems impressed overall with his moves between subjective Charybdis, objective Scylla, and the waystations in between.

Yet problems with this sort of program must arise. For Dallmayr, Giddens's "novel correlation of agency and structure"— the fruit of his theory of structuration and its double hermeneutic—seems "somewhat vacillating and ambivalent; . . . his approach seems reluctant

at points to draw the full implications from the adopted perspective." The adoption Dallmayr refers to is from Derrida's usage of "*differance*," "the structuring of structure," and seeing structure as "an absent set of differences," hence, the "virtual." As Dallmayr notes, Derrida was working not only ontic terrain in his Husserlian derivation, but ontological as well, which, almost by definition as a social theorist, Giddens is hardpressed to follow. He is virtually forced to evade the " 'transcendental' dimension" so much a part of Derrida's task. The upshot is that "virtuality" of structure as Giddens writes of it bears more substantial affinity with the antique manifest-latent dichotomy than with poststructuralist "advances." Dallmayr is also worried by Giddens's rather unreconstructed reliance upon Wittgenstein's theory of rules, particularly regarding "recursive social practices." It would seem that a proper hermeneutic of Giddens's work would require lexical analysis of both "virtual order" and "recursiveness," since they act as axes around which so much of his innovation turns. Dallmayr also finds uncertainty in Giddens's understanding of agency, where "the peculiar nexus of action and nonaction within agency itself" is left untreated, with the result that the theory of structuration cannot deal with such Heideggerian insertions as "suffering" and "caring." Finally, Dallmayr points to Giddens's proposition that social science is afflicted with data that answer back, with "interpretation of preinterpretation" as its major duty—as well as its opportunity. The problem here originates in Giddens's simultaneous acceptance of something like a "universal hermeneutics," while taking serious exception to the correlative claim that in hermeneutics lay solutions for social science at large. Dallmayr finds Giddens's tilting toward *verstehen* over *erklaeren* a weak response to this general issue, though, as before, he recognizes his courage in wrestling with this and related difficulties, while trying to save "the subject" in a theoretically defensible way.

W. H. Dray has been known for many years as an expert interpreter of historiography. In his essay in this book he analyzes four current modes of understanding the English Civil War, the Whig, Marxist, "social interpretation," and revisionist. Dray's essay is in some ways a relief from much of what precedes it in the book, since the language is clear, in English, and pertains to a historical episode famous enough to guarantee immediate reader sympathy. In all these, his work differs from many contemporary hermeneutic exercises, which rely upon neologisms, foreign terms of gnostic importance

(*wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein, aletheia, differance, Sein, parole, ad nauseum*), and obscure referents, or common ones rendered mysterious. Dray is clearly of another camp, one that recalls a less self-conscious, less worried approach to interpreting events, social or textual. His is the clearest instance in the book of Anglo-American sensibility, its willingness to deal directly with the observable, or to hypothesize about the unobservable straightforwardly. There is no longing for invisible structure à la Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, or Althusser, nor for probing the motivations of historical actors at subterranean depth. Facts are taken either as definable as such or as prefactual, and therefore unworthy of inclusion in serious causal models. It is on this level, more or less, that Dray takes to task all four interpretive models for the Civil War. But he is especially rigorous in showing analytical sloppiness in two—the social interpretation school, exemplified by Lawrence Stone, and the Marxist.

By choosing to assay a series of historical events that add up to a set piece, Dray can deal directly with the problem of causes, their priority and relative weight, without suffering through endless conceptual or terminological preliminaries. Some, sensitive to current hermeneutic, semiotic, or poststructural debates, might argue that this conceals more than it reveals. But Dray's robust argument, particularly with Stone's account of the Civil War, seems well suited for this type of interchange, where what is knowable (that Charles lost his head) and what is unknowable (what Charles thought a half-hour before) take on meanings different from those in the "texts" more typically treated by hermeneuticists. Dray's game is to precisely define an event (how it is categorized by a given interpreter and whether the categorization fits, logically and historically, with others in the interpreter's toolkit) and then to check the results against those of competing interpretive schemes. By doing this he can nip at the heels of writers in all four camps, but most tellingly with Stone's "preconditions," "precipitants," and "triggers" of historical action, and with the Marxist struggle to define where and when bourgeois or proletarian elements figured in the Civil War.

