"New Literary History" and the Postmodern Paradigm: Implications for Theatre History.

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"NEW LITERARY HISTORY" AND THE POSTMODERN PARADIGM: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEATRE HISTORY

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NEW LITERARY HISTORY
AND
THE POSTMODERN PARADIGM:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEATRE HISTORY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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in partial fulfillment of the
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in
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by
Robert G. Staggenborg
B. A., Thomas More College, 1972
M. A., University of Cincinnati, 1973
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This dissertation is dedicated to Jane Erin Noe and Michael Burkhart, two who have shattered and immeasurably expanded my horizons.
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ABSTRACT

Thomas S. Kuhn writes of disciplinary paradigms, presuppositions tacitly setting the epistemological boundaries of a particular field or of the vision of a particular epoch. In the past decade, a paradigmatic revolution has deeply altered the western world's sense of reality. A new postmodern paradigm has emerged and evidenced itself in such critical approaches to art as semiotics, phenomenology, poststructuralism, and hermeneutics. The aim of the present study is to identify the central theoretical perspective offered by the new paradigm, to examine and define the central critico-historical principles stemming from such a perspective, and to relate these principles to the work of the theatre historian. In order to do so, the study has limited its focus to a single significant and representative body of work, the first thirteen volumes of the journal, New Literary History (NLH).

The significance of NLH in the realm of American aesthetic theory and history rests on several foundations. The first journal to make the new theory accessible to English speaking scholars, NLH has published articles by many of the leading figures in postmodern criticism. NLH also remains the only major American critical journal dedicated to a re-evaluation of the history in the light of contemporary communication theory.

Chapter I explicates the fundamental epistemological principles of the postmodern paradigm. The chapter has been structured to show the evolution of postmodern epistemology from its inception in Kant to its
most contemporary representation in post-Gadamerian hermeaneutics. The fundamental epistemological principles of the major modern and postmodern critical schools are examined and the interrelationships between these separate critical philosophies are studied. The chapter discusses the epistemological contributions made by Kant, Saussure, Hegel, Dilthey, Heidegger, Derrida, and Gadamer. The chapter also locates the identity of NLH in terms of the overall postmodern paradigm.

Chapter II analyzes the nature of audience response as envisioned in the light of postmodern epistemology. The principles that structure this reception are accounted with special attention being given to contextual linguistics and the postmodern definition of metaphor.

Chapter IV presents a summary of the basic tenets of the NLH approach to the history of the arts and proceeds to an evaluation of the merits and limitations of the NLH format for future theatre history research. The chapter includes an estimation of how the theatre historian may play a unique role in the progress of the NLH program of study.
INTRODUCTION

In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas S. Kuhn develops the concept of disciplinary paradigms, epistemological presuppositions tacitly accepted among members of a particular community of scientific researchers. Paradigms, by setting the epistemological boundaries of a particular field, restrict the selection of problems to "those that can be answered," set down the rules that govern methodical research, and construct the guidelines for understanding the results of that research. As David Bleich asserts, paradigms give consistency to a particular field of research by delineating "the cognitive state of mind of those systematically observing something in human experience." In The Order of Things, structural historian Michel Foucault develops a concept similar to Kuhn's idea of paradigms. Foucault devotes his discussion to "epistemes," the a priori conditions under which "ideas could appear, sciences could be established, experience could be reflected in philosophies." Foucault extends the province of the episteme beyond the realm of scientific discourse, that region of knowledge upon which Kuhn had limited his focus. Foucault asserts that the same epistemes or paradigms govern all forms of discourse within a particular period. And structural historian Hayden White echoes


Foucault's extension of paradigmatic power to all forms of scholarly discourse: "a discipline, as against whatever findings or knowledge it may provide, is nothing if not a product of the conventions, generally social in nature, which make collective work possible." All disciplines insofar as they assume a common standard by which to judge truth and sense must also assume a central paradigmatic basis.

Paradigms, as long as they are stable and in wide acceptance, assure the smooth operation of disciplinary research and discussion. However, epistemological realities change during periods of crisis, points in time which Kuhn characterizes as marked by the "blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research." Such a paradigmatic crisis evidenced itself in the western world in the years immediately following World War II. For example, late eighteenth century paradigmatic standards such as objectivism, positivism, and linguistic atomism prevailed in the study of the arts and humanities until the 1950's. However, due to the influence of eastern culture and existential philosophy, the post-war years saw the emergence of new paradigmatic standards such as relativism, historicism, and linguistic contextualism. In the study of the arts, attention shifted away from the analysis of a work's meaning to the study of a work's potential for meaning making. A new form of criticism which posed new questions arose. Jonathan Culler defines this new criticism: "a poetics which strives to define the conditions of meaning. Granting


new attention to the activity of reading, it would attempt to specify how we go about making sense of texts, what are the interpretive operations on which literature itself, as an institution, is based.\textsuperscript{6} The paradigmatic revolution evidenced in the post-war period deeply altered the western world's sense of reality; Ihab Hassan accordingly defines the revolution as "a radical reorganization of knowledge, in the discourse by which we apprehend our being."\textsuperscript{7} And in the early 1980's, the success of the revolution could be easily perceived. Kuhn cites three types of evidence that testifies to the success of a paradigmatic revolution: the formation of specialized journals, the foundation of specialized societies, and the accepted claim of the new paradigm for a special place in the university curriculum.\textsuperscript{8} In the realm of American letters alone, the increasing number of journals devoted to the new theoretical stance bears witness to the wide spread acceptance of the new paradigm. Since the late 1960's, scholarly publications such as \textit{New Literary History}, \textit{Dia-Critics}, \textit{Yale French Studies}, \textit{Glyph}, and \textit{Poetics Today} which take their stance in favor of the new criticism have entered the ranks of respected literary journals. Symposia devoted to new theoretical discussions such as the 1966 Johns Hopkins conference on structuralism, the 1974 First Conference of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, the 1973 Bellagio conference on


literary history, and the 1980 University of Chicago symposium on narrative have drawn international participation and large audiences, the semiotic association conference attracting a membership attendance of 650. And courses in semiotics, hermeneutics, the new historiography, and structuralism have increasingly been added to the curriculum offered by American universities during the last decade.

For two reasons an understanding of the new paradigmatic revolution and of its central epistemological and methodological principles has become essential to any scholar working in the arts and humanities. First, paradigms insofar as they define what will count as man's reality also determine the identity of human culture. What will be considered by an eighteenth century man as part of his cultural totality may not be considered so by a twentieth century man. Any scholar working in the arts must first ascertain the identity of his subject and this can be perceived only through a knowledge of the particular paradigm dominating a period. Also, insofar as paradigms determine the boundaries of a certain discipline, paradigmatic revolutions mark the evolution of one stage of disciplinary study into another. Kuhn accordingly asserts that when a new paradigm has formed, "the older schools gradually disappear. In part their disappearance is caused by their members' conversion to a new paradigm. But there are always some men who cling to one or another of the older views, and they are simply read out of their profession, which thereafter ignores their work." 9

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Self-preservation as a scholar then demands a constant keeping oneself in touch with universal paradigms and with their revolutionary changes.

American scholarship in letters and in the fine arts has done much within the past ten years to keep up with the foundations of the new paradigm; however, theatre scholarship has done little to digest or assimilate the implications of the new epistemology. The aim of the present study is to identify the central theoretical perspective offered by the new paradigm, to examine and define the central critico-historical principles stemming from such a perspective, and to relate these principles to the work of the theatre historian. Such an aim immediately encounters a difficulty in the immense amount of new critical and historical work produced by major critics on two continents and in the wide variety of disparate visions, each stemming from a single paradigmatic base. In order to counteract this difficulty, the present study has limited its focus to a single significant and representative body of work, the first thirteen volumes of the journal, New Literary History (NLH).

The significance of NLH in the realm of American aesthetic theory and history rests on several foundations. Founded in 1969 as part of the University of Virginia's Sesquicentennial Celebration, NLH became the first of several major critical journals to devote its pages to the new criticism. Ralph Cohen, the founder and editor of NLH since its inception, explains in the periodical's anniversary issue:

Ten years have passed since New Literary History first appeared in the autumn of 1969. There was, then, no Critical Inquiry, no Discritics, no new-policy PMLA; there was then no English literary journal devoted to critical theory or to a reconsideration of literary history, its nature and possibilities. New Literary
History was conceived as a move against the critical current; its aim was to inquire into the theoretical bases of practical criticism and, in doing so, to re-examine the relation between past works and present critical and theoretical needs. . . . It called into question the limitations of subject matter in literary journals, the nature of critical activity, and the meaning of history as commonly understood.

NLH has borne a worthy testimony to the new critical movement; in its pages have appeared articles by many of the leading figures in postmodern criticism: Yuri Lotman, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, Hayden White, Jonathan Culler, Tzvetan Todorov, Stanley Fish, Paul Ricoeur, Hans Robert Jauss, Bernard Beckerman, Herbert Blau, Harold Bloom, Wolfgang Iser, and Charles Altieri. Its editorial board has included such notable scholars as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Thomas S. Kuhn, E. D. Hirsch, Fredric Jameson, Hayden White, Wolfgang Iser, and Hans Robert Jauss. NLH has published for the first time many articles that have since received wide attention and have been included in important critical anthologies. Among these, several stand out: George Poulet's "Phenomenology of Reading," Jacques Derrida's "White Mythology—Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," and Hans Robert Jauss' "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature."

Another factor underlying the significance of NLH is its position as the only major American critical journal dedicated to an ongoing re-evaluation of the history of the arts and to an attempt to reconstruct such a history in the light of contemporary communication theory. In order to fulfill this goal, the journal has enlisted the assistance

of some of the finest scholars in a wide variety of fields, spanning the disciplines of English, theatre, music, art, anthropology, philosophy, science, history, cinema, linguistics, sociology, and rhetoric. The journal has won acclaim from historians in several fields. For example, Michael Baxandall, a historian of the fine arts, writes, "A weird thing about the last ten years has been quite how many art historians have been beating their breasts about the 'theoretical inadequacies' of the activity, and NLH has admirably registered that thudding, with a more representative spread of opinions than any of the art historians' own journals." And James Ackerman calls the "Literary and Art History" issue of NLH (Spring 1972), "the only theoretical symposium that I can recall involving American art historians on any general problem of method."

Furthermore, the format of NLH, a carefully monitored and controlled system of symposia, has done much to further the journal's significance. Each issue centers around a specific topic central to the ongoing historical study of the arts (e.g. "New and Old History," Autumn 1969; "Form and Its Alternatives," Winter 1971; "Modernism and Postmodernism," Autumn 1971; "Ideology and Literature," Spring 1973); each issue has then concluded with an attempt to synthesize the contributions made therein. Cohen attests to the success of this format: "in issues such as 'Is Literary History Obsolete?' and 'What is

11 Michael Baxandall, "The Language of Art History," New Literary History, 10 (Spring 1979), 453.
Literature," the journal initiated discussions that have led to extensive reconsiderations of the subject matter of literary study and literary history. Cohen and Iser further prove the success of the NLH format when they state in NLH's anniversary issue that certain solutions to the problems initially posed by NLH had been agreed upon by the consensus of its contributors. The first thirteen volumes of NLH might then be considered to contain a wealth of critical and theoretical ideas bearing upon the present state of the history of the arts as seen from the perspective of the contemporary postmodern paradigm.

This study will be arranged in the following fashion. Chapter I explicates the fundamental epistemological principles of the postmodern paradigm as evidenced in the pages of NLH. Such an attempt at paradigmatic formation encounters two problems. First, the contributions to NLH do not all represent a single philosophical or critical outlook. Rather the contributions to NLH fall largely into four main streams of contemporary criticism. Two represent the polar positions of the modern paradigm: formalist schools such as structuralism and semiotics and Dilthey's and Hirsch's intentional hermeneutics. Two others represent the polar positions of the postmodern paradigm: the philosophy of Derrida, deconstruction, and phenomenological hermeneutics. Furthermore, no significant critic would claim that any foundational principles of postmodern scholarship have stabilized

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14 Ibid., 418-19.
themselves; rather the postmodern period characterizes itself through a continuous rebellion against fixed precepts, static definitions, and set perspectives. The postmodern paradigm continually evolves as each of the four major contributing schools counteracts with each other. Accordingly Chapter I has been structured to show the evolution of postmodern epistemology from its inception in Kant to its most contemporary representation in post-Gadamerian hermeneutics. The fundamental epistemological principles of the major modern and postmodern critical schools will be examined and the interrelationships between these separate critical philosophies will be studied. Through NHL commentaries and through remarks made by NHL editor Cohen, the identity of NHL will be located in terms of the overall postmodern paradigm. Also, it will be argued that the postmodern critic has posited a similar basis for the history of all arts and of all human endeavors. It will be shown that from the postmodern standpoint the task of the literary historian and of the theatre historian share many other similarities, since both involve primarily the interpretation of nonmaterial "texts," that is of linguistic systems that transcend the particular medium in which they are manifested. Accordingly many aesthetic and historical principles formulated in NHL in terms of literary study will be taken in the following chapters as equally relevant to theatre studies.

NHL espouses a history of art based predominantly on audience reception rather than on the work of art itself. In order to understand the nature of the temporal progression charted in postmodern aesthetic history, it is necessary first to understand the nature of artistic
reception. Chapter II thus analyzes the nature of aesthetic reception as envisioned in the light of postmodern epistemology. The principles that structure this reception are accounted with special attention being given to contextual linguistics and the postmodern definition of metaphor.

Chapter III examines the values and methods of the practicing NLH historian. Since postmodernism attains its identity partially through a strong opposition to traditional forms of scholarship, this chapter first details the NLH attack on positivist history. The principles and procedures of the NLH historian are then examined.

Chapter IV presents a summary of the basic tenets of the NLH approach to the history of the arts and will proceed to an evaluation of the merits and limitations of the NLH format for future theatre history research. This chapter concludes with an estimation of how the theatre historian may play in turn a unique role in the progress of the NLH program of study.
CHAPTER X

New Literary History and the Postmodern Paradigm

Many suggestions for a postmodern paradigm have appeared in the pages of NLH. For example, in the spring issue of 1974, Martin Steinmann titled the new paradigm "Speech Act Theory." Steinmann's article was followed by a debate between David Bleich and Norman Holland over whether the new paradigm should be named "Subjective" or "Transactive." And Herbert Lindenberger counted no less than seven paradigm suggestions in the spring, 1982 issue of NLH. Thus any episteme that would offer itself as a blanket paradigm for NLH must meet a basic requirement: that it respect the integrity of each distinct vision represented in the journal. But since, as James Collins remarks, the theoretical stances taken in the journal "are not neatly rounded off to a systematic completion, but instead remain deliberately open to each other's type of work and to still other possibilities from further quarters," an overall paradigm must also be able to explain the manner in which the different visions can merge into a single progressive line of historical inquiry.

Such a paradigm must also be able to explain the peculiar dominance of critical as opposed to historical essays in a journal which editor Cohen describes as "addressed to all engaged or interested in the reconsideration of literary history." It must also make sense of editor Cohen's rejection of the principle that "history is a study of a series of works arranged in a chronological order as integrated parts of the historical process, and it differs from literary criticism which is the study of literature as a simultaneous order." Cohen views the rejection of the traditional disciplinary boundaries separating criticism and history as the basic foundation for the NLH format. Finally, an NLH paradigm must also be able to define a distinct identity for the journal, an identity which should link the journal to those trends of thought with which Jerome Beaty finds it most frequently associated, "reader-response, receptionalism, . . . literary history" and the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy of the Constance School, a German school of criticism headed by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss.

Kuhn explains that new paradigms are adopted because they are seen as capable of answering crucial problems which could not be resolved in the terms of preceding paradigms. A study which seeks to establish

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the identity of a new paradigm might best begin with an examination of the moment when its predecessor was seen to fail. The noted structural historian, Michel Foucault, cites the moment of failure for the premodern paradigm as that inhabited by Kant and the Romantics, "the threshold between our prehistory and what is still contemporary."9

Paul Ricoeur, a prominent contemporary hermeneutic philosopher, likewise writes, "The struggle between Romanticism and the Enlightenment is the source of our own problem and the milieu in which the opposition between two fundamental philosophical attitudes took shape: on the one side, the Aufklärung [the Enlightenment] and its struggle against prejudice; on the other, Romanticism and its nostalgia for the past."10

This chapter begins with an account of how Kant's "Copernican revolution" plunged the nineteenth-century into an extreme epistemological dilemma. In answer to the Kantian dilemma, two poles of modern thought emerged: One emphasizing man as the dweller of universal, timeless structures; the other picturing man as an "absolutely restless being, pure activity, the negativity or ideality of every fixed category of abstractive intellect."11 These two philosophical trends then merged into the seminal work of the postmodern period, Martin Heidegger's Being and Time (1927). And again the two trends of thought split after Heidegger, each now borrowing essential elements from the other, in order to form the two polar stances of the postmodern period:

Derrida's poststructuralism and Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutics. Finally, it will be argued that a slightly modified and expanded version of Gadamer's hermeneutic may serve as the NLH paradigm. To present the philosophies or visions discussed in terms of their full richness and complexity is not intended; to identify the essential and minimal conditions under which meaning is made in the world of NLH is the goal.

**Kant and the Prelude to Modernity**

The *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant were written in opposition to two eighteenth-century excesses of Cartesian dualism, rationalist metaphysics and empiricist epistemology. Rationalism, as a science of formal logic, had not been able to prove its validity by formulating a consistent, universally accepted metaphysical system. And Kant feared that this failure would be taken as confirmation of the empiricist's claim for material reality as the basis for all important knowledge. In order to alleviate the rationalist's embarrassment, Kant attempted to prove the inherent incapacity of rational thought for metaphysical speculation; and in order to oppose the empiricist epistemological base, Kant formulated his system of pure logic based on *a priori* categories of judgment.

In order to defend his system of *a priori* ideas, Kant opposed the empiricist model of man as a passive perceiver with his own belief in an imaginative intuition which actively intersects with the sensuous manifold (the external world) and shapes the manifold with the prior knowledge that a particular type of meaning may be made. The imaginative intuition works in terms of time, the formal cause of understanding, and space, its material cause. Time, the understanding of the
interconnection of parts, the medium of the active inner consciousness, conditions space: "since all representations, whether they have for their objects outer things or not, belong, in themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state; and since this inner state stands under the formal condition of inner intuition, and so belongs to time, time is an a priori condition of all appearances whatsoever." Time allows understanding to occur and thus controls Kant's model of apperception. In Kant, the universe begins a slow transition from a spatial to a temporal order, a transition to be fully consummated only in the postmodern period.

However, in Kant the nature of new born time already raises problems. For example, since Kant argues that all knowledge comes from the union of the rational and the sensible, the essence of time can never be comprehended, for time which "has to do neither with shape nor position, but with the relations of representation in our inner state" cannot "be a determination of outer appearances." But time as the formal cause of understanding allows itself to be reflected in the act of understanding. Kant explains that because time "yields no shape, we endeavour to make up for this want by analogies. We represent the time-sequence by a line progressing to infinity in which the manifold constitutes a series of one dimension only; and we reason from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with this one exception, that while the parts of the line are simultaneous the parts of time are always

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13 Ibid., p. 50.
successive."\textsuperscript{14} Time allows itself to be comprehended in a self-reflective manner.

How then does Kant rescue the self-reflective mind from subjective relativism? The answer to this question can be found in Kant's discussion of the moral imperative in the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}.

Kant argues that insofar as all men feel a moral duty, such a duty must be a universal practical law: "Assuming that pure reason can contain a practical ground sufficient to determine the will, then there are practical laws. Otherwise all practical principles are mere maxims.\textsuperscript{15} And insofar as the practical law is universally felt, there must be a single, universal rational nature: "for reason to be legislative, it is required that reason need presuppose only itself, because the rule is objectively and universally valid only when it holds without contingent subjective conditions which differentiate one rational being from another."\textsuperscript{16} Kant proceeds to assert that if practical reason assumes a reward for appropriate behavior, that reward cannot be one belonging to a material world where poetic injustice abounds. Kant concludes that practical reason necessarily implies a higher realm of justice than that associated with the material world, i.e. that realm originating in God. Thus Kant stabilizes the self-reflective world of human understanding through the divinely ordained laws of reason. And time, the understanding of relationships, manifests divine order through

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 19.
\end{itemize}
the universally valid principles of positive reasoning. However, Kant's discussion of lines of reasoning will precipitate the classical, objective paradigm.

These lines of reasoning, their ontology, their validity, and their limitations, comprise the central focus of Kant's Critiques. The divinely ordained unity of the Kantial universe validates two types of reasoning, each with its own particular method and domain of certitude. Kant distinguishes practical reason, the act of willing reasonably in accordance with the moral law, from rational reason; he further separates rational reason into general and transcendental logic. General logic, that type usually associated with science, takes its base in the sensible world of intuition; transcendental logic, that type usually associated with mathematics and abstract reasoning, takes its base in the internal world where concepts are formed. General logic depends upon the abstraction from an image of the concepts applied to it; transcendental logic depends upon a further stage of abstraction as the mind reflects on its own powers to form concepts. Kant explains the self-reflective method by which transcendental logic proceeds: "we can reduce all acts of understanding to judgments, and the understanding may therefore be represented as a faculty of judgment. The functions of the understanding can, therefore, be discovered if we can give an exhaustive statement of the functions of unity in judgment."17 Transcendental logic thus requires an abstractive distancing from direct observation and its proper domain is an intermediate world between the sensible and the divine.

Kant's major contribution to the history of epistemology depended upon the interposing of the transcendental mediating world between the sensible and the divine. But the temporality of this intermediate world undermined the epistemological certainty of many nineteenth century men. For time places a restriction on man's potential for knowledge. Time as the condition of man's apprehensive judgment upon the manifold prevents man from apprehending all types of *noumena* (things-in-themselves), i.e. the manifold, the self, and God. Concerning the manifold, Kant writes, "Even if we could bring our intuition to the highest degree of clearness, we should not thereby come any nearer to the constitution of objects in themselves. We should still know only our mode of intuition, that is, our sensibility. We should, indeed, know it completely, but always under the conditions of space and time -- conditions which are originally inherent in the subject."\(^{18}\) Concerning the self, Kant writes, "We can thus say of the thinking 'I' (the soul) which regards itself as substance, as simple, as numerically identical at all times, and as the correlate of all existence, from which all other existence must be inferred, that it does not know itself through the categories, but knows the categories, and through them all objects, in the absolute unity of apperception, and so through itself. Now it is, indeed, very evident that I cannot know as an object that which I must presuppose in order to know any object."\(^{19}\) And since all important knowledge stems from an exercise of *a priori* ideas upon the manifold, Kant writes, concerning the divine: "Now no one, I trust,

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\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 201.
will be so bold as to profess that he comprehends the relation of the magnitude of the world as he has observed it (alike as regards both extent and content) to omnipotence, of the world order to supreme wisdom, of the world unity to the absolute unity of its Author, etc. Physico-theology is therefore unable to give any determinate concept of the supreme cause of the world, and cannot therefore serve as the foundation of a theology which is itself in turn to form the basis of religion."²⁰

Kant's prohibition of rational logic from a comprehension of the divine, while intended as a preservation of the spiritual domain against the trauma of rationalist metaphysical failure, produced the opposite effect for many nineteenth-century men. Michael Timko observes that the arrival of Kant's work in England in the 1830's caused an abrupt break between the Romantic and the Victorian periods: "To Tennyson and the other Victorians much of Wordsworth's metaphysical searching to find or apprehend relationships among certainties, or what seem to be certainties to him -- that is, God, nature, and man -- are overshadowed by what appear to be the larger epistemological issues, the chief one being . . . the ability of man to know or apprehend at all."²¹ Foucault describes the resultant epoch as the historical moment when Representation disappeared and Man was born in its place; by this he means that truth ceased to be given objectively by the external world and became instead the subjective product of the human mind. But, owing to Kant's


sealing men off from full knowledge of himself, the making of meaning became part of the unconscious and could no longer be rationally controlled by the being caught within it. Foucault explains, "it is possible to have access to him only through his words, his organism, the objects he makes -- as though it is they who possess the truth in the first place (and they alone perhaps); and he, as soon as he thinks, merely unveils himself to his own eyes in the form of a being who is already, in a necessarily subjacent density, in an irreducible anteriority, a living being, and instrument of production, a vehicle for words that exist before him." Foucault explains that this uncontrollable and incomprehensible manufacturing of meaning, this anonymity of man's other self, that part of man which Kant attributed to the divine, then became transformed into the collective unconscious.

In the late nineteenth century attempts were made to master the newly found personal and political unconscious. And in their quest for certitude, certain thinkers turned to the only empirical remainder of the Kantian universe, the intermediate imaginative faculty. Thus in the process by which time reflected upon itself, the two schools that forerun postmodern thought were established. Lawrence Manly depicts these two philosophical movements as descendents from the empiricist and rationalist dispositions. The empiricist search for "social, historical, and psychological genesis" grounded its study in the active

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23 Ibid., pp. 238-39.
intuition. On the other hand, the rationalist "insistence on the noumenal grounds of fitness, certainty, and rectitude" manifested itself in "an explicit search for the permanent structures of the mind itself, the organizational categories and forms through which the mind is able to experience the world, or to organize a meaning in what is essentially in itself meaningless." Both movements, by extending the intermediate domain to the proportions of a universal landscape, necessarily found transcendental logic the sole valid form of reasoning. The new empiricists, who included Hegel, Marx, and Dilthey, would supply the writers of NLH with their ideals and aspirations; the new Cartesians who included Saussure, Peirce, the early Husserl, and the early Freud, would supply the writers of NLH with targets for their animadversions. Both together would form the fundamental cognitive basis for the critico-historical principles of NLH.

Saussure and Structuralism

Of all the work to have come from the neo-Cartesian movement, perhaps only Edmund Husserl's Cartesian Meditations rivals Ferdinand de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics in terms of its impact upon postmodern thought. Saussure, the father of structuralism, constructed his system of linguistics on a fundamental distinction between langue, the "storehouse filled by members of a given community through their active use of speaking. a grammatical system that has a potential existence in each brain, or, more specifically in the brains of a group

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of individuals," and parole, its individual manifestation. **Langue**, "a Kantian . . . categorical, combinative unconscious," shares with its Kantian counterpart an intersubjective nature: "It is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by members of a community." **Langue** stands to parole as the individual's social, linguistic competence to his individual performance.

**Langue** also shares with its Kantian counterpart a self-enclosed nature, noumenal knowledge being replaced by the conventional, arbitrary nature of words: "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image." **Langue**, the social lexicon of a language, permits meaning to be made by distinguishing certain logically similar words from each other. Saussure writes, "Instead of pre-existing ideas then, we find . . . values emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are differential and defined not by their positive content but by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not." For example,

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29. Ibid., p. 66.

30. Ibid., p. 117.
the word "green" is partially defined in relationship to the word "red," "horse" to "cow," and in certain cultures, "being" to "nothingness." "Horse" is defined by its relationship to synonyms such as "pony," to other mammals, to other animals, to other nouns, and so on. **Langue** as a syntactical lexicon controls semantics. And since Saussure argues that meaning can be determined only from an immense series of differences, **langue** must be viewed as a unified totality. A change in one definition within the **langue** will result in at least a minor change in all other definitions. Thus, in a passage central to an understanding of poststructuralist thought, Saussure explains, "The idea that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it. Proof of this is that the value of a term may be modified without its meaning or its sound being affected, solely because a neighboring term has been modified."31 Saussure concludes that in language all meaning is created through contrasts, through relative differences: "in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms."32 In this play of differences "without positive terms," Saussure allows for the temporal evolution of a language and thus imitates his Kantian counterpart in the entrapment of time within the object observed, in this case within language.

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32Ibid., p. 120.
This unified totality of language as a single metaphorical system constitutes one of Saussure's two most significant contributions to the foundations of postmodern criticism. The other stems from his definition of langue and results in his evaluative distinction between synchronic and diachronic studies. Since Saussure asserts that language remains an entire whole at each moment of its use and since meaning always depends upon an immense series of differences, he finds it "absolutely impossible to study simultaneously relations in time and relations within the system." He thus separates synchronic linguistics which pertains to "everything that relates to the static side of our science" from diachronic which pertains to "everything that has to do with evolution." But, since any single language event can be understood only in terms of its relationship to its context, Saussure explains: "the linguist who wishes to understand a state must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony. He can enter the mind of speakers only by completely suppressing the past. The intervention of history can only falsify his judgment." Saussure's positing of this priority of synchronic context over diachronic history, itself only a comparison of different synchronic states, presents the other structuralist foundational principle for postmodern history.

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., p. 81.
The application of Saussurian structuralism to the study of cultural life and artifacts attained a brief period of prominence in Europe during the 1950's and early 1960's. However, as Hans Robert Jauss reports, structuralism had become almost extinct by the mid-1960's.\textsuperscript{36} The inherent incapacity of structuralism to form a lasting poetic stemmed from its global focus on the nature of meaning making rather than on the nature of meaning itself. While Saussure stressed the absolute reliance of the speech act upon context, he formulated no answers to the central problem that was to preoccupy postmodern historians: the nature of those factors which delineate context and consequently determine the relationship between parole and langue. Accordingly the most ardent followers of Saussure inevitably evolved during the 1960's into champions of Peirce, the father of semiotics, a structuralist based approach to the solution of that problem. However, semiotics presented only one of the several routes open to structural thought in the wake of structuralism proper. Nor was semiotics necessarily the most popular route taken, since its repetition of structuralist epistemology left it open to the same philosophical attacks as those to be levelled against Saussure.

Structuralism owed its demise to inherent problems more metaphysical than technical, the chief problem being its implicit deterministic nature. Paul Ricoeur, despite his debt to structural thought, weighs against structuralism because "The act of speaking is excluded not only as exterior execution, as individual performance, but as free

combination, as producing new utterance." He adds that for the structural anthropologist "history is excluded, and not simply the change from one state of system to another but the production of culture and of man in the production of his language." Jacques Derrida, another writer heavily influenced by structural thought, writes in a similar vein: "the respect for structurality, for the internal originality of the structure, compels a neutralization of time and history." Derrida explains that since a structure remains a motionless and hence timeless concept, "one can describe what is peculiar to the structural organization only by not taking into account, in the very moment of its description, its past conditions; by omitting to posit the problem of the transition from one structure to another, by putting history between brackets." The discovery of **langue** as deterministic relativism inevitably led to the identification of language as social ideology. Fredric Jameson, a structural hermeneuticist, writes "The Structuralists . . . dissolving the individual unit back into the **langue** of which it is a partial articulation, set themselves the task of describing the organization of the total sign-system itself . . . We may therefore understand the

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38 Ibid., p. 84
40 Ibid., p. 291.
Structuralist enterprise as a study of superstructures, or, in a more limited way, of ideology.  

The linking of the ideological to the unconscious syntactical begins the transitional period between modernism and postmodernism. From the coupling of the syntactical with the ideological spring two predominant characteristics of postmodern criticism. Meaning comes to originate not in the words themselves but in the order of words, an order Michel Foucault describes thus: "Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a frame, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as through already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression."42 As a result, the structural critics demand an immeasurably closer reading than that called for by the New Criticism. NLH editor Cohen explains that the leading new critics "have set themselves the task of ordering through the unsaid what is found to be obscure, disjunctive, or asymmetrical in what is said. . . What is considered, therefore, as a process of demystification, becomes a process of remystification, of reconstruction -- of finding theoretical statements in ruptures of the text, in obscure hiding places, in absences of all kinds, in the writing of  

The espying of implicit ideological statements in all uses of language also results in a focus on the ideological base of all scholarly disciplines. In the postmodern period, the study of the arts breaks from its traditional disinterestedness. Turning self-reflective, criticism now attempts to awaken from its insensitivity to its own ideological underpinnings. Wolfgang Iser writes that the new "literary theory sprang not from any intensified study of literature so much as from the parlous state of literary criticism at the universities -- a state which it was meant to remedy. Literature has, to a great extent, lost its social validity in contemporary society, and it was the attempt to counteract this erosion that led to the breakthrough of theory." As criticism turned to a social critique of critical method, as history turned to a moral critique of historical method, postmodern criticism intertwined the cognitive with the explicitly ethical and the political. Evan Watkins writes in the Winter 1971 issue of NLH, "in one grand shock wave spread over the last fifteen years . . . criticism could recover for itself a sense of participation in a much wider enterprise and a sense of a vital role in what was increasingly known as the crisis of Western culture." However, it should not be assumed that these critics and historians possessed a substitute ideology to propagate; rather the postmoderns refused to credit any vision as "innocent" or unsuspect.

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The transition from structuralism to deconstruction, a term often associated with the predominant sector of poststructuralist activity, can be chronicled in the work of Roland Barthes, the single predominant figure who includes all important stages of structural thought in his criticism. Barthes voices the sentiments of the transitional period in *Critical Essays* (1964):

> ideas and themes interest me less than the way society takes possession of them in order to make them the substance of a certain number of signifying systems. This does not mean that this substance is indifferent; it means that we cannot apprehend it, manipulate it, judge it, make it the basis of philosophical, sociological, or political explanations without first having described and understood the system of signification of which it is merely a term; and since this system is a formal one, I have found myself engaged in a series of structural analysis.  

In these words Barthes describes the process of "demystification," the breaking down of a concept or image through structural analysis in order to reveal its latent ideological message. In the poststructuralist period, Barthes' critical aim changes radically. For example, in his most famous deconstructive work, *S/Z* (1970), Barthes spends 271 pages interpreting Balzac's short story, "Sarrasine," in order to reveal all interpretive analyses, including his own, as fallacious.  

This marked change from critical structuralism to deconstruction resulted from further reflection upon the deterministic nature of the structuralist system. Barthes and his fellow poststructuralists came to realize that their metalinguistic tools, having been derived from within the linguistic system, already bore the impress of a deterministic

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ideology. Jacques Lacan, the psychologist most frequently associated with the poststructuralists, writes, "Language is language and there is only one sort of language: concrete language -- English or French for instance -- that people talk. The first thing to state in this context is that there is no meta-language. For it is necessary that all so-called meta-language be presented to you with language." And Derrida writes in a similar vein, "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language -- no syntax and no lexicon -- which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest." The need arose to find one's existential freedom beyond the pall of language, to master ideology by refusing to be taken in. The close reading of the critical structuralist then turned microscopic as interpretation focused on "the irreadable that catches on, the burning text produced outside of all probability, and whose function. . . . would be to contest the merchandizing constraints of the written." In order to ground this process of "misreading," a new Heideggerian interpretive process, an anti-methodological methodology, became imperative. If Martin Heidegger had not existed, Derrida would have had to create him.

48 Jacques Derrida, "Of Structure as an Intermixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever," in The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenie Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1972), p. 188.
49 Ibid., p. 280.
Saussurian structuralism and its aftermath then bequeathed to the postmodern critical milieu of NLH a strong metaphysical, epistemological, political, and moral commitment. Structuralism transformed all human perspectives into metaphorical statements; grounded the belief in culture as an invisible, holistic linguistic system identified with social ideology; presented the critique of ideological consciousness as the central impulse behind history and criticism; declared invalid any statement suggesting an unclouded vision of a work's objective meaning; and turned critical attention to the pragmatics of aesthetic perception. Structuralist writers appearing in NLH who figure in the present study include Alastair Fowler and Jonathan Culler.

Hegel, Dilthey and Phenomenological Hermeneutics

Kant's theory of the active imagination initiated a transition from a noumenological to a teleological order, from a spatial to a temporal universe. The resultant demise of the classical, objective paradigm severed meaning from its spiritual, social, and historical context. In order to construct a new cognitive framework, the leading figures of the modern period seized on the Kantian transcendental method of self-reflection. The Neo-Cartesians, threatened by the disparate lives of a thousand isolated forms, erected their systems on the Kantian categorical consciousness. Their descendents could only reach the teleological postmodern period through a direct revolt against the fixed geometric systems of their progenitors. On the other hand, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel founded a school of thought that would develop directly into a major sector of postmodern criticism.
Hegel was threatened not so much by the loss of a social context for meaning as by the loss of an established process for the disciplinary study of the human sciences. He feared that a reign of total subjectivity would result from the isolated individual's frenzied attempts to gain integral union with the cultural unconscious. In order to found a science of the learning process, a *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), Hegel attempted to codify the rules of the Kantian intermediate agency. However, Hegel argued against the limited nature of his Kantian prototype. Hegel writes that the ego does not make use of something (i.e. *a priori* categories) in making judgment; rather the ego is judgment, the willing of meaning.\(^5^1\) Hegel's remark is necessarily entailed by this moment when the intermediate agency becomes the creator of the universe. Foucault explains that in Hegel, "the totality of the empirical domain was taken back into the interior of a consciousness revealing itself to itself as spirit, in other words, as an empirical and transcendentental field simultaneously."\(^5^2\) At this moment, no intermediate spatial or categorical system remains possible. Meaning has become fully temporal. By thus adopting the temporal agency as the cornerstone for his philosophical reflections, Hegel became the father of "a direct, unbroken lineage"\(^5^3\) to postmodern hermeneutics.

Before examining the fundamental principles of hermeneutic reasoning as displayed in Hegel's phenomenology, a clarification of the

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term hermeneutics may be in order. The term hermeneutics as used in the pages of NLH and in this study refers to that branch of philosophical inquiry informed by the ideas of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Hegel's phenomenology embodies the essential foundations of contemporary hermeneutic reasoning. Charles Taylor provides a synopsis of these fundamental principles: "The object of a science of interpretation must thus have: sense, distinguishable from its expression, which is for and by a subject."^54 However, Taylor underplays one essential element of the hermeneutic process, the role of the interpreter as the creator of all meaning, as "the content of the relation and itself the process of relating,"^55 a role similar to that of the divine in the Kantian universe and to the unconscious in the nineteenth-century.

The hermeneutic process of interpretation begins with the subject's projection of significance upon the world. However, in order for learning to occur, a "surplus of signification," as overload of meaning beyond the phenomenon's signifying power must exist. Meaning must overextend structure; understanding must call for greater skills than a mere explanation. In other words, there must be more in the object than can meet the eye. There must be a vague but significant area that demands interpretation. Otherwise a progression beyond the soul's static self-reflection would be impossible. Hegel writes,

"Consciousness, we find, distinguishes from itself something, to which at the same time, it relates itself; . . . and the determinate form of this process of relating, or of there being something for consciousness, is knowledge."56 "Surplus of signification" results in the process by which "consciousness tests and examines itself" and, since all meaning is self-generated, self-examination initiates the process of learning. Hermeneutic knowledge can result only from a process of self-transcendence, from the passage from a limited to a more encompassing self, from an earthly self to a more spiritual self. Consequently, any hermeneutic interpreter must take a stance upon a triad of essential and intertwined metaphysical questions: the nature of the all-emcompassing self, the obstacles restricting man from entry into that absolute self, and the means of interpretation by which the obstacles may be overcome.

For Hegel as well as for the postmodern hermeneuticists, the chief obstacle to interpretation lies in man's tendency to settle for factual, positivist observation. Hegel writes, "man's mind and interest are so deeply rooted in the earthly that we require a like power to raise us above that level."57 And for Hegel as well as for the postmodern hermeneuticists, the power to raise man above "facticity" comes from dialectical reasoning. Dialectical reasoning operates first by comparing two entities and then by negating their uncommon elements in order to produce the concept of a purer third. Unlike noumenalogical reasoning, dialectical reasoning does not operate on an additive but on

57 Ibid., p. 73.
a subtractive basis; inessential, earthly elements are removed in the process of reducing mental perception to its essential, informing idea. For example, the comparison of many trees produces the idea of tree-ness; also many visions of this tree produces the idea of this-tree-ness.

Hegel and the postmodern hermeneuticists separate dialectical reasoning into the same three general stages of comparison (Gestalten), "each of which in realizing itself at the same time resolves itself, has for its result its own negation — and so passes into a higher form."\(^{58}\) The first Gestalt results from the gap between the object and its "surplus of signification" which corresponds to a contrast between one's interior notion of a thing and the thing-in-itself, between the "I" and the "not-I", between "what is to be tested" and its "criterion". This contrast tests the truth of perception and thus the concept of truth becomes realized. The concept of truth then resolves the first and forms the second Gestalt. Here the contrast for the dialectical mind is that between "consciousness of what to it is true, and consciousness of its knowledge of that truth."\(^{59}\) And this contrast leads ultimately to the final stage of dislectical awareness, the contrast between one's relative grasp of truth in the here and now and the eternal essence and form of that truth. Hegel describes the resolution to this final stage as the sundering of one's individuality into the universal Absolute Spirit, a grand historical Geist of which


the individual is but the momentary manifestation. At this moment Hegel subsumes the world back into the temporal agency of the self-enclosed Kantian intermediate domain and sends it on its way "along the stream of progress over onward."60

Hermeneutic reasoning as displayed in Hegel depends upon an ever actively creative mind in the interpreter, a gap between structural form and a surplus of signification, a process of self-transcendence through dialectical reasoning, and an active concern with one's own historicity, with one's being in the unrepeatable here and now. However, although Hegel supplied the base for postmodern hermeneutics, he also manifested the central problem that would impel its evolution: the problem of finding a transcendental source equiprimordial with the constantly progressing perceiver. Hegel doomed his phenomenology by attempting to define methodically the rules of the constantly progressing, meaning making spirit. As Foucault explains, one can define the rules of the primordial source of thought and creativity only in static and codifiable terms.61 And just as the birth of teleological time had collapsed the Kantian model of apperception, Hegel's positive system of the world spirit collapsed his attempt to found a science of the temporal man. The Hegelian system was quickly perceived as spatially determined and thus deterministic and the eminent period of cultural


study was characterized by a total rejection of Hegelianism and an apology for experimental knowledge.\textsuperscript{62}

Hermeneutic reasoning then lay dormant until the end of the nineteenth century when Wilhem Dilthey, protesting against the "growing separation between life and scientific knowledge," attempted to form a more "realistic" hermeneutic of free historical man. Rejecting Hegelian idealism, Dilthey called for a hermeneutic which would start from the "reality of life" and perception. And in order to base his interpretation on the reality of perception, Dilthey grafted onto his hermeneutic the phenomenological theory of intentionality, a concept that remains the cornerstone of hermeneutic interpretation. Concerning the theory of intentionality, a theory of active perception introduced into modern psychology by Franz Brentano and developed by Edmund Husserl, the father of the phenomenological method, Hans-Georg Gadamer states: it "is the antithesis of all objectivism. It is an essentially historical concept, which does not refer to a universe of being, to an 'existent world.'\textsuperscript{63} The theory of intentiality asserts that the mind encounters an amorphous real world with full expectation that that world will confirm to one's past experience of it, that it will continue to fulfill the same structural expectations. It also asserts that the intentional consciousness does not demand a complete inventory of an object's characteristics before it composes a mental image of that object as an entirety. For example, by perceiving a few general characteristics of a house, one constitutes the idea of that house as a


completely enclosed entity, an idea which further exploration may confirm or negate. Intentionality then implies a thoroughly teleological ontology of perception. Herbert Spiegelberg explains, "This consciousness shows roughly the following structure: A primal impression (Ur impression) of a streaming present surrounded by a horizon of immediate 'retention' of the past (to be distinguished from active recollection) and of immediate 'protention' of the future (to be distinguished from active expectation). In . . . retention . . . the present sinks off steadily below the surface and becomes sedimented in such a way that it is accessible only to acts of recollection." Dilthey transforms intentional consciousness into his concept of "life" which he calls "a flame, not a being; energy, not entity." Dilthey writes, "The living coherence of mind is life, which is prior to all knowing . . . Vitality, historicity, freedom, and development are its characteristics. Our consciousness of the world as well as our consciousness of ourselves has arisen out of our own vitality."