Dray's general complaint repeats what historians have said to generalizers (theorists and social scientists, philosophers of history, and so on) for two centuries: how can one decide when a historical event begins, how it is constituted, what it accomplished, what actually transpired—and then, most critically, compare this heuristic to others, perhaps separated by centuries in time, sea changes in thought?

He chides Stone for admitting that "historians can only weight causes 'intuitively,' at any rate 'in the last resort,' " calling this an "embarrassment." But isn't this the kind of embarrassment "good" historians have always seemed to pull off when "poor" ones did not? The notion that "intuiting" differences is degenerate intellectual labor would only arise—as Heidegger and others explained—in an era in which intelligence is equated with demonstrable precision, something a historian can seldom deliver. Dray pursues other important theoretical issues, perhaps in spite of his credentials as a historian, such as the usefulness of "a theory of principled judgment with regard to the relative importance of causes"; the need to consider "enabling conditions" beyond the control of historical agents; the place of chance and coincidence in causal models; and—perhaps most interesting given Dilthey's place in hermeneutic history—the call to "read history forwards": "giving an account of it from the standpoints of the original agents." In the end though, Dray sticks to the historian's traditional side of the platform, letting a little theory go a long way and watching it carefully lest it throw aside or trample too many hard-won "facts" from the record.

Just as with Giddens and Dallmayr, Dray's critic is expertly conversant with the matters at hand. Rex Martin's own monograph, *Historical Explanation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) partakes of a formalist tradition more in keeping with American than Continental philosophy of history. The driving force behind such analyses is a sharp, insistent habit of mental experimentation in which one asks: If an event can be identified clearly, would its presence in history be felt differently with certain key components altered? Though formalized (e.g., "chance" is expressed as the "crossing of finite and independent causal chains"), Martin's cross-examination of Dray's interpretive effort seems to owe as much to Socratic inquiry as to formal logic. It may at first, for the uninitiated, seem shocking to watch the machinery of logical analysis at work on a phenomenon as historically mundane as the English Civil War. But Martin's handiwork pays off, since he is able to systematize Dray's argument, then crisply point out its strengths and weaknesses.

Martin sees Dray as most sympathetic with the revisionist posture. "Several causal paradigms" make it up, including an appreciation of chance in historical occurrence as well as unintended consequences; "agent or intentionalistic causation" as the dominant "explanation form" (what social theorists label "voluntarism"); a theo-

retical aspiration toward understanding "principled judgment"; and "Dravian abnormalism," the search for genuinely intrusive, disruptive events that are thus identifiable as the beginnings of causal chains. This way of summarizing Dray's critique of others and, at the same time, his own positive formulation, is leagues away from Dray's own discursive style or cognitive frame. But with this new language Martin can say things—can make interpretations—that Dray probably could not, setting aside the question of whether he would care to. For instance, "Always, though, such unintended effects are secondary in that if the agent had never done what he did intentionally, or tried to do, he would never have brought about what he did bring about, unintentionally, as an effect of what he did intentionally." Martin is comfortable with such reasoning because, one would think, he can easily imagine historical facts or events fitting into it, and thereby being uniquely illuminated. But, owing perhaps to a distantiation from Hegelianism, historicism, and other correctives to the healthy simplicity of positivism, formulations such as Martin's risk violating a hermeneutical proposition dating from Schleiermacher. The content of consciousness is historically variable, making what Dray calls "motive analysis"—which Martin does not mention, but relies upon nonetheless—a tricky business. Establishing "finite causal chains," "quasi-causal patterns," "intersecting chains," and the like requires as an a priori, some sort of *Nacherleben* or "reliving," a distinctly nineteenth-century prospect when viewed today, but no less difficult and necessary for being so. Dray accused Stone, in practicing "social interpretation," of covering his traditional historical technique with a veneer of social science terms, adding little to explanatory power. One wonders if the language of analytic causal analysis completely escapes a similar plight. Still, Martin produces in short compass what Dray left unsaid, a clear statement of the logic in play, and what can be expected of it; no mean hermeneutic achievement.

The essays in this volume are broad in their coverage of contemporary hermeneutics, but they hardly exhaust the field. Rather than delineating here the boundaries of interpretive theory as applied in numerous disciplines today, we ask the reader to consult the book's bibliography. It is a selective list of works in English, most of them quite recently published. By considering the range of topics within hermeneutics as suggested by the bibliography, one easily understands the appeal of this field for scholars interested in bringing together what is often left in pieces; the synthetic possibilities seem limitless.