Intentional consciousness then constitutes the nature of the self in Dilthey's hermeneutic system; however, it also constitutes the obstacles which the hermeneutic historian must rise above. Two facets of the theory of intentionality comprise special difficulties for the art of interpretation. First, in positing man as a thoroughly active

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perceiver, Dilthey's theory of intentionality inexorably intertwines cognition with emotion and desire. Dilthey asserts, "Daily experience shows that the perception of objects is attended by feeling and willing." "The 'I' is not an onlooker who sits before the stage of the world, but is itself action and reaction." Consequently the idea of a presuppositionless understanding no longer holds credance in Dilthey's universe. Dilthey states, "There is no man and no thing which would only be an object for me and not a hindrance or help, a goal for striving or an instance of will, importance, demand for attention, closeness of opposition, distance or strangeness. The vital relation, whether momentary or lasting, makes men and objects into bearers of happiness, expansion of my existence, extension of my power -- or they restrict the horizon of my existence, exert a restriction upon me, and lessen my potentiality." Accordingly Dilthey asserts that every perception entails a conditioning by one's needs and desires in the here and now and that no process of self-transcendence can ever remove man beyond the desirous origins of his intentional understanding. Second, the theory of intentionality casts doubt on every effort to study man and his culture in a methodical, positivist, quantitative way. Every factual statement about man arrests and distorts the ever ongoing process of the life force. Dilthey concludes, "Life is the fundamental fact which must form the starting point for philosophy. It is that which is known from within, that behind which we cannot go. Life cannot

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67 Dilthey, Gesammelte Schriften, VII, 131, Ermarth, p. 119.
be brought before the judgment seat of reason." Consequently Dilthey postulates what James Collins calls "the essential modernity of his notion of interpretation", the belief that the human sciences must find an approach based on an "irreducible kind of explaining." Dilthey depicts the historian as confronted with two seemingly insurmountable obstacles: the inability of attaining a neutrally objective perception of the past and the inability of methodically articulating any authentic exploration into the realm of human culture.

Dilthey does not deem the historian's task impossible. If Dilthey sees human intentionality as a hindrance to one type of historical understanding, he also views it as the passageway to another. The intentional consciousness arranges itself in a series of discernible structures. Dilthey explains: "The state of consciousness which perceives reality, evaluates, and posits goals contains in itself an order of levels . . . in which every mental relation provides a foundation for one built upon it in a particular manner. Here we do not have elements but structure -- and the progression through the levels within each mode of relating manifests its own structure." Moreover, man's structural perspective acquires social dimensions through its interaction with its particular historical environment: "By experience of life I mean those propositions which constitute themselves in a collective circle of persons. They are statements about the nature

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and course of life, judgments about what has proved to be of value, rules of living, and determinations of goals and goods. Their hallmark is that they are creations of a community. As morality, tradition, and public opinion they exercise a decisive power over the individual viewpoint. And Dilthey asserts that these socially determined structures of the individual consciousness then express themselves as the formal causality of all great historical events and works. Consequently, these structures are capable of forming a basis for historical research.

But, unlike the structuralists, Dilthey regards the study of social structures as only the preliminary stage towards the real goal of the historian, the study of life. Dilthey's position on this point stems naturally from his reversal of the Saussurian relationship between langue and parole. For Dilthey asserts that life, human desire, parole, stands not in front of language as individual manifestation but behind it as the impulse to social communication. While Dilthey does not deny the structuralist historians' belief in the priority of synchronic states, he does interweave the diachronic with the synchronic as the relationship between individual desire and social consummation. And this contrast between social structuration and the individual life force provides the gap upon which Dilthey builds his hermeneutic dialectic.

Dilthey's dialectical system parallels Hegel's and refines it through an exploration of the concept of hermeneutic circularity. Hermeneutic circularity refers essentially to the bond of similarity linking any two diverse entities at any stage of the dialectical

process. The first level of circularity in Dilthey's interpretation of a work corresponds to the Hegelian contrast between an object and its surplus of meaning. Dilthey explains, "The whole of a work is to be understood from the individual words and their connections with each other, and yet the full comprehension of the individual part already presupposes comprehension of the whole."\textsuperscript{72} Dilthey relegates these two different aspects of a work, the relationship among its parts and its total meaning, to two separate tasks of the historian, structural explanation and empathic understanding (Verstehen) respectively. Dilthey defines Verstehen as "that process by which we intuit, behind the signs given to our senses, that psychic reality of which it is the expression."\textsuperscript{73} Dilthey bases his process of Verstehen on the belief that one can assume into one's own mind the structural expectations and perspectives of another. Dilthey writes, "inasmuch as the exegete tentatively projects his own sense of life into another historical milieu, he is able within that perspective, to strengthen and emphasize certain spiritual processes in himself and to minimize others, thus making possible within himself a re-experiencing of an alien form of life."\textsuperscript{74} But Verstehen must not be understood as a cutting off of one's present prejudices in order to enter another person's time; rather Verstehen occurs in the here and now. Explains Ricoeur, "By 'hermeneutical circle' Romanticist thinkers meant that the understanding


\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 232.

of a text cannot be an objective procedure in the sense of scientific objectivity, but necessarily involves a precomprehension which expresses the way in which the reader has already understood himself and the world. Therefore, a kind of circularity occurs between understanding a text and understanding oneself."\(^75\) Dilthey writes that *Verstehen* implies an immanent self-discovery and self-transcendence effected through the experienced auto-critique of one's own prejudices: "Understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou; the mind rediscovers itself at ever higher levels of connectedness; this sameness of the mind in the I and the Thou and in every subject of a community, in every system of culture and, finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, makes the working together of the different processes in the human studies possible."\(^76\) The resultant circularity between the comprehension of one's self and of another's, between the understanding of one's relative grasp on truth and another's equally relative perspective, provides a glimpse of the universal bond that unites all men: "In Understanding, the individuality of the exegete and that of the author are not opposed to each other like two incomparable facts. Rather, both have been formed upon the substratum of a general human nature, and it is this which makes possible the communion of people with each other in speech."\(^77\) This for Dilthey becomes the aim of historical exploration, not the resurrection of the past but the


freeing of man from his present prejudices in order that a more humane future may be appropriated. Dilthey asserts, "The understanding of the past must become an energy to shape the future . . . The historical consciousness must contain the rule and energy which will allow us, in contradistinction to all past happenings, to turn freely and sovereignly toward a unitary goal of human culture."  

Although his writings to a great extent remain unavailable except in his native German language, Dilthey, the "overture" to NLH, has contributed much to postmodern hermeneutics and history. Dilthey's hermeneutic system, the obstacles to interpretation from which it springs and the goals towards which it is directed, constitute the foundation for Gadamer's hermeneutic. Because of Dilthey, the chief object of study in the postmodern period has become the various historical transformations of intentionality. And Dilthey's rooting of all human studies under the determinations of the here and now provides the ground on which all postmodern historians meet. Indeed Ralph Cohen partially explains the foundation of NLH and its uniting of critical and historical perspectives in terms of such a concept: "literary criticism, literary history, and even literary theory are all literary genres, and as such they are historical; that is, they arise, as journals do, at particular moments in time, and they have particular ends that time erodes. Of course, all these genres have their modes of proceeding, but all are historically determined . . . Literary history,  

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therefore, is not the historical genre but merely another historical

Despite its contribution to postmodern historical inquiry, Dilthey's hermeneutic opened itself to charges similar to those levelled against Hegel's. James Collins expresses the postmodern sentiments toward Dilthey: "Dilthey opens up horizons on interpretation, without fully explaining and understanding them himself." On the one hand, Dilthey stressed the inescapability of the historian's own historicity, his situatedness in the here and now; after Dilthey no progression in hermeneutics was to be made without taking into account relativism and historicism. On the other hand, Dilthey's system still addressed the problems of the post-Kantian aporia. Inevitably Dilthey followed the other leading figures of the modern period in founding his system on the Kantian intermediate consciousness. Paul Ricoeur explains, "It is not without interest to recall why Dilthey proceeded as he did. He posed the problematic of the human science on the basis of a Kantian argument. The knowledge of things runs up against an unknown, the thing itself, whereas in the case of the mind there is no thing-in-itself; we ourselves are what the other is." Dilthey, in erecting his system out of that moment when time reflects upon itself as structure, assumed that he had identified two separate entities, the self and the other.

Derrida points out that at this moment phenomenology deconstructs itself through an ontology contradictorily divided between a "naive" teleological ontology of a reality constituting self and a "classical" ontology which still allows the existence of the other. Murray Krieger explains how this contradictory ontology ultimately led to the "celebration of subjective" criticism. Krieger concludes, "Because such critics saw language as an unavoidable mediating element which, based on its principle of differentiation, kept selves and their objects separate, the self-conscious subject had to achieve a breakthrough beyond such separateness, as the literary work faded into the blend of reader and author, reader -- as author." Krieger proceeds to detail how the unresolved subjectivism of Dilthey's position led many critics again to seek more scientific and positivist methods of historical inquiry, this time in the shape of Formalism and Structuralism.

The work of Wilhelm Dilthey, the fullest development of Hegelian hermeneutics prior to Heidegger, represents the richest embodiment of one polar attitude during the modern period. The transitional and eclectic nature of Dilthey's interpretive system prohibits the neat ordering of his descendents into a single critical movement. But one may place them along a continuum ranging from Dilthey's hermeneutic to those schools with which it bears the closest resemblance: phenomenology, structuralism, and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

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Dilthey links himself closely with phenomenology through his championing of the central phenomenological tenet, the theory of intentionality. Indeed, the term "phenomenology" when used in NLH to designate a particular school of criticism usually refers to Dilthey's most ardent followers, the Geneva School of Consciousness Criticism and its near neighbors. The term "phenomenology" will be used in a similar way throughout the present study. However, phenomenology in its broadest sense divides itself into three critical schools: those stemming from Husserl, from Dilthey, and from Heidegger. Husserl's descendents distinguish themselves from Dilthey's in calling for a disinterested description of an aesthetic work as an objective entity. Consequently, Husserlian phenomenological criticism has exerted a major influence on Rene' Wellek and other New Critics but has received scant attention in the pages of NLH. On the other hand, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology distinguishes itself through its belief in the idea of indeterminacy, the theory that the structure and content of a particular aesthetic work are in a process of continual change and thus undescrivable in universal terms. Along a continuum from Dilthey to Heidegger one may then range Jean Starobinski, a leading figure of the Geneva School; E. D. Hirsch, a self-proclaimed champion of Dilthey; and Wolfgang Iser, a leading figure of the Constance School of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics.

Dilthey's theory of structural explanation also aligns his work with recent structuralist developments that regard rules of structure as cybernetically and historically determined. On a continuum from Saussure's belief in universal structural principles to Dilthey's faith in historically determined structures one may range Morton Bloomfield's
All of the above mentioned critics have made frequent contributions to NLH and their work will bear significance in the present study.

**Martin Heidegger and the Postmodern Paradigm**

The seminal work of the postmodern period, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), reflects both a neo-Cartesian and a Hegelian influence. At the same time, it marks an evolution beyond modernist thought. For example, Heidegger, the pupil of Husserl and Dilthey, accepts the phenomenological tenet of intentionality but proceeds beyond his mentors to articulate fully the relativism and subjectivism such a concept implies. In describing what he terms "pre-understanding," Heidegger explains that the unconscious intentional aspect of man projects meaning onto the world: "Interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance -- in a fore-having . . . In every case interpretation is grounded in something we see in advance -- in a fore-sight. It is grounded in something we grasp in advance -- in a fore-conception." Heidegger concludes, "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us." But intentionality also stands as desire behind every human action including that of cognitive reasoning. Understanding merely apprehends the meaning which one has already projected: "In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from


86. Ibid., p. 192.
the former."\(^{87}\) At this point, Dilthey's identification with another becomes impossible; the other has lost its existence. Heidegger founds what NLH editor Ralph Cohen calls the central norm of contemporary criticism, the rebellion against Husserlian reduction, that is, against any attempt to bracket off all presuppositions in order to discern the eternal essence of a work. The work no longer remains the creation of another but of one's intentional self. Such a concept produces many ramifications upon the history of the arts. David Couzens Hoy explains that through Heidegger the postmoderns have acquired "a metaphilosophical belief in the historical character of all discourse, including philosophy itself, and thus in the unnaturalness of epistemology."\(^{88}\) D. W. Robertson expresses the resultant dilemma for the historian: "Actually, we know very little about the past beyond the dubious evidence of our memories which are always colored by the present. What we as students have before us instead of the past itself is a series of monuments, artifacts, and documents existing in the present, which are just as much part of the present as are automobiles, neutrons, or cola beverages. The historian . . . concerns himself with the order and significance of the detritus of the past in the present, not with the past itself, which is unapproachable."\(^{89}\) Robert Weimann expresses the same dilemma in terms of the theatre historian: "The most learned and historically-minded scholar cannot physically become an


Elizabethan; he cannot recreate the Globe or visualize the original production. Even if he conceived of Shakespeare's drama as being enacted in the theatre, he would still be influenced by his own experience of the modern stage, its twentieth-century audience and actors and their social relationships, that are quite different from those which, in Shakespeare's Globe, then constituted part of the play's meaning. 

Furthermore, the lack of an objective hinge for critical estimation calls a halt to critical debate over a work's meaning. Radical intentionality implies radical pluralism; radical relativism silences critical discussion. George Steiner explains: "The critic is an activist of apprehension. His demarcation, his 'pacing' of the elucidative distance between himself and the 'text-object' is operative, instrumental, functional. Operation, instrumentality, or function are not, cannot be indifferent. Indifference does not act." Steiner concludes that since every act of perception stems from an intentional and relativistic cut into the stream of existence, "No critical ruling can be refuted. Action knows only reaction and counteraction, not refutation."

Heidegger also assimilates thoughts akin to those of the structuralists. Heidegger's concept of language as socially predetermined and unconscious parallels Saussure's concept of \textit{langue}.


\textsuperscript{91} George Steiner, "'Critic'/'Reader',' \textit{New Literary History}, 10 (Spring 1979), 424.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 426.
In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes, "Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding. The intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriate interpretation of it."\(^9\) In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes, "words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are."\(^9\) Heidegger concludes that the unconscious, socially determinate, and all-pervasive character of language prevents individual innovative perceptions from occurring. Heidegger writes: "everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection . . . to Others. It itself is not; its Being has been taken away By the Others."\(^9\) Heidegger reaches the same conclusion as the critical structuralists, that insofar as socially adopted methods of inquiry prevent innovative insight, they must be overcome. Ricoeur notes that Heidegger's "explication will add nothing to the methodology of the human sciences; rather it will dig beneath this methodology in order to lay bare its foundations."\(^9\)

Heidegger extends the postulates of modern thought to their inevitable and ineluctable impasse. In Heidegger, man becomes at once a slave to social determinism and the victim of radical subjectivity.

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However, while Heidegger accepts the modern exploration of the intermediate domain, he also provides a bridge beyond the modern impasse to the other two domains of the Kantian universe. Heidegger accepts Dilthey's explanation of the individual impulse to language, of the free drive to structural understanding, of the primordial priority of parole to langue. Upon this "rift" in man, upon the hermeneutic circularity between man's ontological freedom and the socially determined pre-understanding of the structural universe, Heidegger proceeds to erect his hermeneutic system. And in the passage from Being and Time which gives birth to the postmodern technique of interpretation, Heidegger insists that the free suspension of categorical judgments may resurrect the noumenal domain:

In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of things themselves.

In Heidegger's hermeneutics, truth results from the frustration of man's desire to use the world as a depository (the "ready-to-hand") for predetermined ideas to order. Heidegger writes, "when something ready-to-hand is found missing, though its everyday presence . . . has been so obvious that we have never taken any notice of it, this makes a break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection discovers emptiness, and now sees for the first time what the missing article was ready-to-hand with, and what it was

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ready-to-hand for." For Heidegger and for the postmoderns, truth refers to a suspension of judgment, to a rupture in one's projection of meaning. Truth results from the disappointment of expectations and creates an openness which may then be filled with the wonder of new meaning. Heidegger asserts what he deems the moral imperative of the ontologically free rational man, the doing of "violence to language". Heidegger explains, "Being thus demands that any ontological Interpretation which sets itself the goal of exhibiting the phenomena in their primordiality, should capture the Being of this entity, in spite of this entity's own tendency to cover things up. Existential analysis, therefore, constantly has the character of doing violence . . . whether to the claims of everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquillized obviousness." This principle becomes the root of postmodern "methodology." Cohen explains the importance of "violence" in postmodern criticism and history: "As a hypothesis underlying every textual analysis, including its own, it provides a basis for finding a different example of contradiction-making in every text."

Truth as a moment of violence against critical presuppositions feeds on a plurality of critical methods. And truth as the active rupture of social language continually changes its nature along with the constant evolution of language. Truth in its constant opposition to the

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presuppositions of the here and now assumes a strictly temporal dimension. And since truth is the function of art, the work of art can never by empirically or methodically examined and explained. The work of art, its reception and its truth, remain in a constant flux of change.

Postmodernism may be characterized by an overall belief in radical relativism and radical historicism; by a concept of truth as auto-critique; by a plurality of critical methods, each sacrificed to the sundering power of truth; and by the search for each work's "negativity," for the work of art as "other," for those factors which negate one's initial approach and reception of a work. Postmodernism as a "critique of false consciousness" operates within a strongly ethical dimension. The postmoderns identify reality with interpretive method and stress the moral demand to build a more humane interpretive reality for the future, to erect a future world which respects the "fullness of language." Hayden White notes:

Modern interpretation thrives as much on the question, 'Who shall have the authority to determine what is a proper question to put to a text?' as it does on the question, 'What does this text mean?' In the deliberative disciplines especially, every claim to knowledge is also a claim to power. And interpretation has as much to do with establishing the legitimacy of a particular exercise of interpretive power as it does with the establishment of the validity of a given interpretation of a text.

And the differing postmodern stances on the ethics of interpretation divide the period into its two polar stances, the French poststructuralism and the German hermeneutics.

Derrida and Deconstruction

By itself the work of Martin Heidegger could not have grounded postmodern ethical criticism. While Heidegger's teleological vision transformed criticism from applied methodology to free moral action, Heidegger concerned himself primarily with the ontological base of knowledge rather than with interpretation's socio-ethical ramifications. While Heidegger supplied postmodern criticism with its concept of interpretation through methodological rupture, he provided few suggestions on how to handle rupture's aftermath.

Rather the ethical impulse toward postmodernism evolved from the failure of modern criticism. And the two prototypical stances of postmodern aesthetics responded directly to the problems plaguing their respective ancestors. On the one hand, the critical structuralists' inability to derive an ideologically uncontaminated methodology resulted in their recognition of the mutual exclusiveness between individual freedom and social langue. Consequently, poststructuralist critics placed their highest moral value on the freedom to be found outside the confines of language. On the other hand, the ultimately self-enclosed subjective position of Dilthey fostered in the hermeneuticist a renewed desire for individual consummation in the communal unconscious. Consequently, contemporary hermeneuticists placed their highest moral value on tradition and the linguistic community. The distinction between the two polar postmodern positions may be perceived clearly in the different degrees of worth accorded by each to human freedom, to social heritage, and to historical study.

The poststructuralist drive for linguistically unfettered freedom manifests itself in the central philosophical belief, "the metaphysics
of absence." In opposition to epistemologically based "metaphysics of presence," the metaphysics of absence stems from a belief that the ineffable spirit of man defies confinement in any linguistic assertion, that truth emerges from the violent silencing of language.

And in order to silence language, the poststructuralists attempt to "deconstruct" the text, to expose language in itself as incapable of communication. Derrida's chief strategy for deconstruction results from a blend of Saussurian *langue* and phenomenological intentionality. Derrida points out that any statement as a new utterance, as a new projection of meaning, "effaces" its origins in *langue*; else it could not come into existence as something new. At the same time, it points toward its future fulfillment as another's interpreted material. For example, Derrida coins the word, "differance." "Differance" seems to be comprehensible because of one's familiarity with its contrasting term, "difference;" *parole* promises to make sense because of one's familiarity with *langue*; the present promises to fulfill past expectations. However, "differance" defers interpretation until further grounds for understanding have been laid. Derrida never lays these grounds. Rather by leaving "differance" uninterpretable, Derrida suggests that once an utterance as something new has servered itself from *langue* no restrictions remain on its potential for meaning. A word can mean anything one wishes it to mean; meaning is a question not of language but of desire. Language then contains no meaning giving "center" and can be reduced to its pure state of nonsignificance. Jacques Ehrmann, another poststructuralist, writes, "Meaning is organized within non-meaning; it does not take its place. It neither covers over nor obliterates it . . . Therefore, since non-meaning does not efface itself
as loss, as flight; to attempt to arrest it is to allow it to escape; but neither does releasing it allow us to grasp it."\textsuperscript{102}

Derrida and the poststructuralists belabor this seemingly obvious point because they view the myth of a linguistic center as the great debilitating alibi of Western man. Derrida implies that the concept of a linguistic center results from man's attempts to anaesthetize himself against the trauma of an ever fluctuating reality: "The concept of a centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset."\textsuperscript{103} But this anaesthetization, this "reification," denies man the wonder of an amorphous, undefinable universe. Consequently, through a totalization of the Heideggerian suspension of judgment, poststructuralism has set itself the task of deconstructing, of "decentering," of reducing the power of language to convey meaning and it attempts to do so through spotting self-contradictory elements in the text.

As Ihab Hassan notes, poststructuralism dominated the American new theoretical scene during the late 1970's and early 1980's,\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102}Jacques Ehrmann, "The Death of Literature," \textit{New Literary History}, 3 (Autumn 1971), 44.


providing the context for NLH. However, NLH cannot be classified along with Glyph, Yale French Studies, and Dia-Critics as a predominantly poststructuralist journal. For the poststructuralists view the historical study of art as merely another manifestation of ordering through metaphysical presence and thus as suitable fodder for deconstruction. Ehrmann writes: "The 'meaning of history'... is therefore only a myth to which we have clung -- perhaps out of our weakness and cowardice or of some visceral desire to believe that life has a foundation that could justify it, out of some obscure need to orient ourselves and thereby attempt to protect ourselves from what our society calls madness."\(^{105}\) However deconstruction as the non-science of the Heideggerian moment of rupture plays a minor but essential part in the new history of the arts. And NLH has published articles by such poststructuralists as Jacques Derrida, Jacques Ehrmann, Paul de Mann, Harold Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller. The present study will make occasional allusions to them.

**Gadamer and Contemporary Hermeneutics**

Derrida's postmodern de-centering of language bears only minor relevance to contemporary hermeneuticians. As early as the turn of the twentieth century Dilthey had already de-centered language for hermeneuticians. He did so by negating what remains a central tenet of the poststructuralists, that parole stands in front of langue as individual manifestation. Instead Dilthey had asserted a central principle of hermeneutics, that human desire stands behind language and utilizes it to make sense of the world. Despite a common ancestry in

the work of Martin Heidegger, hermeneuticians find poststructuralism and its metaphysics of absence philosophically untenable. Deconstruction operates from a stance outside the deterministic confines of language, a stance that hermeneuticians cannot envision. In the seminal work of contemporary hermeneutics, *Truth and Method* (1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, "we cannot see a linguistic world from above ... There is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could itself become an object." Gadamer concludes, "Being that can be understood is language." Furthermore, the poststructuralist position entails a deliberate relishing of the present moment. Herbert Blau explains: "So much of modern thought -- disturbed by a world impeded (if not made) by words -- wants to free language for use now, as if names were (or should be) only referrable to present things. That is why there has been so much experimenting with the denial of names and the refusal of words, as if now is (or should be) all the reality there is." However, Gadamer accepting the phenomenological concept of intentionality, cannot conceive of a presuppositionless present, that is, a present which does not entail the past. Gadamer views the inescapable existence of language as the voice of tradition, of the historical community, of the projection of past prejudices into the present: "If every language represents a view of the world, it is this primarily not as a particular type of language (in

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107. Ibid., 432.
the way philologists see it), but because of what is said or handed down in this language.\textsuperscript{109} Moreover, since one's intentional expectations, one's "horizon of understanding," exist in a perpetual state of flux, language and tradition move with one into the future: "The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past ... which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion."\textsuperscript{110} This is not to say that Gadamer denies the Heideggerian interpretive process whereby the obstruction of the present moment ruptures methodical consciousness; but Gadamer does not believe that the present moment can be prolonged beyond the imperceptible moment of rupture.

Gadamer consequently disagrees with Derrida over the derivation of rupture. For Derrida rupture occurs through a willful existential wrestling of freedom from social langue; for Gadamer, it occurs naturally through what he terms "the fusion of horizons." Gadamer writes, "Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused."\textsuperscript{111} Gadamer's fusion of horizons resembles Dilthey's understanding of the "I" through the "Thou": "It not only lets those prejudices that are of a particular and limited nature die away, but causes those that bring about genuine understanding to emerge as such. It is only this temporal


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 271

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 258.
distance that can solve the really critical question of hermeneutics, namely of distinguishing the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones by which we misunderstand." However, the influence of Heidegger's radical relativism produces a subtle but profound difference between Dilthey's hermeneutic and Gadamer's. On the one hand, Dilthey's historicism separates the past from the present life world. On the other hand, contemporary hermeneuticists wonder if a totally separable past would be understandable at all. And Gadamer explains that, since the past is not totally unintelligible, much of the past must be retained in the evolution of tradition. Gadamer concludes: "Time is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of customs and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us."

For Gadamer what can be understood of past tradition remains still alive within us and the goal of historical research is not so much to reveal what we already share with and thus understand about the past but to confront us with what we do not understand, what remains unintelligible. History, in uncovering the pastness of the past, in uncovering its "otherness," its "alterity," produces a rupture in our present horizon, a disappointment of expectations, and thus "brings something new into the language." Gadamer writes: "a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to a text's newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither


113 Ibid., pp. 264-65.
'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices." However, the "alterity" of the past, its newness, its unintelligibility, does not openly present itself. Hermeneuticist Frederic Will explains: "How could we determine when the past has become unintelligible? At what point would we know that unintelligibility had set in? At no point. When we reached such a point we would already be unable to recognize it as the beginning of unintelligibility. Unintelligibility is by definition unrecognizable." One can never surprise the past into revealing its otherness. As Gadamer asserts, "Restoration, if made central in hermeneutics, is no less absurd than all effort to restore and revive life gone forever." Rather the hermeneutic historian seeks not the reconstruction of past realities, at least he does not hope to establish them as facts, but instead seeks to work out his present prejudices. Gunther Buck, a disciple of Gadamer, explains that in interpretive history, "I not only discover something about an object, but primarily something about myself . . . To go back 'behind' an experience-horizon and push through it, as it were, is therefore, more accurately speaking, to unfold its implications, which previously, so long as it was still

naively in force, had remained unnoticed." Gadamer comments that in interpretive history, "we do not remain what we were." Jerome McGann summarizes the effect of hermeneutics upon historical criticism: "in attempting to specify historical distinctions, we set a gulf between our past and our present. It is this gulf which enables us to judge and criticize the past, but it is equally this gulf which enables the past — so rich in its achievements — to judge and criticize us."

In his exposition of the critico-historical principles behind the foundation of NLH, Ralph Cohen summarizes the effect of hermeneutics upon recent literary scholarship:

In taking account of the responses of different readers, the critics inevitably find themselves writing literary history. They inherit the tripartite division of literary study — literary theory, literary criticism, literary history — in which theory is 'the study of principles of literature, its categories, criteria and the like, while studies of concrete works of art are either literary criticism (primarily static in approach) or literary history . . . Literary criticism, according to this view, is the study of literature as a simultaneous order, whereas literary history is a study of a series of works arranged in chronological order as integral parts of the literary process. But most critics . . . resist the idea of literature as a 'simultaneous order' because it overlooks the complex relation between a present reader and past works, especially the pastness of the past. 'Simultaneity' draws attention to those aspects of a work that exist for us, not those which had existence for other, earlier readers, and to this extent the 'work' is not properly distinguished from a particular historical interpretation of it. The critics also resist the vagueness of a

concept such as 'historical process'; they argue that the historical ordering of works involves a conceptual hypothesis, and it is to the unfolding of these hypotheses that they address themselves.120

**New Literary History** may then be regarded as fundamentally a hermeneutically based journal. And the **NLH** writers who figure predominantly in this present study all swear allegiance to the hermeneutic grounds laid by Gadamer. These writers include Hans Robert Jauss, Fredric Jameson, Wolfgang Iser, Hayden White, Rainer Warning, and Paul Ricoeur.

**New Literary History and the Postmodern Paradigm**

**New Literary History** takes as its central tenet Gadamer's teleological pragmatization of Dilthey's interpretive system. However, Gadamer's work cannot suffice by itself as the **NLH** paradigm. For although Gadamer lays the grounds for the continuing of historical research in the wake of modernist positivism, he does not concern himself with creating a pluralistic model that would co-ordinate the diverse forms of contemporary criticism and history manifested in the pages of **NLH**. On the other hand, Paul Ricoeur and Fredric Jameson have shown that Gadamer's work implies the possibility of such a pluralistic paradigm.121

The differences between hermeneutic and objectivist pluralism stem from Gadamer's redefinition of time. The neo-Kantian aesthetic holds a Platonic belief in the fixed idea of a work which allows a series of sectional individual interpretations, each valid in its own right. And


in neo-Aristetelian aesthetics, theory exists as the universal truth informing the individual practice of criticism and literary history. On the other hand, hermeneutics stresses the temporality of all visions and collapses theory and practice into the same category as intentional praxis. The postmodern writers for NLH exist in a relativistic world without timeless works of art, without universal critical or historical principles, and without a "naive" acceptance of their own methodology as eternally valid. In NLH, historical praxis exists as an individualistic process of seeing; criticism as "a love letter to oneself." In the postmodern period, radical relativism implies radical pluralism.

Gadamer and his disciples believe in a communal ethic and posit a commonly agreed upon heuristic model of the interpretive process. Again, however the tripartite model of the hermeneuticists differs widely from the essentially dualistic model of the neo-Kantians. The neo-Kantian tradition continues the neo-classic dichotomy which divides the world into subject and object, perceiver and perceived, phenomenon and noumenon, time and space. Gadamer's hermeneutic reasserts the three-tiered Kantian system as a fully temporal universe. In Gadamer, the domains of phenomenal consciousness, noumenal reality, and divine interdict become transformed respectively into the moments of the intentional projection of past expectations, the ruptured present, and the spiritually refined future. And Gadamer asserts the fully realizable nature of this teleological universe.

A particular aspect of criticism then dominates each of these three domains. The initial domain, that of the intentional projection of the

past, manifests itself in the application of acquired methodology. Ricoeur explains that at this initial stage of approaching a text, phenomenology and structuralism, the "hermeneutics of belief" and the "counterhermeneutics of suspicion," hold sway not as irreconcilable forms of interpretation but as Dilthey's dialectically contrasting poles, understanding and explanation. Ricoeur writes, "The first time, understanding will be a naive grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole. The second time, comprehension will be a sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures." However, in Gadamer's hermeneutics the initial level of interpretation, that of structural projection, will always keep itself open to the second level of understanding, that of ruptural truth; one will always remain aware of the relativity of one's own position. On this second interpretive level, Heidegger's work and its amplifications in Derrida constitute the metatheoretical level of the NLH paradigm. Here certain principles arise to control all practical applications of historical method: All applications of methodology possess an immanent bias and the goal of any study in the humanities is to manifest those erroneous and harmful prejudices that help to ground such a bias. Truth is to be regarded as temporally determined and manifests itself as the negation of one's expectations. Truth lies not in the readily understood but in the unintelligible. Historical reality, always a matter of linguistics and interpretive processes, cannot be reconstructed. History aims at revealing the present to itself and thereby at clearing an opening for

the refinement of the future. Error in historical research results not from a failure to recognize and methodically interpret all the facts but from the unrelenting desire to do so.

Finally, the third interpretive level concerns the problem of ethical criticism. At this point, the writers for NLH sever themselves completely from structuralism and its descendents. NLH supports the concept of an international, interdisciplinary language community. The major writers for NLH view their vocation as part of a communal process of replenishing the human spirit.
CHAPTER II

The Ontology of Audience Response

In a period which identifies history with the reconstruction of past interpretive processes, the work of the historian of the arts naturally commences with the construction of a heuristic model of audience perception. For the postmodern historian, this model consists of three distinct but integral interpretive moments: the initial projection of past expectations, the ruptural present, and the handling of ruptural aftermath. The discussion of these three moments has given rise to three central issues in postmodern criticism: respectively, the nature of artistic language, the nature of metaphor, and the nature of artistic closure and determinacy. This chapter will examine the central stances taken on these issues by the hermeneutic writers for NLH. In doing so, this chapter defines the ontological nature of the aesthetic response detailed in the pages of NLH.

Speech Act Theory and the Initial Aesthetic Response

The majority of the writers for NLH regard reality as a matter of interpretation and interpretation as a matter of linguistics. Consequently their definition of art and of the aesthetic response begins with an investigation into the nature of artistic language. The investigation divides itself into two polar positions, that of the structuralists and that of the postmoderns; respectively, that of the argument for art as constituted by a special "poetic language" and that of the argument for art as merely a deviation from everyday "practical language."

The debate between the two positions concerning artistic language cannot be resolved on the purely aesthetic level, since the issue at
stake intertwines itself with the question of the nature of human cognitive processes and consequently with the essential paradigmatic problem of epistemological certainty. On this level, the distinction between the two aesthetic visions results from their differences in opinion concerning the relationship of *langue* and *parole*.

The structuralist concept of art as a special "poetic language" holds that in the work of art the ostensive, referential power of language is reduced in order that the work's essential structural principles may be more clearly manifested. The concrete elements of a work become subservient to the expression of a universal aesthetic idea; the structural idea of a work of art becomes more important than the content or material used to express that idea. The concept of the work of art as the embodiment of a special "poetic language" consequently entails two fundamental postulates alien to the phenomenologist and the hermeneutician. First, the structuralist regards language as a centered phenomenon with its own inherent capacity to control the manufacture of meaning. Correspondingly, the structuralists adhere to the neo-classical subject-object dichotomy whereby any statement, be it informative or poetic, is received by an initially passive perceiver. For the structuralist, language is an object which directly communicates its message. Desire and innovation are held within the confines of language; *parole* stands in front of *langue*.

The opposing hermeneutic position stems from a contrary placement of desire behind structure. The conception of the work of art as merely a deviation from "practical language" replaces the primordial priority of *langue* with that of desirous intentionality, the meaning bestowing rules of language with the principles of live discourse, and the
semantic control exerted by structural syntax with that constituted by communicative context. This counter-aesthetic then roots itself in a vision of language as a desirous action rather than as an atomistic assertion and it replaces the dominance of structuralist linguistics with a situation-based speech act theory.

Speech act theory, an attempt to de-center linguistics by transferring the central focus away from formal linguistic principles to "rule-governed forms of behavior,"¹ has become a major branch of contemporary linguistic study and a crucial adjunct to hermeneutic aesthetics. First developed and popularized by John L. Austin in How To Do Things with Words (1962), speech act theory was formulated in opposition to the positivist "obsession with true and false as categories which, along with the category, meaningless, should neatly embrace all utterances."² Instead Austin contends that the meaning of a statement is as much controlled by the psychological-situational context in which it is uttered as it is by the formal syntactical, semantic and grammatical principles of language. In order to justify this assertion, Austin defines two aspects of all utterances, the performative and the constative, a division familiar to any student of the Stanislavsky method of acting between what a statement does and what a statement asserts, between language as action and language as declaration.

Austin's distinction between the active performative aspect of an utterance and its static constative reflection of langue has become a central principle for contemporary aesthetics, both the modern and the postmodern variety. For example, E. D. Hirsch reflects this distinction in his separation of artistic significance and artistic meaning: "The important feature of meaning as distinct from significance is that meaning is the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter. An interpreted text is always taken to represent something, but that something can always be related to something else . . . Meaning is what an interpreter actualizes from a text; significance is that actual speaking as heard in a chosen and variable context of the interpreter's experiential world." And postmodern hermeneuticist Paul Ricoeur parallels this distinction in his separation of discourse and meaning: "First, all discourse occurs as an event; it is the opposite of language as 'langue,' code, or system and as an event, it has an instantaneous existence, it appears and disappears. But at the same time -- here lies the paradox -- it can be identified and reidentified as the same; this sameness is what we call, in the broad sense, its meaning." Ricoeur adds: "the aim of language is double: the aim of an ideal sense or meaning (that is, not belonging to the physical or psychic world) and the aim of reference. If meaning can be called inexistent, insofar as

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It is a pure object of thought, it is the reference . . . which roots our words and sentences in reality."^5

This distinction between the performative and constative characteristics of all utterances grounds contemporary speech act theory. However, a division has occurred within the theory's advocates. The strict followers of Austin and Searle remain adherents to the neo-classical subject-object dichotomy, believing that the rules governing both the performative and the constative aspects of an utterance may be perceived, codified, and classified. And Austin and Searle merely repeat on a social structural level the type of transcendental thought practiced by Saussure on the formal linguistic level. Jonathan Culler notes, "As the founder of speech act theory, Austin is, in fact, repeating at another level (though less explicitly) the crucial move made by Saussure: to account for signifying events (parole) one attempts to describe the system that made them possible."^6 Indeed, Austin, aware of the infinite regression and relativism implicit in any concept of a temporal based communication sans rigid codification, attempted to ground his speech act theory through the establishment of certain structural "felicity conditions" necessary for communication to occur.^7 These conditions are as follows: an accepted conventional procedure must lead to a


conventionally accepted effect; the participants in the speech act must be able to fulfill the full requirements of their roles; the full conventional procedure must be properly executed. These three conditions enable a speech act to take place. Two other conditions allow its abuse to be detected: the participants must possess the appropriate conventional attitudes and must be sincere about them.

However, in perhaps the most significant debate to occur within contemporary criticism, Jacques Derrida, through the aid of the phenomenological concept of intentionality, argued forcefully against John Searle in order to prove Austin's felicity conditions fallacious. Derrida's central argument parallels Dilthey's assertion concerning the impossibility of knowing or defining the life force. Derrida explains that Austin's felicity conditions demand full coincidence between one's intentional attitudes and the conditions that constitute any situation. However, to accept such a total coincidence between man's intentional self and his present situation means the reduction of man to a totally present, nonthinking entity; it would again strip man of his unconscious intentional desire and make him a slave to the linguistic system. Derrida writes, "The conscious presence of speakers or receivers participating in the accomplishment of a performative, their conscious and intentional presence in the totality of the operation, implies teleologically that no residue reste escapes the present totalization." Derrida concludes that Austin and Searle's formulation of speech act theory cannot attain validity because the human intention "animating the utterance will never be through and

through present to itself and to its content."  

Paul de Man parallels Derrida's argument against Austin's speech act theory, again capitalizing upon the unconscious aspect of human intentionality. De Man explains that since the mind does not "know whether it is doing or not doing something, then there are considerable grounds for suspicion that it does not know what it is doing."  

The poststructuralist attack against Austin's speech act theory has produced wide ramifications upon all schools of modern and postmodern thought. Most importantly for the present study, the poststructuralist attack upon Austin and Searle freed speech act theory from its structuralist deterministic confines and opened it for use as grounds for a hermeneutic aesthetic. The kernel of speech act theory, the influence of context upon the perception of meaning, a concept similar to the hermeneutic concept of tradition, remained intact despite Derrida's onslaught. As Culler notes, what the poststructuralist attack on speech act theory put in question was not the contextual determination of performative effectiveness "but the possibility of mastering the domain of speech acts by exhaustively specifying the contextual determinants."  

Paul Ricoeur explains how the hermeneutic aesthetic borrowed significant facets of speech act theory without subscribing to Austin's structuralist amplifications. Ricoeur notes the first facet:  

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"Discourse is always realized temporally and in a present, whereas the language system is virtual and outside of time." This trait, the fundamental principle of speech act theory, allows for the free movement in time of constitutive linguistic rules and has enabled speech act theory to secure a firm place in the hermeneutic aesthetic.

Ricoeur notes the second trait: "Whereas language lacks a subject -- in the sense that the question 'Who is speaking?' does not apply at its level -- discourse refers to its speaker by means of a complex set of indicators." The principle of self-referentiality corresponds to Austin's definition of the "illocutionary force" of language: the "performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something."

The third trait Ricoeur notes corresponds to his and Hirsch's definition of communicative meaning: "Whereas the signs in language refer only to other signs within the same system, and whereas language therefore lacks a world just as it lacks temporality and subjectivity, discourse is always about something. It is in discourse that the symbolic function of language is actualized." The propositional power of language corresponds to Austin's definition of "locutionary force," "the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words

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13 Ibid.
in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning' in the favorite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference."\(^{16}\)

Finally, Ricoeur notes that discourse is always addressed to a particular audience: "Whereas language is only the condition for communication, for which it provides the codes, it is in discourse that all messages are exchanged. In this sense, discourse alone has not only a world, but an other -- another person, an interlocutor to whom it is addressed."\(^{17}\) This extensive aspect of communicative language corresponds to Austin's definition of "perlocutionary force:" "the achieving of certain effects by saying something."\(^{18}\)

Together the regulative rules governing the illocutionary, locutionary, and perlocutionary forces of a language comprise the hermeneutic model of practical everyday communication. And the hermeneutic aesthetician then seeks to define the peculiar communicative power of art by noting its deviations from this communicative mode. Wolfgang Iser explains, "experience of the text is aesthetic insofar as the recipient produces the object under conditions that do not or need not correspond to his habitual disposition."\(^{19}\) The hermeneuticists note the primary aesthetic deviation as distanciation, the temporal

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\(^{18}\) J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962), p. 120.

fixation of discourse. This fixation results in a lowering of contextual restraints as the work's locutionary meaning transcends the restrictions of the here and now. Richard Ohmann explains, "Literary works are discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended. If you like, they are acts without consequences of the usual sort, sayings liberated from the usual burden of social bond and responsibility."20 Barbara Hernstein Smith defines the fictive nature of art in a similar fashion: "when we interpret a natural utterance, we seek to ascertain its real historical determinants, the context that did in fact occasion the occurrence and form. However complex and elusive that context, it is nevertheless historically determinate and particular. The context of a fictive utterance, however, is historically indeterminate."21 And Herbert Blau uses similar words to describe the nature of theatre art: "We may think of Iago as an avatar of difference, an undoubted presence leaving origins behind. The scene is now familiar, slipped, and loosed; yet is there not something within us, as if another Troilus, that doesn't want to believe it? What will hold still, for all the seeming? That's the problem to which we keep returning to in the theatre."22

At this point it should be stressed that speech act theory and the hermeneutic aesthetic based upon it do not restrict themselves to verbal communication but include all other forms of language as well. For example, Paul Ricoeur states that action may be regarded as a text


insofar as it can be seen as a variation upon a prototypical model, that is, insofar as one can project the illocutionary intention behind it and the perlocutionary effect at which it is aimed. Ricoeur writes, "A typology of action, following the model of illocutionary acts, is therefore possible. Not only a typology, but a criteriology, inasmuch as each type implies rules, more precisely 'constitutive rules' which according to Searle . . . allow the construction of 'ideal models'."\(^{23}\)

And in the first NLH article to explore an aesthetic based upon speech act theory Barbara Hernstein Smith uses Hamlet's abuse of Opelia as one of her primary examples. Writes Hernstein Smith, "To understand why Hamlet abuses Ophelia, the reader must infer from, on the one hand, the linguistic structure of the play and, on the other hand, everything he knows about the world of man and the relation of their acts to their situations and motives, a plausible set of motives and situations for that act."\(^{24}\) Here the linguistic structure of the play, its intent, corresponds to the play's perlocutionary force; the motives of the characters, its illocutionary force. Illocutionary force may also be extended to the motives of the playwright in choosing a particular action over another. However, it should be stressed that each communicative action or object (such as a costume, an expressive lighting effect, or a theatre set) constitutes only a segment of the entire locutionary text of a production. Barbara Hernstein Smith explains this concept in terms of the novel: "The essential fictiveness


of novels, however, as of all literary artworks, is not to be discovered in the unreality of the characters, objects, and events alluded to, but in the unreality of the alludings themselves. In other words, in a novel or tale, it is the act of reporting events, the act of describing persons and referring to places, that is fictive. 25 Although the individual action remains confined to its position in the entire production's locutionary structure, the audience can no longer rely upon everyday contextual clues in determining the assertion made by the production as a whole. And to the degree to which the author or director's illocutionary intentions and perlocutionary aims remain undiminished, the theatrical production loses its artistic stature and encroaches on the rhetorical and propagandistic. The hermeneuticist regards the theatrical production as a tabula rasa upon which the audience is initially forced to write its own interpretation. A play's significance emerges from the audience's projected interpretation. The initial assertion of a work of art becomes the product of the mind of the beholder.

However, the loss of everyday contextual determinacy need not imply a poststructuralist vision of the total indeterminacy of the art work. Nor need it imply a perspective of the art work as a totally free floating structure upon which the individual audience member is at liberty to impose any interpretation he desires. Charles Altieri explains that such a subjective stance, placing the interpreter totally outside the text's embodiment of language, manifests an anti-hermeneutic, positivist slant which robs language of its

unconscious deterministic nature and reduces it to an object that can be stood outside of, that can be freely and consciously manipulated to express different things. Rather Altieri opposes the poststructuralist subjectivist concept of aesthetic understanding with the objective hermeneutic position. Objective here is to be understood in light of its definition by Gadamer and Kuhn: "objectivity is less an abstract property of certain kinds of things than a property of certain procedures within an established model of inquiry. Objectivity is simply the possibility of reaching agreement among inquiries or descriptions of a phenomenon."26 The hermeneuticists view the audience's initial response to an art work as essentially objective through their acceptance of the phenomenological concept of the social structuration of individual intentionality. One's initial aesthetic response remains contextually determined by one's being historically situated in a particular "interpretive community." Stanley Fish, one of the first to develop the concept of interpretive communities, explains, "If the speakers of a language share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalized, understanding will, in some sense, be uniform; that is, it will proceed in terms of the system of rules all speakers share . . . they will be constraints on the range, and even the direction, of response; they will make response, to some extent, predictable and normative."27 In a similar vein, Fredric Jameson writes, "we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the

always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations or -- if the text is brand-new, through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive methods." And Wolfgang Iser argues that "Literary texts collect and store elements from many other texts, which may themselves be literary or may -- as 'contexts' -- reflect social norms and conventions. The selections from texts and contexts lays down the direction from which the world is to be approached through the literary texts in question." Furthermore, the phenomenologists and the hermeneuticists agree that the "objectivity" of an audience's intersubjective aesthetic response extends from the smallest semantic component to the full structural design of a work.

In addition to assuring a certain degree of intersubjective uniformity in an audience's aesthetic response, the concept of an interpretive community also allows the artist a certain degree of control over the reception of his artistic statement by those with whom he shares a common tradition. Hans Robert Jauss writes, "The work does not exist without its effect; the effect presupposes reception, and in turn the audience's judgment conditions the author's production."  

27 Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge: Harvard, 1980), p. 11.
Jauss further points out that the artist can ignore his connections with tradition only at the risk of becoming incomprehensible, Jauss explains:

A literary work, even if it seems now, does not appear as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its 'beginning' arouses expectations for the 'middle and end', which can then be continued intact, changed, re-oriented, or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of genre or type of text.

Thus the lowering of practical illocutionary and perlocutionary restraints on communication cannot be viewed as necessitating a poststructuralist conclusion regarding either the total indeterminacy of a text or the individual audience member's right to foster his own private, subjective interpretation of a work. For the artist and his collective audience as participants in a common interpretive tradition may be regarded as co-partners in the creation of an aesthetic experience. However in the interaction between the artist and his audience, the latter always retains the upper hand. For just as the concept of phenomenological intentionality implies that all perception flows from the projection of past expectations, so the hermeneutic version of speech act theory asserts that the aesthetic lowering of everyday contextual restraints unleashes a more fervently creative pre-understanding. Iser explains that "As what is meant can never be totally translated into what is said, the utterance is bound to contain implications, which in turn necessitate interpretation. Indeed, there never would be any dyadic interaction if the speech act did not give

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rise to indeterminancies that needed to be resolved." Consequently, Iser argues that since every intentional projection "involves certain heuristic decisions" which "cannot be equated with the literary text, but simply opens up a means of access to it," intentional pre-understanding of a text "always attempts to subjugate fictional discourse to existing theoretical frameworks."  

However, the aesthetic lowering of contextual restraints not only evokes a more forceful intentional projection of significance but causes an audience to reflect upon their own intentional structures. Wolfgang Iser explains that when norms are removed from the "practical" world to become part of a work of art, "They are set in a new context which changes their function, insofar as they no longer act as social regulations but as the subject of discussion which, more often than not, ends in a questioning rather than a confirmation of their validity."  

The freer the individual audience member becomes in the projection of his own individual interpretation, the greater becomes his need to check the validity of his interpretations against the structural base on which it depends. Iser explains this relationship between the individual interpretation and the intersubjective locutionary structure in terms of connotation and denotation. He writes that aesthetic "signs fulfill

their function to the degree in which their relatedness to identifiable objects begins to fade or is even blotted out. For now something has to be imagined which the signs have not denoted — though it will be preconditioned by what they do denote. Thus the reader is compelled to transform a denotation into a connotation.  

Iser concludes, "the reader's communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates signifieds which he then must continually modify." For example, a more sophisticated member of an eighteenth century audience may be taken with a private sense of revulsion at the peculiar horrors demonstrated in the denoument of Shakespeare's King Lear. Being so moved, he will naturally be prompted to reflect upon whether his response manifests his own particular idiosyncrasies or whether such a response is well warranted by a play or production that has exceeded the logical protocol of a particular conventional aesthetic structure, i.e. that of tragedy. This path of reflection then necessarily entails an investigation of the relationship between the audience's collective intentional concept of tragedy and its embodiment within Shakespeare's play. However, it should be stressed that such a cognitive exploration need not have occurred consciously. Rather it would have transpired most frequently on the unconscious level as one's intentional expectations (e.g. those of King Lear as a tragedy, of the structure of reality as reflected in tragedy and in King Lear's embodiment of tragedy, and of oneself as a member of a collective audience) were either negated or fulfilled. Instantaneously, the

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37 Ibid.
aesthetic experience evokes reflection upon the langue of conventional structural principles and upon the parole of the art work as the embodiment of those principles.

Such a concept of the aesthetic experience resembles closely the structuralist idea of overdetermination formulated by Roman Jakobson, the Russian formalist. Jakobson's classic statement of this principle reads: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." Jakobson here asserts that the art work, existing in a situation where pragmatic implications have been reduced, shifts its focus from the referential power of signs to their structural interrelationships. In the work of art form comes to dominate over referential content and to a great degree itself constitutes aesthetic content. But the close similarity between the hermeneutic concept of distanciation and the structuralist concept of overdetermination need not lead to structuralist Morton Bloomfield's conclusion: "If by poetic language we mean language used for poetic purposes or a special dialect used in the writing of poetry or other literature, it makes no difference in most cases for poetic analysis. It makes a metaphysical but not much of a literary critical difference." Bloomfield's assertion ignores the postmodern union of critical inquiry with metaphysical vision as well as the resultant differences in the epistemological status of the work of art in the structuralist and postmodern world views. Also the epistemological

difference between the structuralist and the hermeneutic work of art, between art seen as a fixed message and the art event viewed as an interpretive process, produces a profound difference in what each position views as the content, the reality, and the power of the work of art.

As one passes from a concept of artistic significance based on an immanent structure to a concept of the artistic experience as projected significance, the boundaries defining the content of the work of art enlarge and gain flexibility. Commenting upon the articles contained in the issue of NLH devoted to "Form and Its Alternatives," Morris Weitz opposes Smith's hermeneutic vision of speech act theory with the view expressed by Joan Webber and Warner Berthoff: "that certain literary forms are inextricably tied to their social and political contexts; and consequently that they cannot be intelligently understood or aesthetically evaluated independently of those contexts." However, Weitz's juxtaposition stands in contradiction to the hermeneutic assertion that "the reader's response is not to the meaning; it is the meaning." For in asserting the audience's perceptual framework as the dominant determinant of the aesthetic event, the hermeneuticist insists upon the eternal elasticity of audience reception. A work's historical, social, and aesthetic context do not automatically cease to occupy a position in the interpretation of a work's locutionary structure. Rather the "factual" context of a work becomes


41 Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge: Harvard, 1980), p. 11.
"fictionalized" as it becomes transformed into part of the audience's aesthetic perceptual apparatus. For example, the "factual" function of myth in classical Greek society exerted a control over the aesthetic experience of Aeschylus' audience that has distanced that experience forever from twentieth century man. Hermeneuticist Frederic Will explains the resultant unintelligibility of Greek tragedy: "Greek tragedy puts the question of intelligibility forcefully before us. How can we teach Greek tragedy in translation to our younger contemporaries? Key words -- sophrosyne, anangke, philia -- are impenetrable except to experts, who are usually unable to find their own culture, to pass on the news." Consequently Will and other hermeneuticists argue that a twentieth century production of a Greek tragedy represents not the recreation of a classical work but the presentation of a contemporary piece. And Rainer Warning postis the mobility of interpretive horizons as the chief difference between an objectivist and a hermeneutic aesthetic, the latter operating with full knowledge that the text "is only the linguistic manifestation of a speech act which, qua act, stands in institutionalized contexts of acting" and that "consequently, a theoretical grasp necessitates taking those pragmatic contexts into account."


member. The work of art ceases to be a mimetic structural statement over which the audience holds the contemplative power to grasp, analyze and relate to their life. Rather the art work brings to light its audience's structural understanding of their world, an understanding which had hitherto remained submerged beneath the utilitarian trafficking of everyday life. As Michael Holquist and Walter Reed explain, "texts do not provide photographs of society but X-rays of the system out of which they are constituted." These X-rays of social perception, those revealed intentional structures, become the hermeneutic equivalent of aesthetic verisimilitude, a verisimilitude now no longer mimetically embedded in the text but actualized in the operations performed by the audience in creating the text's contextual world. And since a text does not directly give a sense of verisimilitude but instead allows an audience to create it, the hermeneuticist argues for a diminished and less stringent aesthetic distance than traditionally understood. For example, Wolfgang Iser asserts, "If the sense of the narrative can only be completed through the cooperation of the reader (which is allowed for in the text), then the borderline between fiction and reality becomes increasingly hazy, for the reader can scarcely regard his own participation as fictional. He is bound to look on his reactions as something real, and at no time is this conviction disputed." And Hans Robert Jauss writes, "When the accent of reality is bestowed upon a province of meaning, the other

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provinces of meaning appear only as 'quasi-realities,' including the everyday life world."\(^{46}\)

In identifying aesthetic significance with the intentional projections of an audience, the hermeneuticist allows the possibility for ruptural meaning to occur through the aesthetic experience. For the hermeneuticist argues that the conventional expectations of an audience will never fully coincide with the locutionary structure of the text. Wolfgang Iser writes, "An author's perspective of the world, the text clearly cannot claim to represent the reader's view. The gap cannot be bridged just by a 'willing suspension of disbelief' because . . . the reader's task is not simply to accept, but to assemble for himself that which is to be accepted."\(^{47}\) And in asserting that the audience's aesthetic projections of verisimilitude come from the same source as everyday practical consciousness, the hermeneuticist allows the aesthetic event to infringe unconsciously upon the entire social, cognitive life of the audience. Hayden White writes, "The text is not to be 'cracked,' like a code, but restored to its original state as a mysterious presence in a putatively stable linguistic world, a presence which challenges, not only language, but the very modes of perception of that world . . . the work of art is comprehensible precisely because it figures a way of knowing which conflicts with the ways of knowing of the


generation into which it is projected."\textsuperscript{48} Hans Robert Jauss
summarizes the hermeneutic concept of aesthetic significance:

"Significance, which is unlocked through aesthetic experience, arises from the convergence of effect and reception. It is no atemporal, basic element which is always already given; rather, it is the never-completed result of a process of progressive and enriching interpretation, which concretizes -- in an ever new and different manner -- the textually immanent potential for meaning in the change of horizons of historical life-worlds."

The hermeneutic vision of speech act theory then may be summarized: art suspends the everyday pragmatic context that controls and facilitates the understanding of meaning; in doing so, it evokes a more powerful though self-conscious projection of pre-understood significance, verisimilitude. And this projection of verisimilitude, stemming from the audience's everyday consciousness, allows the art work to make a profound disturbance in one's perception of the workaday world.

Rupture and Metaphor

NLH has produced many articles describing speech act theory and its bearing on an audience's aesthetic response. But the postmodern authors of NLH delegate a purely idealistic, heuristic validity to descriptions of an audience's intersubjective response. The necessarily limited and metaphorical nature of the phenomenological projection insures a lack of complementary coincidence between interpretation and the work itself. In terms of postmodern aesthetics, any interpretive projection is doomed to be reductive; interpretation naturally ignores an artistic text's

\textsuperscript{48} Hayden White, "Literary History: the Point of It All," \textit{New Literary History}, 2 (Autumn 1970), 179.

polysemous nature, its multiplicity of avenues for diverse interpretations, its surplus of signification. Martin Price explains that the interpretive unity projected upon a work's otherwise multifacted, insignificant structure leads to an overinterpretation, an overdetermined form, "fulfilling a number of functions at once and sacrificing the full realization of each for the sake of the others."^50 For similar reasons, Wolfgang Iser explains that the aesthetic experience occurs in a total state of tension: "The polysemantic nature of the text and the illusion-making of the reader are opposed factors. If the illusion were complete, the polysemantic nature would vanish; if the polysemantic nature were all-powerful, the illusion would be totally destroyed."^51

Multiple causes for the work of art's polysemous nature have been suggested by the writers for NLH. For example, Iser cites not only the imbalance between the author's and the audience's intentional worlds but also the demands placed upon the audience to complete the communicative message after the restraints of contextual clues have been lowered. The lack of clear contextual directions for the construction of an art work's significance opens up a wide variety of interpretive possibilities, the understanding of any piece depending upon aesthetic closure, the selection of any single interpretation at the expense of the others. This necessity for aesthetic closure occurs in any narrative medium on three levels: that of plot construction and


verisimilitude (the global text); that of the interpretation and evaluation of any single event, communicative object or sentence (the subtext); and that of the deciphering of the play's message, theme, or significance. Wolfgang Iser explains, "Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, because no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections -- for filling in the gaps left by the text itself." And Iser adds, "A gestalt that represents plot development is still not completely closed. The closing can only come about when the significance of the action can be best represented by a further gestalt." But, as hermeneuticist Robert Weimann explains, the lack of clear contextual directions for the construction of an artistic text results in a constant tension in interpretation which forces one to check and recheck the validity of one's interpretive projections. Weimann writes, "both reference and sign -- in their very different ways -- engage in a relationship to an object or situation . . . which, being imaginary, enjoys a metaphorical rather than actual station. At the same time this relationship is subjected to a process of rhetoric and evaluation which tends to stress the tension (rather than the congruity) between reference and


53 Ibid., p. 123.
object." In this fashion, the polysemous nature of a text assures itself of constant recognition. Indeed, the demand to maintain aesthetic interest and curiosity may drive the audience to ferret out a work's polysemous nature even when it has been most submerged. E. H. Gombrich, an art historian who has influenced many NLH writers, states, "The more the text fulfills our expectations; the more we want from it . . . Illusion wears off once the expectation is stepped up. We take it for granted and want more." According to the postmodern critics of NLH, aesthetic reception exists in a constant state of flux between an audience's act of closure and the possibilities for other acts of closure opened up by the text. And since no interpretation can be stabilized, no foundations are left for the classical concept of artistic unity.

In the dissonance between an audience's interpretation and a text's polysemous nature, in the rift between the projection of a familiar verisimilitude based upon learned expectations and the text's power to elude those projected boundaries, the power of the art work comes into being. As Iser writes, "Experiences arise only when the familiar is transcended or undermined; they grow out of the alteration or falsification of that which is already ours." For the same reason, Needner points to the breaking of expected visual codifications as the

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source of power in the graphic arts: "Without an indication of the
effects of a crossing on two strata of the life of a person, a picture
would not point to what is really spontaneous and unique in subjective
experience: no emotions, nor temporal proclivities, but the boundaries
that someone may have transcended and we have not."

This rift between an audience's expectations and the reality of the
text provides the basis for what the postmodern critic deems the single
most essential element of artistic expression, metaphor. Ricoeur's
definition of metaphor, supported by the majority of writers in the
issue of NLH devoted to metaphor, speaks of the metaphorical moment in
terms of the "logical absurdity" resultant from this rift. Ricoeur
explains that the work of art is received with the expectation of a
certain type of unity, verisimilitude, which the individual expressive
element then possesses the power forcefully to contradict. In this
conflict between world vision and the obstinate element which refuses to
make sense in terms of that world, Ricoeur writes, the audience is
presented with "a choice between either preserving the literal sense of
both the subject and the modifier and concluding to the meaninglessness
of the whole . . . or attributing a new meaning to the modifier such as
the whole . . . makes sense." Ricoeur defines this obligatory
choice as the metaphorical moment, "a clash between literal meanings
which excludes a literal use of the word in question and gives clues for
the finding of a new meaning which is able to fit in the context . . .

57 Angel Medina, "Discussion: On Narrative and Narratives," New
Literary History, 11 (Spring 1980), 573.

58 Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," New
Literary History, 6 (Autumn 1974), 102.
and to make sense in this context." The metaphorical moment becomes equivalent to the Heideggerian moment of rupture and proceeds from a forced suspension of judgment.

Tzvetan Todorov explains that the Heideggerian basis for the poststructuralist concept of metaphor "requires both as and of literature that we recognize the Other as other, without identifying it with ourselves, without identifying ourselves with it -- that we view it as irreducibly external, neither inferior nor superior but fundamentally different." However, it should be stressed that for other NLH writers including the hermeneuticists, the metaphorical introduction of the alien, of the other, need not imply a total disruption to an audience's sense of verisimilitude. Judgment need not remain totally suspended. As David Edge explains, the metaphor may itself act "to eliminate confusion, to structure chaos." Sol Worth adds that the metaphor is "designed as much to prevent putting the wrong things together as to help us to put the right things together." Wolfgang Iser explains metaphorical control in terms of an audience's initially projected interpretive scheme: "Each scheme makes the world accessible in accordance with the conventions the artist has inherited. But when something new is perceived which is not covered by these schemata, it

can only be represented by means of a correction to the schemata."\(^6\)

Iser amplifies this concept of schema and metaphorical correction through utilizing the cybernetic gestalt concepts of figure and ground, foreground and background; metaphor, he writes, "inevitably creates a background-foreground relationship, with the chosen element in the foreground and its original context in the background. And, indeed, without such a relationship, the chosen element would appear meaningless."\(^6\) And for similar reasons Yuri Lotman explains that an aesthetic experience can be achieved only through the metaphorical process by which a new figure at once stands out from and is compared to a traditional ground. Lotman writes, "an artistic text is so constructed that it not only refutes some definite system but constantly recalls it, keeping it alive in the reader's consciousness."\(^6\)

And through the metaphorical clash of past expectations and a ruptural communicative element, a new conception of reality enters into the audience's language. Wolfgang Iser explains that in metaphor "Expectations aroused in the reader by allusions to things he knows or thinks he knows are frustrated; through this negation, we know that the standards and models alluded to are somehow to be transcended, though no longer on their own terms. These now appear to be, as it were, things of the past; what follows cannot be stated, but has to be realized."\(^6\)


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 108.


In a similar fashion, hermeneuticist Murray Krieger writes that in the metaphor "the langue has been violated to the point that the parole appears to have become its own langue, a system of which it is the only spoken representation . . . Not that it is literally incompatable with the existing langue of which it is a parole, but that the langue cannot account for what this particular speech act has performed."67 Pointing to the power of metaphor to being something completely new into the language, Jonathan Culler distinguishes between the dead and the live metaphor: "the 'dead' metaphor . . . functions as nonmetaphorical expression, though we can perceive its metaphorical origins, and the truly creative live metaphor . . . is not simply a substitute for another expression."68 The live metaphor brings more than a new naming of the world into the language, more than a new comparison of two unlike entities. Rather the live metaphor ruptures past world visions and thereby creates a new sense of verisimilitude, a new world of possibilities which had hitherto remained unrecognized. Paul Ricoeur writes that according to the extent to which a metaphor negates former expectations without straining credibility, it also disrupts the established order of the probable, the possible, and the necessary and causes a new world vision to come into being. Ricoeur writes that the understanding of an artistic text coincides with grasping "the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text . . . If we may be said to coincide with

anything, it is not the life of another ego, but the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine power of the text." In this fashion, metaphorical rupture secures the social power of art by making the communal **langue** of intentional expectations, that is, the socially sanctioned concepts of art and of the world, the background against which the foregrounded artistic innovation occurs. Hermeneuticist Geoffrey Hartman describes the artistic event as a "liminal" experience, a ritualistic separation of an audience from its socially preconceived world vision in which the individual audience member is forced to weld a new interpretive reality. Hartman writes that the individual audience member "discovers in this way both his individuality and his isolation, both selfhood and the meaning of society . . . The ritual process leads, of course, beyond liminality. A new identity, or reidentification, should emerge." And Ricoeur cites the metaphorical moment as the most important factor in the hermeneuticist history of art. Ricoeur asserts that through metaphorical rupture language becomes "historied" with usage; new possibilities for meaning are created in the language system. Ricoeur explains that the ruptural communicative element once understood becomes "heavy with new use-value" and "returns to the system. And, in returning to the system, it gives it a history." Thus, for example,

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W. S. Gilbert's introduction of electrical theatre lighting introduced into the language of theatre illumination a new metaphorical dimension, shattering the past expectations of his audience and creating a richer signifying system.

Thus the majority of writers for NLH regard metaphor as not only the central moment of artistic truth and power but also as the seat of aesthetic innovation. Metaphor has thus become the single most essential element in the aesthetic expounded in NLH and the chief subject of study for the hermeneuticist historian of the arts.
CHAPTER III
The Ontology of Historical Inquiry

Hermeneuticist Geoffrey Hartman capsulizes the central historiographic perspective of the NLH writer: "Can history-writing, or interpretation in touch with it become a new medium -- a supreme fiction which does not reduce being to meaning, but defines a thing sharply in terms of the 'difficulty of what it is to be'?"¹ Hartman's description of history as "a supreme fiction" stresses the self-consciously heuristic and idealistic nature of any humanistic study which finds itself confined to the expression of unique experiences and events in terms of an inadequate communal language. For the historians of NLH all traditional attempts to chart historical progression necessarily imply a reductive, allogorical, paraphrastic, and thus fictionalized approach to an irreducible, multifarious reality.

In the pages of NLH, the correspondence between "factual" events and their scholarly reconstruction ceases to serve as a primary criterion for the evaluation of historical study. According to the hermeneuticist, no unbiased summit exists outside the confines of language from which such a correspondence may be accurately perceived or evaluated. Instead, the postmodern critical evaluation of historical texts foregrounds the historian's own reality, his own interpretive linguistic perspective. The postmodern historian argues that because of the necessarily reductive nature of all linguistic usage, a historian's work reveals more about the historian than it does about the historical

events of which he writes. For example, Thomas Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* reveals more about Carlyle's (and the Romantics') vision of revolution than it does about the actual storming of the Bastille; and, in a similar fashion, Oscar Brockett's *History of the Theatre* reveals more about Brockett's and the mid-twentieth century theatre historians' interpretive reality than it does about the actual progression of the theatre. Accordingly, in the pages of *NLH* traditional historical issues such as valid documentation, correct and efficient collation of historical data, and authentication of primary sources receive little attention. On the other hand, questions concerning the ethical adequacy of the historian's perceptual framework predominate.

This chapter investigates the positions taken by the *NLH* critico-historians regarding the adequacy and inadequacy of various historical perceptual frameworks. The stance universally taken by the *NLH* critics against the traditional, positivist, "factual" history of the arts will first be examined. Further, how does the postmodern critico-historian hope to remedy the deficiencies of positivist history through the creation of an alternate perceptual framework? This chapter concludes with an overview of the methods of hermeneutic history and of the gains the hermeneuticist hopes to achieve through his refurbishing of the historical method.

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Positivism and Its Problems

The hermeneutic program for the history of the arts was developed as a direct attack upon the procedures of traditional positivist history. Hayden White describes the task of the positivist historian: he "seeks to explain what happened in the past by providing a precise and accurate reconstruction of the events reported in the documents. He does this presumably by suppressing as far as possible his impulse to interpret the data, or at least by including in his narrative where he is merely representing the facts and where he is interpreting them." In a similar fashion, James Ackerman writes that positivist history depends on the assumption "that fact can be apprehended directly by the observer and that the objectivity of statement can be secured by the logic of their formulation and by the reliability of the methods of investigation on which they are based." In other words, the positivist operates from an atomistic perspective of language wherein a direct correspondence may exist between the word and what it indicates, between signifier and signified. Correspondingly, the foundations of positivist history deny the arbitrary and inherently prejudiced character of language and imply a belief in the possibility of an innocent, uncontaminated vision. Only through such a belief can the historian maintain the importance of objective empirical research as a means of warding off bias in the interpretation of historical data.

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Accordingly, the NLH attack upon positivism has been launched in the name of the two central hermeneutic principles: the indefinability of the intentional life force and the inescapably prejudiced nature of all human perception. This attack has been levelled against the positivist historian both in terms of his analysis and description of the single historical event and in terms of his construction of causal historical patternings.

Repeatedly the NLH historians stress the reductive tendencies of the positivist's conception of linguistic reality. Echoing Dilthey, the postmodern historian argues that the positivist's evasion of the gap between linguistic convention and "reality" results in the confused transformation of purely metaphorical, linguistic concepts into empirical realities with their own objectively observable histories. The workings of this fallacy (most noticeably evidenced in the reduction of temporal progression to such broad spatial concepts as cultural periods, aesthetic styles, and predominant temporaments, ideals, and world visions, i.e. Zeitgeist) are explicated by Louis Althusser in a passage crucial to New Marxist hermeneutics: "it presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an inner essence. . . it presupposed that the whole had a certain nature, precisely the nature of a 'spiritual' whole in which each element was expressive of the entire totality as a 'pars totalis'." Hayden White explains that the historian's compulsion to create such a centered order stands behind even the first perusal of historical documents, indeed that without the premonition of such a centered whole any reading of historical documents

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would prove incomprehensible. White explains that "Before the historian can bring to bear upon the data of the historical field the conceptual apparatus he will use to represent and explain it, he must first prefigure the field -- that is to say, constitute it as an object of mental perception."\(^7\) Siegfried Giedion argues that the existence of such a codifiable, describable centered order must be called into question. He notes, "History writing is ever tied to the fragment. The known facts are often scattered broadcast, like stars across the firmament. It should not be assumed that they form a coherent body in the historical night."\(^8\) Accordingly, the positivist historian of the arts has been portrayed in the pages of NLH as one who dresses his own identity, his own ideas of order, his perceptual framework, in the garb of another period's predominant Zeitgeist and proceeds to find the works of that period inevitably created in his own image. George Steiner asserts that the traditional study of the arts "exhibits a precise drive towards usurpation; it would work away from its own existential derivativeness and take on the ontological primacy of its cause."\(^9\)

If the NLH historian cannot rest comfortably with the positivist separation of historical description from historical interpretation, he is no happier with the professed scientific neutrality of the positivist historian. In supporting the Heideggerian concept of intentional pre-understanding, the NLH historian argues that every linguistic cut

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\(^9\) George Steiner, "'Critic'/ 'Reader'," *New Literary History, 10* (Spring 1980), 437.
into the stream of reality has been intentionally predetermined. For example, arguing that every perception involves a distinction between what remains the same and what has changed, between what fulfills and what negates one's intentional expectations, Hayden White explains that the mere act of recognizing the past as such involves an ideological judgment concerning the present. White writes, "the very claim to have distinguished a past from a present world of social thought and praxis, and to have determined the formal coherence of that past world, implies a conception of the form that knowledge of the present also must take, insofar as it is continuous with the past world."¹⁰ And noting that the very selection of historical data for inclusion in an aesthetic history automatically entails a judgment of what is to count as aesthetic value, Richard Fogle condemns the positivist's dream of scholarly neutrality in a fashion similar to White's. "In literary history, as in criticism, the problem of value has to be faced. The attempt to eradicate it from consideration simply transfers it to something outside literature that the historian values more."¹¹

These two central fallacies, the treatment of artificial concepts as if they were empirical realities and the camouflage of ideological partiality under the disguise of scholarly neutrality, are seen by the NLH historian as not only pertaining to the positivist description of historical data but also as deeply embedded in positivist noumenalogical-deductive reasoning. Noumenalogical reasoning exists in

the form of a syllogism wherein one set of data, the conditions, are related to another set of data, the results, by means of a causal principle or law. Interpretation in positivist history usually consists in determining the latter, the connection between one set of data and another. Although interpretation often may be more implicit than explicit, positivist history depends on such a form of interpretation if it is not to degenerate into the chronicle, the mere collection of data without any reasoned connection. Indeed without interpretation the historian would have no reason for the selection and emphasis of one set of data over another.

However, the hermeneuticist finds the positivist laws of interpretive reasoning just as fallacious as the data on which such reasoning depends. Leon J. Goldstein argues that history involves itself not with the actions and reactions of physical properties and elements but with the ever changing facets of the uncodifiable intentional unconscious, facets that can move and be moved in a large number of indefinable and incalculable ways. Goldstein asserts that historical reasoning "cannot prove that events produce, give birth to events; not logically, not empirically." Furthermore, noumenalogical reasoning when applied to the study of human actions stands in direct contradiction to a central phenomenological principle, that the processes of the cognitive unconscious often disobey the logical rules of reasoning and order. It follows that if historical interpretation is to do justice to the often chaotic progression of historied time, the historian would have to forsake the basic character

of noumenalogical reasoning, rational order. And once the logical
disorder of the intentional unconscious has been granted, lineal
history, that is, history based on a flow of causal connections, reveals
itself as the chauvinistic suppression of the integrity and existential
identity of other ages. Writes D. W. Robertson, "The common assumption
that institutions, attitudes and ideals display a 'linear development' in
the course of history has no justification in the evidence of history itself. And the further assumption that the present represents a kind of glorious fruition of linear development amounts to nothing more than what might with some justice be called 'historical anthropomorphism' inherited from romantic philosophers like Hegel."\(^{13}\)

Despite their severe attacks upon the foundations of positivist
historiography, the writers of NLH exercise caution in their portrayal of
the practicing positivist historian. They recognize the sensitivity shown by predominant positivist scholars to the inherent perils of their disciplinary philosophy and suggest that the actual failings of positivist history may assume a conscientiously covert nature. The writers of NLH portray the practicing positivist as a man riven between the ethical responsibility to respect the existential integrity of the actual historical document and the opposing impulse to discern significant patternings amidst the chaotic welter of historical data. Hayden White explicates this dilemma in terms of existential information and significant comprehension: "information conveyed in any scientific explanation must vary in inverse proportion to the degree of comprehension claimed for the explanation. The more information given

about a specific phenomenon, the less comprehension to be expected; the more comprehension provided, the less data the generalization constituting the explanation can be expected directly to apply to.\textsuperscript{14}

Correspondingly White divides positivist history into four predominant patterns of thought, ranging on a continuum from that which attempts a total suppression of the theoretical, the idiographic, to that which focuses primarily on the theoretical unveiling of causal principles, the mechanistic. White defines the idiographic historian as one who "conceives of his work as finished when the phenomena he has observed have adequately been represented in precise descriptive prose."\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, White defines the mechanistic historian as one who attempts to predict the future "by virtue of the mechanistic reduction of . . . data to the status of functions of general laws of cause and effect that are universally operative throughout all of history."\textsuperscript{16}

White also divides positivist history into those patterns of thought which focus on spatial description and structural explanation, the idiographic and the contextual, and those concerned with charting the temporal evolution of forms, the organicist and the mechanistic. White defines the contextual as that form of thought associated with stylistics and periodization. This mode of historical thought attempts to assimilate the raw data of the idiographic into broad, spatially

\textsuperscript{14}Hayden White, "The Problem of Change in Literary History," New Literary History, 7 (Autumn 1976), 100.

\textsuperscript{15}Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," New Literary History, 4 (Winter 1973), 300.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 302.
unifying concepts. On the other hand, the organicist stands as an informative check on the total theorizing tendencies of the mechanistic. White defines the organicist's tracing of historical development as resulting in a "synthesis in which each of the parts of the whole must be shown either to mirror the structure of the totality or to prefigure the form of either the end of the whole process or at least the latest phase of that process."\(^{17}\)

The organicist insists that the principles governing an art form's development not be discovered in nonaesthetic influences but instead be located in the inherent life potential of the particular art form. While the positivist historian of the arts tends to shun the mechanistic due to its overt opposition to prized scholarly neutrality, the other three forms of positivist historical narrative continue to play a large part in contemporary aesthetic history. Consequently, the problems inherent in each have received a great amount of attention in the pages of NLH. And an investigation into what the NLH writer deems the ethical failings of each may lead to a clearer understanding of the vehemence with which the NLH writer has attacked the practice of positivist history.

The historian who places his highest value on scholarly neutrality will naturally gravitate toward the idiographic. However, the writers for NLH argue that the idiographer, in assuming that an alien past can be discerned directly through present day vision, evades the central judgment that initiates every historical study, the difference between the past and the present. Jameson writes, "One is tempted to say that this position 'solves' the problem of the relationship between present

\(^{17}\) Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," *New Literary History*, 4 (Winter 1973), 302.
and past by the single gesture of abolishing the present as such."\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, since the hermeneuticist views art as a ruptural action taken against the perceiver's expectations of the world, the hermeneuticist also views the idiographer's evasion of the relationship between the art work and its interpretive context as coincident with his inability to perceive the existential identity, the social impact, the aesthetic and historical action of the work of art. As Geoffrey Hartman asserts, logical, rational interpretation of the work of art replaces appreciation of aesthetic ruptural action.

White identifies the ultimate results of empirical, idiographic history: a deluge of distancing facticity and man's consequent inability to recall lived experience. White writes, "The indiscriminate use of recollection, the conscious effort to remember everything, is a threat to memory's power to restore consciousness' original relationship with its world."\textsuperscript{19} Yet no matter how exhaustive the historian's research, no matter how many documents turned over, no matter how many historical data recorded, the reconstruction of past events remains forever beyond the idiographer's reach. Dennis Tedlock forcefully stresses this point when he writes in regards to the stenographic recording of contemporary oral performance: "How long does a silence have to be to be profound? How loud is loud? ... When does an annoyed tone become an angry one, or irony become sarcasm? Such qualities are not discrete entities and find no secure place in a mechanical scheme,


\textsuperscript{19} Hayden White, "Literary History: The Point of It All," \textit{New Literary History}, 2 (Autumn 1970), 82.
but they do make changes in the meaning of what is said."

Accordingly the writers of NLH portray the idiographer as one cut off from the living action of the work of art and surrounded by a massive accumulation of recorded data, an accumulation continually expanding without raison d'etre and without hope of even accurately reconstructing the material thingness of the art of the past. In order to stem and shape the flood of historical data, the idiographer inevitably turns to the theoretical and the contextual.

The writers for NLH do not deny that the contextual approach to the history of art permits a rational ordering and emphasis alien to the idiographic. However, the contextual approach to history involves itself with two positivist concepts which have received severe criticism in the pages of NLH, empirical stylistics and periodization. The hermeneutic historian argues that the postivist's concept of distinct historical periods, each with its own empirically manifested style, not only concerns itself with unreal entities but also suppresses the life impulse and social impact of the work of art.

In the pages of NLH, positivist periodization has come under severe attack for a large number of reasons. F. E. Sparshott supplies the most accessible of these arguments when he writes, "a period 'style' is nothing but a movement that happens to have become dominant, and nothing dictates that an age has to be so dominated by anything." Sparshott also links the problem of periodization with the inherent nature of the

intentional unconscious where predominant styles, particular states of langue, originate. The intentional unconscious, though holistically involved in each act of perception, continually develops in an irrational and restricted fashion as particular and oftentimes minute expectations are negated and reconstructed. Sparshott writes that style "results from the convergence of many changes, proceeding at different rates." Sparshott argues that all attempts to define style in a rationally coherent and demonstrative fashion must be considered fallacious.

Another argument frequently waged against the positivist's concept of periodization concerns itself with the difficulty in empirically locating and describing style. The hermeneuticist argues that style can be located neither on the level of an empirically manifested Zeitgeist, on the level of the predominant ideas or ideals of a period, nor even on the level of the material form of the work of art. The NLH historian regards the concept of a predominant Zeitgeist governing production in all the communicative systems of a period as tenuous and as conducive to "impressionistic comparisons and easily elastic formations." To similar effect, Hans Robert Jauss explains that "simultaneously appearing literature . . . breaks down into . . . works formed by the different moments of the 'shaped time' of their genres (as the apparently present starry sky moves apart astronomically at very

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different rates)." Nor does the NLH historian believe that style can be directly located in the ideals or ideas that predominate during a particular period. Style as the manifestation of contoured linguistic perception originates in the intentional unconscious. Style exists as a form of intentional understanding which proceeds rational, ideational segmentation and analysis. Style prohibits or permits certain ideas to dominate during a period according to whether those ideas can adapt to its structural vision. For example, the disconnected ideas of existential philosophy would find no place in the totally unified, analogical structure of medieval thought. Consequently, as Hayden White argues, the historian who seeks to define a period through a description of its predominant ideas mistakes a period's material forms for the true reality which binds these forms together, its sense of structural verisimilitude.25

Furthermore, since style remains a matter of interpretive reality, it must be located in the act of perception rather than in the object perceived. The isolated analysis of a work of art in itself can reveal little about the predominant style of a particular artist or of a particular period. In opposition to the positivist's attempt to locate style at the level of a work's material and formal structures, George Kubler cites two axioms of icenographic method: "1) that a visible form often repeated may acquire different meanings with the passage of time, and 2) that an enduring meaning may be conveyed by different visual


forms." For similar reasons, Brian Stock asserts, "In any community or period of time, two sorts of changes are presumably always going on at once: real change which is happening but not perceived and perceived change which may or may not be taking place." For example, Fredric Jameson writes of "hegemonic forms" wherein a previous aesthetic form "is appropriated, secretly emptied of its content and subverted to the transmission of oppositional messages." Jameson cites the remaking of folk song and peasant dance into the aesthetic forms of the pastoral and the court masque. In summary, the writers for NLH undermine the grounds for positivist periodization by stressing the impossibility of empirically locating a period's predominant style.

However, the central argument levelled by the hermeneuticist against positivist contextualism pertains to another domain, the ethical respect for the ruptural power of art. Positivist periodization aligns itself with structuralism insofar as it views the individual works produced during a period as reflections of that period's langue. Inevitably the positivist then defines style in fixed, static, structural terms. Douglas Archibald writes, "In most elaborations of an 'ambience,' a gestalt or a 'world-view,' the past becomes objective and static -- and dead . . . Our imaginative past becomes spatial -- an object, a construction, a closed circuit of sequential events -- rather than a set of temporal relationships in which we are invited to

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participate.” Such a conception of style denies the dynamic ruptural power of art. Furthermore, Kubler explains that positivist stylistics reduces the stature of the art work to a variation upon a theme: "The historian of an art trains himself to recognize the norms and commonplaces of an age; he traffics with the mediocre, and encounters greatness like eccentricity, in the form of significant deviations." In summary, the contextualist though working on a broader scale than the idiographer, shares the same tendency to diminish the art work into a static object without the power to alter meaningfully and recharge a society's communal langue.

Akin to structuralism, contextualism may provide a method for the analysis of synchronic cross-sections of historied time, but it cannot supply a method for noting the impulse behind significant historical change. Having reduced the art work to a reflection of a period's stylistic reality, the contextualist loses track of the antagonistic force exerted by the individual work upon the communal langue. And having lost the means to measure ruptural impact, the historian becomes incapable of perceiving the nature of historical evolution. The contextualist who seeks to account for the change between one synchronic stylistic reality and another inevitably turns to the organicist's method of historical narration.

The organicist's vision of an art form as a living and evolving medium with its own inherent principles of change and development allows


the positivist historian to account for the contour of historied time without the apparent sacrifice of scholarly neutrality. However, the writers for NLH argue that once a historian has begun to separate his data into the patterning of a chronological narrative, he has at the same time introduced an entire metaphysical vision into his work, no matter how surreptitiously. According to White, "the historian confronts a veritable chaos of events already constituted, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting a story of a particular kind."31

The introduction of a metaphysical vision into a historical narrative implies an equivalence among all entities comprising the story. Consequently, the hermeneutic historian argues that the organicist's perception of history negates the existential integrity of a work or a period. For example, Rainer Warning complains about the lack of appreciation given to medieval religious drama by the organicist historian. Warning argues that the organicist considers medieval church drama as a transitional form worthy of scant attention since it fails to fit in with the existential nature of theatre as understood in the twentieth century, "the separation between the internal situation of the performance and the external one of reception."32

31 Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), p. 16.

periods also lose their existential integrity as they become subordinated to the historical march toward the most contemporary stage of artistic perfection. Morton Bloomfield summarizes the reductive tendency of the organicist's vision: "The notion of progress and evolution has made natural in modern scholarship an emphasis on continuities and similarities, even long after those basic notions of the intellectuals of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries had begun to fade as dominating ideas or perhaps paradigms of modern thought."  

The NLH attack on organicism also concerns itself with the much debated topic of aesthetic influence and innovation. In the organicist's concept of aesthetic evolution, the successive artists working in a particular medium become united through the common goal of perfecting that medium, each climbing on the shoulders of his immediate predecessor and carrying the medium on from where his predecessor has left it. Such a conception of artistic evolution implies that innovations may be consciously identified and assimilated by succeeding artists but it fails to account for the essentially unconscious character of intentional perception and speculation, the sources of all aesthetic evolution according to the hermeneuticist. Hayden White accordingly calls the organicist's concept of conscious innovation and influence, the "unfortunate residue of superannuated intellectual loyalties, loyalties that derive from out-moded conceptions of the nature of tradition on the one side and from positivist notions of

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writers as atoms banging into one another, like billiard balls, on the other side."

The writers for NLH argue that the organicist's concept of history reduces man's aesthetic past to a series of codifiable events stripped of their deep, unconscious mystery and of their ruptural otherness. Philip Fisher summarizes the hermeneutic complaint against the organicist vision by noting how positivist aesthetics originated in "the idea of systematic ordering . . . and the use of spatial display as a form of education" during the "Museum Age," the Enlightenment.

Fisher adds,

That we walk through a museum, walk past the art, recapitulates in our act the notion of art history itself, its restlessness, its forward motion, its power to link. Far from being a fact that shows the public's ignorance of what art is about, the rapid stroll through a museum is an act in deep harmony with the nature of Art, that is, art history and the museum itself (not with the individual object, which the museum itself has profoundly hidden in history)."

The NLH historians argue that the positivists' efforts at impartial scholarship have continually limited and diminished the social importance of art by reducing aesthetic and historical reality to a single plane, be it that of idiographic thingness, of contextual stylistic langue, or of organic implicit metaphysics. Consequently, positivist history lacks the oppositional contrast between reality and perception, between parole and langue, between desire and language, that

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allows both the historical event and the work of art to exert their full ruptural power. According to the writers of NLH, positivist history has lost its power to interest, to alter one's perceptions or to involve either the reader or the historian in the creative understanding of another reality.

**Hermeneutic History and Its Hopes**

Reality rests not in the object perceived but in the act of perception, in the temporal, linguistic, holistic act of perception. This credo immediately separates the hermeneutic NLH historian from the positivist. The relocation of reality into the arbitrary gaze of the perceiver and the consequent separation of the historian from any authentic, unbiased perception of the totality of factual existence produces a profound alteration in the metaphysical assumptions of hermeneutic philosophy. For example, the positivist's valued scholarly neutrality causes traditional history to gravitate toward the ideal of empirically accurate and clear sighted reconstructions of past objects and events. On the other hand, the hermeneuticist, arguing that past realities cannot be seen through the eyes of the present, regards such reconstruction as wasteful erudition, as "patient stenographic drudgery in the name of science." The hermeneuticist asserts that any element of the past not still alive in the tradition of the present has forever lost itself in time and can no longer be resurrected, reconstructed or re-understood. Consequently, hermeneutic history has radically shifted its direction away from that of positivism. Instead of attempting to recollect and explain past realities, the

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hermeneuticist hopes to investigate his own reality through confrontations with another. Since reality remains a matter of perceptual frameworks and interpretive strategies, the hermeneutic historian of the arts looks not to the material thingness of the past work of art but to the minds of the past that comprehend it. As Thomas Roberts writes, "Any . . . inquiry into the character of literature must begin not with the books claimed to be literature but with the people who claim to perceive literariness in them." In a similar fashion Manfred Naumann explains, "We start from the view that author, work, and reader, the literary process of writing, appropriation, and communication, are mutually interconnected and form a relational structure." The hermeneutic historian of the arts seeks to reconstruct the past interactions between an aesthetic text and its audience not in order to explain the interactions as empirical realities but in order to encounter the reconstructions as the heuristic and idealistic models of a ruptural reality different from his own.

Another fundamental division between hermeneutic and positivist historiography stems from the phenomenological belief in the holistic nature of every act of perception. The positivist, operating from a base in the rationalist subject-object dichotomy, divides reality into a number of discrete entities, each with its own distinct and objective history. However, such a precise compartmentalization of historical reality becomes impossible once one identifies reality as the product of

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a structural world vision. Though separate sets of elicited expectations, say those elicited from a theatre audience or from a reader of popular fiction, may seem to indicate the existence of separable realities, each system of expectations receives its identity only through contrast with its entire contextual environment of other systems. For example, theatre will attain its existential identity partially through contrast with rival art forms. The value and expectations that a society places upon theatrical entertainment will vary according to whether the theatre's chief aesthetic competitor is the serial novel or the cinema. Jean Starobinski cites the pinpointing of this contra-contextual identity as the starting point for all histories of art: "Even before bearing upon that sector of society which may have constituted the 'public' of a given 'author,' the history of a work's reception must reflect, be it only summarily, upon the choice which promotes to the rank of precious and memorable works those texts which belong neither to daily verbal exchange nor to the sphere of religion." 

New Marxist Manfred Naumann further stresses the defining link between the individual work and the social perceptual framework into which it enters. Naumann writes of "social modes of reception," attitudes toward the work of art that reflect the identity of a certain social class or community. Social modes of reception, Naumann writes, include:

ideas . . . of what literature is, ought to be, can do, and must have done; of how works, authors, movements, schools, whole literary epochs, and the history of literature are to be evaluated, interpreted, and understood; of which works and authors the reader ought

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to read, and which not; ideas of norms for realizing the possibilities inherent in literary production and reception for a specific mode of social communication and cultivation of consciousness.

Hans Robert Jauss concludes, "the history of an art of literature can no longer be written as an autonomous history, but only as part of the social process." Hermeneutic historiography differs from positivism in prohibiting the narrowness of the organicist's focus on a single, isolated topic of study.

But, perhaps the most essential division between the work of the positivist historian and that of the hermeneuticist stems from the latter's belief in the fundamentally indefinable nature of historical progression. Whereas the positivist labors for historical reconstruction, the hermeneuticist works to deconstruct his own reconstructions. Or, as Istvan Soter states, whereas the positivist envisions similarities and influences, the hermeneuticist encounters confrontations. And these confrontations, between the work of art and its linguistic context, between past realities and the historian's own present perception, shape and impel the progress of hermeneutic history.

The work of the hermeneutic historian can be divided into three integral tasks. Initially the hermeneutic historian concerns himself with the structural analysis of historical data in the hope of

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reconstructing a particular period's "world model," "the whole set, more or less closed, of rules which function for us as rules of decoding." 44 This structural endeavor co-exists with the attempt to experience past realities. The structural and the phenomenological sides of the historical discipline then balance and inform each other. Above all, the hermeneuticist attempts continually to adopt an appropriate ethical perspective toward his work, leaving a clearing for ruptural insight to occur.

Although the reconstruction of past world models remains an idealistic endeavor, certain principles guiding such work have been frequently repeated in the pages of NLH. According to the writers of NLH, a world model represents more than the linguistic framework of a particular period, more than a period's sense of style or verisimilitude, even more than a society's criteria for judging what will pass as a real entity. Society's existence as a unified cultural network, indeed the very existence of human society, depends on such a model. Yuri Lotman, the Russian semioticist who perhaps has done more work than any other contemporary critic in the exploration of the cybernetic mechanisms of world models, writes, "at a certain moment, the moment, in fact, from which we can begin to speak of culture, man linked his existence to a continually expanding nonhereditary memory; he became a receiver of information (during the prehistoric period he was merely a carrier of constant and genetically given information.)" 45 Lotman


adds that this system of nonhereditary memory "represents a powerful means of 'self-adjustment' for a culture, since it bestows upon it a systematic unity, and determines from several aspects the qualities it will possess as an information-storage system." Consequently a world model assures a certain potential for intersubjective communication and perception among the members of a community. It guarantees the members of a society the right to exist within the same stream of perceived reality. It also determines what ideas, ideals and types of communication will predominate during a particular period. And it does so not in the manner of the positivist Zeitgeist, as the cause of individual parole's, but as "the conditions of possibility" of their existence. Hayden White asserts, "In a given period and place in history, the system of encodation and decodation permits the transmission of certain kinds of messages regarding the context and not others." Maria Corti concludes, "The result is inevitable: anything which does not fall within the bounds of the model cannot exist within the culture." A world model sets the boundaries defining the cultural and represents the barrier against which the ruptural power of art is directed. A world model gives cultural identity to a particular


society and in doing so forms the oppositional force necessary to give identity to cultural artifacts.

Once a society has solidified its world model, it puts into play a series of mechanisms designed to stabilize cultural identity and thus to prevent ruptural occurrence. The most easily discerned of these defense mechanisms, the maintenance of taboos against the anticultural, determines what may not be expressed without great risk within a particular culture. At the same time it shapes much of what does become expressed. For example, Fredric Jameson identifies the social function of romance and its descendant, melodrama, as the social assimilation and handling of the threat of the anticultural. Jameson asserts that in the romance, the Other is feared not "because he is evil; rather he is evil because he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean, and unfamiliar." Jameson accordingly identifies the social function of the romance as "drawing the boundaries of a given social order and providing a powerful deterant against deviancy and subversion."

Lotman identifies another of society's stabilizing mechanisms as the willed shortening of cultural memory. Lotman writes, "Every culture creates its own model of the length of its existence, of the continuity of its memory." Lotman asserts that the longevity of a culture's memory will be determined "by the permanence of its basic structural principles and by its inner dynamism -- its capacity for change while

51 Ibid.
still preserving the memory of preceding states and, consequently, of the awareness of its own coherence." And Stephen Nichols proceeds to demonstrate how society's regulation of its own longevity may profoundly affect the structural perception of a particular period. Nichols points to a peculiarity of medieval perception, the consideration of all realities as co-existent in a perpetual present. Nichols explains, "What could be thought, and, most importantly, named in words -- no matter, what its origins -- did not constitute an abstraction unknowable in reality, but, on the contrary, an important and tangible part of the experience of present concrete existence." Nichols demonstrates this point by drawing attention to the frequent commingling of pagan and Christian icons within medieval painting. And Rainer Warning explicates this same perceptual principle of medieval disjunction in terms of the frequent pagan imagery and allusions used in medieval religious drama. Writes Warning, "This is not a contrast pregnant with significance, but rather Christianity is understood here in pagan terms and paganism is conceived in Christian ones."

The writers for NLH cite a third mechanism for the defense of cultural identity, the stratification of a single society into a hierarchy of social communities, each with its own distinct values and perceptual norms. Wolfgang Iser writes, "Every epoch has had its own thought system and social system, and each dominant system in turn, has

53 ibid.


other systems as its historical environment, regulating them to subsystems and so imposing a hierarchical order on what is considered to be the reality of the respective period. Yuri Lotman presents an overview of the resultant dynamic system that emerges from this social stratification: "the entire system for preserving and communicating human experience is constructed as a concentric system in the center of which are located the most obvious and logical structures, that is, the most structural ones." The nucleus of a particular society's sense of reality, its foundational paradigm, conditions the existence of any subcommunity. The central world model of a particular period stands in the relationship of structural langue to the parole of the subcommunity. However, a world model, existing on the nuclear level as a fixed set of syntactical rules, takes on the life force of a dynamic system as a subcommunity fills it out with the semantics of its own desires, hopes, fears, values and aspirations.

The process of social stratification bears heavily upon the task of the historian of the arts. For it replaces the concept of a period's predominant Zeitgeist or communal language with a large number of linguistic perspectives, each attached to a distinctly different subcommunity. The multiplicity of linguistic perspectives inevitably enriches the individual audience member's perception of a work of art not only insofar as the individual may belong to a large number of linguistic subcommunities but also insofar as it insure a rich

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cross-fertilization of different linguistic levels in every act of perception. Hans Robert Jauss identifies the three predominant levels of linguistic perception involved in aesthetic perception as "the reflective at the high level of authors, the social at the level of cultural institutions, and the prereflective at the underground level of immediate experience." Every aesthetic experience involves the individual in perceptions stemming from his own unique personality, from his membership in an institutionalized subcommunity, and from his situation within an over expanding cultural society. The writers for NLH have tended to concentrate upon the level of the institutionalized subcommunity, the level they identify with generic expectations. Alastair Fowler asserts the necessity of identifying a particular genre with a particular subcommunity. Noting that "no genre has ever been open to all social groups regardless of their level of education," Fowler asserts that the basic identity of genres comes from "formal constituents" which coincide with a subcommunity's particular manifestation of a period's world model. Jauss likewise identifies genres as the "communicative norms" and "subuniverses" of a particular subcommunity. And Tzvetan Todorov asserts the close connection between artistic genres and the institutionalization of the subcommunity: "a society chooses and codifies the arts that most


closely correspond to its ideology; this is why the existence of certain genres in a society and their absence in another reveal a certain ideology.\(^6^1\)

The tracing of generic change has become one of the NLH historians' chief tools for charting the development of a particular period's world model. Furthermore, Jauss explains that since subcommunities do not exist in mutual exclusion but instead continually interact, the structural analysis of the changing relationships between genres allows one to reconstruct the evolution of a particular society's hierarchical structure.\(^6^2\) Fowler, preceding from a similar argument, lists several relationships that may be obtained between different genres: inclusion, inversion, contrast, combination, and conversion.\(^6^3\) Fowler explains that by noting the dominant member in any generic inter-relationship one may pinpoint the more nuclear subcommunities within a society's stratification. However, the mapping of perceptual evolution through the inter-relationships of genres attains validity only in the study of those types of society which Lotman classifies as paradigmatic. Paradigmatic societies secure their identity through a rigid stratification of norms and subcommunities, all centered in the fashion of concentric circles around the nucleus of a single prized community


On the other hand, societies may exist through what Lotman terms syntagmatic ordering. Here all texts and all subcommunities possess equal value and a world model diffuses itself through such a society as its noncentered condition of being. Neoclassical France may be viewed as a prototypical example of the paradigmatic society; contemporary existential Europe, as a prototypical example of the syntagmatic society.

Paradigmatic and syntagmatic societies vary not only in regard to their means of social ordering but also in their means of evaluation of texts. Lotman writes that the paradigmatic society "will tend towards a specialization of its texts so that to each cultural function there corresponds an adequate type of text." On the other hand, syntagmatic societies "will tend to obliterate the boundaries between texts in order that identical texts should serve the whole set of cultural functions." While genre holds an important position in maintaining and proclaiming the identity of a subcommunity in a paradigmatic society, syntagmatic societies tend to relinquish the firm codification needed for predominant genres. Instead aesthetic texts enter into a broad social marketplace and rival with other types (e.g. religious, scientific, philosophical) for the importance and use-value to be assigned by a particular culture. Hayden White demonstrates how this commodification of the work of art inevitably leads to a reduction of art's potential for social impact and to a resultant isolation of art

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65 Ibid., 243.
66 Ibid.
as a self-enclosed linguistic system. "If we insert 'literature' into the list of possible commodities, it then becomes possible to understand, not only the alienation of the artist which the representation of the value of his product in terms of money alone might foster, but also the tendency of the artist to fetishize his own produce as being itself the universal sign and incarnation of value in a given social system." ⁶⁷

Many of the writers for NLH have identified this progression from a paradigmatic to a syntagmatic social stratification, from the work of art as the generic identity of a subcommunity to the work of art as fetishized commodity, as the predominant tendency of Western civilization. Consequently, the history of art as presented in the pages of NLH gravitates from a portrayal of the work of art as the parole of an institutionalized social langue during the classical, medieval, and neoclassical periods to a portrayal of art as an isolated linguistic system during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Accordingly, the hermeneutic practice of the history of art, while never losing sight of the other systems which form the context for aesthetic evolution, alters its direction midstream from a medievalist contextualism to a modernist organicism.

However, in the postmodern period the coherent nature of art as an isolated linguistic system disintegrates. John T. Irwin explains that as the syntagmatic stratification of society breaks culture apart into a multitude of diverse entities, as art becomes insulated from an often

indiscernible social langue, as the ruptural power of art becomes possible only as an assault upon its own isolated system, the self-evidencing power of the artist becomes severely jeopardized. Accordingly, Jauss identifies the contemporary period as one of "ironic identification," "a level of aesthetic reception upon which an identification that the reader would otherwise have expected is denied him in order to jolt him out of his undisturbed attentiveness to the aesthetic object and to direct his awakened reflections toward the conditions of illusion and the possibilities of interpretation." Irwin asserts that the contemporary artist has most frequently opted to achieve this form of anti-aesthetic self-evidencing through a focus on the material corporality of his artistic medium. The contemporary artist has resisted the intentional expectations of his audience by emphasizing that element which cannot be made to fit into an abstract structural perspective, the material substance of the artistic medium. For example, Herbert Blau, citing Grotowski and Brook, points to the somatic base of many of the major innovations made in theatre language during the 1960's and 1970's. The hermeneutic historian who seeks

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to study the works of art produced by a loosely organized syntagmatic society inevitably links his research with the idiographic.

The writers for NLH cite a final means for the social solidification and protection of cultural identity, the use of a predominant type of media as the prized carrier for socially significant information. Lotman argues that the durability of the medium used for society's central texts exerts a powerful influence upon the longevity of a society's cultural memory. For example, a print culture possesses the capability for a longer termed heritage than an oral culture. However, more importantly for the historian of the arts, the capacity of the predominant medium for carrying certain kinds of information and its incapacity for others will determine the types of communication and linguistic perception which prevail within a given culture. Marshall McLuhan, a pioneer in the study of the cybernetic effects of media, speaks of "entelechies," patterns of structural learning and perception re-enforced by the predominant use of a particular medium. For example, Robert Kellogg describes the basic perceptual habits developed within an oral culture as, on the one hand, sensuous, communal, and poetic, and on the other, as conservative, formulaic, and stereotyped. Kellogg explains that the person-to-person immediacy of communication within an oral culture re-enforces the sense of a shared, dynamic communal body of truths. At

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the same time, its lack of permanency prevents the explorative and technical accumulation of detail. Accordingly Morton Bloomfield argues that the invention of the printed text "is a substitute for memory but is more accurate than memory. The text makes possible literary accuracy and creates a kind of standard."

And a large number of postmodern historians have blamed print culture for endorsing a positivist conception of reality and a correspondent view of language as inherently centered. Murray Krieger explains that with the advent of the printing press, the act of linguistic expression "became its own synchronic metaphor... In the Renaissance it took on the aesthetic dignity of a physically present act, and tried to earn its right to such a dignity by manipulating its elements into becoming its own emblem, graphic symbol of itself." Lotman asserts that the fundamental character of French Neo-Classicism can be understood only in terms of its bringing to its first full fluorescence the centered linguistic perspective of print culture. Lotman writes, "The relationship between Truth and the world being depicted became the point of view. The fixed and unique meaning of these relationships, the way they all radiate from a single center, corresponded to the idea of Truth as something eternal, uniform, and immutable." The material modes of a particular period's sanctioned communicative media work to forcefully shape a society's world model. As Morton Bloomfield writes, "The graphic level can be central to the

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social order without paying attention to the significant. Only the signific is relevant."78

The writers for NLH depict society as safeguarding its cultural identity through four essential cybernetic mechanisms: the erection and enforcement of cultural taboos, the controlled longevity of cultural memory, the stratification of society into a regulated hierarchy of subcommunities and norms, and the sanctioning of a particular medium of communication. These four cybernetic mechanisms then allow the hermeneutic historian to complete his first task: the discovery of the structural principles, the essential rules of perceptual logic, the absolute presuppositions, constituting the world model of a particular period. The hermeneutic historian begins this task by noting the contrast between the cultural and the anticultural, between the sanctioned and the taboo. He notes not only what is included and excluded from a particular culture but also the principles of structural organization which make the anticultural the negative exponent of the cultural. Furthermore, he notes the diachronic breadth of a particular society's self-image, the distance into the past and the projection into the future which a society claims for itself. He notes the structural differentiations evidenced in the discontinuities between successive cultures. He also notes the means by which a society unifies its diverse subcommunities into an integrated cultural reality. In a paradigmatically ordered society, the hermeneutic historian of the arts focuses on the relationships between genres; in a budding synagmatic society, on the relationships between communicative systems; in a

loosely organized syntagmatic society, on the relationships between elements belonging to the same aesthetic system. The NLH historian completes the first stage of his work by noting the cybernetic effects engendered by the predominant media utilized during a specific period. Having thus reconstructed the synchronic world model of a particular period, the hermeneuticist then calculates the structural nature of a work of art's ruptural element.

However, the NLH historian cannot rest content with a mere structural analysis of world models and of opposing works of art. Rather he seeks also to measure the force of aesthetic conflict, the difficulty encountered in giving birth to the new. As Hans Robert Jauss asserts, hermeneutic history inevitably involves itself with the history of "aesthetic distance," "the distance between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new world, whose reception results in a 'horizon change'."\(^{79}\) The NLH historian measures this distance by noting the rigidity with which a society protects its structural perspective, by pinpointing these elements of its structure most susceptible to a particular shock of the new, and by analyzing the interrelatedness of other structural elements contingent to these segments under attack. Hans Robert Jauss further notes that the success with which a particular work crosses this distance may by calculated along "the spectrum of the reaction of the audience and the judgement of criticism (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or later understanding)."\(^{80}\)


\(^{80}\)Ibid.
The initial stage of the NLH historian's task, the reconstruction of past world models, involves a complex structural analysis of the entire social reality which may have existed during a particular synchronic cross-section of historied time. The complexity of such a system naturally prevents the historian from contemplating its complete and accurate reconstruction. However, the hermeneutic historian feels little need to complete this part of his task.

The primary aim of the hermeneuticist rests not in the reconstruction of past intentional worlds. Rather by projecting himself into another perceptual framework, by asking what reality would have been like had he viewed it through a world model different from his own, the postmodern historian hopes to encounter the alterity of the past and thus to transcend his own perceptual framework. Accordingly Stanley Fish writes that the critico-historian "has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of political, cultural, and literary detriments." And Hans Robert Jauss identifies the value of history as the training to see reality from different perspectives. According to the hermeneutic vision, historical inquiry exists primarily for the benefit of the historian and the historian alone can truly evaluate the quality of his own work.

However, the writers for NLH do not endorse an existentially unrestrained impressionism of the part of the historian. Rather they

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stress the necessity to restrain "intuitions" through "the accessible facts," to temper "historical and cultural aestheticism" through structural analysis. World models serve as a restraint upon the historical experiential endeavor. And positivist philology may serve a similar purpose. Positivist philology accordingly has not been banished totally from the world of NLH; rather the NLH vision exists as a metatheoretical stance governing and controlling the pursuit of philology. Morton Bloomfield writes,"Positivism insofar as it stresses respect for fact and text, for accuracy and care, must always have a place in our studies. But we can move beyond such an attitude if we so desire." The NLH historian does insists that primary value in historical research be transferred from objective accuracy to perceptual enrichment.

In order for this enrichment to take place, the historian's "familiar" perceptions must be "defamiliarized"; the historian's expectations for rational order must be restrained in order that the alterity of the past may show itself more effectively. Many of the NLH writers seek to achieve this "defamiliarization" through the process of "problematizing," a method of inquiry that finds its roots in R.G. Collingwood's "logic of question and answer." Collingwood, a seminal influence upon the historical thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer and a forefather of the postmodern revolution against positivist history,

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developed independently of the phenemenologists his theory of "absolute presuppositions," a concept similar to that of intentionality. Absolute presuppositions like intentional expectations form a holistic perceptual system which continually seek its stabilization. Collingwood asserts that any new piece of knowledge arises in answer to a question put forth by this system, in response to a structural gap that demands reconnection through a new piece of information. Accordingly Collingwood explains the central principle of his logic of question and answer: "A body of knowledge consists not of 'propositions,' 'statements,' 'judgements' . . . but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer; and . . . a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic." According to Collingwood and to the postmodern hermeneuticist, the task of the historian lies then in the empathic reconstruction of not only a particular period's answers, its predominant structural perceptions, but also of its questions, the structural tensions that gave rise to these answers. Due to the immense and complex nature of a system of absolute presuppositions, the historian's quest for questions can never be completed. Collingwood asserts that the answers of a historian should not be evaluated in terms of correctness or incorrectness, of truth or falsity, but rather in terms of "right" or "wrong," a "right" answer being one "which enables us to get ahead with the process of questioning and answering."

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87 Ibid., p. 37.
In the pages of *NLH* the historian appears as one who "problematizes," as one who does not disseminate answers so much as one who asks questions. And the postmodern historian asks questions of past realities, of his own present reality, and in the most complex form of hermeneutic historical scholarship, the study of "effect history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), of his entire scholarly and cultural tradition. For example, in "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature" (Winter 1979), Hans Robert Jauss begins his study not with the reconstruction of a medieval world model but with an examination of the contemporary world vision of the medieval. Jauss traces the present concept of medieval culture back through the Romantic period, noting the major scholars who have contributed to his present perceptual framework and linking the work of these scholars to the predominant world models of their respective periods. In this fashion Jauss develops a diachronic structure of the evolution of medievalist thought which eventually merges into a rich synchronic description of the present day medievalist's world vision. This reconstruction then allows the alterity of Jauss' own medieval world model to extend its ruptural impact beyond the barrier of his own idiosyncratic vision and to directly and overtly affect a large segment of his scholarly and cultural tradition.

The hermeneutic historical endeavor thus manifests itself in a constant tension between a structural-phenomenological analysis and a deconstructive "problematizing." The hermeneuticist remains aware that his findings can be expressed only in fictionalized, vague, opaque, and heuristic terms. He also remains aware that, despite the complexity and vastness of his historival endeavor, the accessible products of his
labor recedes forever before him. For the hermeneuticist knowledge always lies in the future beyond his grasp. And with every new act of understanding, the hermeneuticist moves part of the way into that future and the past retreats before him. As Frederic Will writes, "The past we are striving to both enlighten and combat is an incomplete horizon which reforms after every appropriate vision of it, a horizon never adequately comprehended because always freshly generated by us."^{88}

Such an endeavor may naturally appear convoluted and self-defeating in the eyes of the positivist. Yet the writers of NLH vehemently proclaim the dignity, the social responsibility, and the joyful verve manifested in their efforts. For Geoffrey Hartman the hermeneutic respect for art as a mysterious ruptural other serves to resurrect the social importance and living power of the particular work of art. Hartman writes that a new aesthetic history "is necessary less for the sake of the intellect than for the sake of literature; it is our 'historical duty' because it alone can provide today a sorely needed defense of art."^{89} For Fredric Jameson the central basis of hermeneutic history, the isolation of present perception from all other reality, allows the historian the power to regain lost importance in the betterment of human society. Jameson writes that in hermeneutic history the past "rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgement on us, and through us, on the social formation in which

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we exist." And for Hans Robert Jauss the hermeneutic insistence that the indefinable spirit of man be taken into account by the scholar in the humanities betokens a reawakening of humanistic brotherhood. Jauss asserts that in its rebellion against "the technocratic educational ideal", hermeneutic history brings together "understanding, interpretation, and application in order to win back for self-experience the knowledge of that which has become alien, the past as well as interhuman life."


CHAPTER IV

A New Theatre History: Losses and Gains

The editors of NLH continually stress the identity of the journal as that of a symposium. And a symposium cannot exist without a contrast of voices. Nevertheless, from the pages of NLH a single central vision emerges concerning the epistemological and ethical dimensions of historical study. And this vision manifests itself on three complexly developed, profoundly argued and inter-related levels: the epistemological, the aesthetic, and the historiographic.

The epistemological dimension of the NLH vision entered into its two hundred year evolution through Kant's and Hegel's rebellion against Cartesian dualism, through their reshaping the universe from a noumenal to a teleological order. At the cornerstone of the NLH world vision stands the resultant phenomenological concept of intentional understanding. The beliefs, values, and methods of study explicated in the pages of NLH may be seen as attempts to work out the implications of this central concept. One may also discern, grafted on this phenomenological root of the NLH perspective, certain central tenets of the structuralists: namely the holistic, linguistic, conventionally biased character of all perception. However, by themselves Husserlian or Diltheyean phenomenology and Saussurian structuralism remain spatially confined visions, mutations of a positivist perspective. A reshaping of their core tenets was necessary before the full teleological vision of NLH could come into existence. Consequently, the man most influential in the temporal revisioning of intentionality, Martin Heidagger, stands as the seminal figure in the
recreation of a new aesthetic history. Heidegger's central concepts of intenional pre-understanding and ruptural truth provide the basis for the critical and historical methodology expounded in NLH. With Martin Heidegger, reality becomes transferred from its empiricist base in the perceived object to its hermeneutic base in the act of perception. After Heidegger, criticism divides into those who would totally silence language and pre-understanding, the poststructuralists, and those who believe that man can only exist in the stream of pre-understood linguistic reality and tradition, the hermeneuticists. NLH takes its vision from the latter.

Through the evolution of contextual linguistics, particularly through the development of speech act theory by Austin and Searle and its consequent partial deconstruction by Derrida, hermeneutic philosophy gained firm access to an appropriate aesthetic vision and formed the second level of the NLH paradigm. In NLH aesthetics, artistic significance results from an interaction between an aesthetic text and its audience, the latter initially assuming the upper hand. The work of art, by forcing the audience to supply the contextual determinants necessary for communicative significance, foregrounds an audience's perceptual linguistic framework and exposes it at its most vulnerable position for attack. This aesthetic attack upon linguistic pre-understanding, this erection of aesthetic metaphor, constitutes the most important and powerful moment of the aesthetic experience in the world of NLH.

Due to his coupling of the aesthetic experience with a temporalized linguistic tradition, the NLH critic inevitably finds himself involved with the third level of the NLH paradigm, the methodology for charting
the history of a work's reception. And the writers for NLH insist that every act of praxis in the history of the arts implies a set of epistemological and aesthetic judgements. Consequently, mobilized by the ethical impulse behind postmodern criticism, NLH has launched a severe attack upon positivist history in terms of its implicit aesthetic. The NLH historian argues that the positivist endeavor to reduce all history to a single linguistic perspective has abolished the multi-levelled texture of reality necessary for ruptural occurrence. The positivist endeavor, the NLH writers assert, has reduced the temporal action of the work of art to the stature of a material commodity. In opposition to the positivist endeavor the NLH historians have constructed their own model of historical research. This model breaks down into three stages of inquiry: the structural analysis of past intentional world models; the empathic projection of the historian into the structural perceptions of these world models; and a constant process of problematizing, of putting questions until the past opens up its alterity.

As the postmoderns have transformed all perception into a matter of linguistics and all understood reality into the stature of a text, the NLH program for aesthetic history can be extended without modification to the study of theatre or of any other art form. However, it should be stressed that hermeneutic history remains still in its infancy. Historical work of considerable scope and value has been published by such scholars as Rainer Warning, Wolfgang Iser, Fredric Jameson, and Hans Robert Jauss. Of particular interest to the theatre scholar is Jauss' historical survey of aesthetic empathy and catharsis as evidenced predominantly in the theatrical experience. ("Levels of Identification
of Hero and Audience," *New Literary History*, 5 Winter 1974) Yet much work needs to be done in order to lay the grounds for the hermeneutic historian. Martin Price stresses the need for a more "subtle social psychology than we so far have." Bernard Beckermann stresses greater study in the cybernetic mechanisms of learning and perception along the lines laid out by Piaget and Polanyi. Alastair Fowler calls for greater study into inter-art relationships, a need felt acutely by the hermeneutic scholar who wishes to study art forms such as the theatre which unite a large number of diverse communication systems. And, as Leroy Searle asserts, the study of expansive world models demands a more strenuous effort at interdepartmentalization than is so far evidenced at American universities.

In this interdisciplinary effort to create a new social history of the arts, the theatre historian may find himself in the privileged position traditionally accorded to the literary historian or to the historian of the fine arts. From the positivist perspective, the theatre historian labors against a debilitating obstacle, the impermanency of the central object of his study, the theatrical performance. Unlike works of literature, paintings or films, the theatrical performance vanishes in the act of creation. The

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hermeneutic approach to aesthetic history does not offer a way around this problem. However, in positing reality as a matter of perception, hermeneutics strips the literary historian and the historian of the fine arts of their privileged position. Poems and paintings no longer exist as first-hand historical documents but instead become purely present realities. While historical inquiry may cause the work of art to show forth its pastness, this historicity cannot be discerned written on the surface. Nor does the hermeneutic historian seek to recapture the material form of a work of art as it may have existed in the past. Rather he seeks to understand the mentality of the past that first observed it. In this endeavor, the traditional values assigned to primary and secondary resources become reversed. Secondary resources become primary documents in the study of past intentional states. And the most revealing secondary resources for the literary historian and for the historian of the fine arts, pieces of practical criticism, remain largely undeveloped until the modern period. On the other hand, the theatre historian has uncovered a rich cornucopia of secondary resources which may prove invaluable to a new aesthetic history.

The unique character of the theatrical form of metaphorical expression also enables the theatre historian to probe key issues more readily than the historians of the other arts. Wolfgang Iser details four types of metaphorical structures, each applicable to a discussion of the nature of theatrical entertainment. The first type of metaphor, the counterbalanced, concerns itself with aesthetic surprise and suspense. The counterbalanced metaphor involves a contrast which only seems to be improbable but which when fully understood makes sense without disrupting the initially projected verisimilitude of a piece.
For example, the death of Cordelia, occurring at the moment when King Lear's tragic catastrophe seems most likely to have been averted, may disrupt an audience's expectations for a peaceful denouement but it confirms the original tragic cast projected over the play. Iser explains that this type of metaphor results in aesthetic suspense through the creation of blanks that must be filled in by an audience from what it has already learned about the world of the work or from what it still has to learn. Consequently the metaphor of counterbalance "achieves its control mainly by restricting its blank references to a simple yes or no decision."

The counterbalanced metaphor raises questions that may be answered through literal analysis such as what caused a particular event to happen and what will happen next. In order for this metaphor's control to exist, in order that aesthetic suspense may be prevented from expanding into a total suspension of judgement, a firmly established world vision must be created and fully accepted by an audience. Thus Iser asserts that metaphorical counterbalance relies on "a very definite hierarchy of perspectives; not only are the qualities and defects of the perspective clearly graded, but the communication function of the text is also specifically indicated." Thus the metaphor of counterbalance relies on a largely unchecked support of the perceptual norms of its social environment. Theatre, depending upon a popular audience for its very existence, may be seen as heavily reliant upon the counterbalanced metaphor. This close connection between theatre as popular entertainment and the rhetorical bolstering of the

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6 Ibid., p. 181.
social norm makes theatre, perhaps more than any other art form, a reliable reflector of the intentional perceptual structures of its social environment.

The second type of metaphor cited by Iser, the oppositional, occurs when the ruptural element becomes improbable enough to call into question the initially accepted verisimilitude of a piece. The oppositional with its conflict of two mutually exclusive world visions locates metaphorical rupture on the level of language itself and foregrounds the socially accepted norms that constitute a particular language system. Despite the many attempts to incorporate the oppositional metaphor into the theatre production, especially noticeable for example in forms of alternate and environmental theatre which attempt to disrupt the basis of theatrical language by blurring the distinction between theatre and reality, such attempts can attain little aesthetic validity according to the majority of the writers for NLH, for the theatrical medium unlike the literary prohibits the abstraction necessary for the oppositional to take place.

The dynamics of metaphor are to a large extent determined by the concrete nature of an aesthetic medium and by the resultant steadfastness of verisimilitude peculiar to that medium. The concrete element of theatre limits and localizes a work's verisimilar base in a fashion contrary to that of the purely verbal literary work. Oleg Grabar argues that since the graphic arts possess a much lower degree of discursive power than the literary arts, more background information becomes necessary before one comes to them. For example, the title of painting becomes more essential to one's aesthetic appreciation than the title of a novel. Consequently Grabar defines the nature of the power of the
fine arts not as discursive but as model: localizing, shaping, and emotionally grounding one's pre-existent ideas. Grabar writes, "the visual world, because it is genuinely interpreted in another medium than itself, possesses intrinsically a semantic field which is almost as large as the intellect of its observer. In other words, the 'receiver' may be considered as more important than the 'sender', perhaps even more than the 'message'. 7 Adapted to the theatrical medium, Garbar's assertions imply that the world view of a play originates not from the production elements, not from the spectacle, but from the clues set up by the play's narrative and verbal locutionary structures. Only after these structures have created a sense of verisimilitude does this world become localized through the production elements. Spectacle emotionally grounds plot. As Herbert Blau writes, "In the erotics of theatre, words are (theoretically) corporal. They are up there for public scrutiny. The mind's eye echoes the mind's ear." 8 Consequently, a holistic unified response to a theatrical production demands a constant localization of verisimilitude in the play's production elements. The theatre secures and holds fast in the bonds of unrelieved spectacle a constant, unified sense of verisimilitude. At no moment can a theatrical production be divided within itself between two conflicting world visions. In the theatre, spectacle prohibits the oppositional metaphor and unifies all attempts at such division into a single, dominant, graphic theatrical style.

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The exclusion of the metaphor of opposition from theatrical presentation produces important ramifications for the critico-historian of the theatre arts. The dominance of an unswerving verisimilar base, grounded in the physicality of theatrical production, prevents theatre from foregrounding and examining the normative ideas that constitute its world vision. As a result, Jean Hristic describes the theatre as "far purer" than the novel, which can support a mixture of co-existant genres and world views. Accordingly Hristic contrasts the novel which exists primarily as a foregrounding of the ideational elements which constitute its world view with the theatre which exists primarily as a foregrounding of its world view as an unbroken whole. It follows that theatrical expression, existing as a microcosmic manifestation of a particular society's world vision, will tend toward the conservative. Peripheral social change will tend to have little effect upon it. Changes within the structure of theatre language may serve as a fairly reliable barometer of changes within the structure of a society's linguistic perspective. The theatre historian finds himself in a position closer to the core of a particular period's paradigmatic vision than do historians of other arts.

Iser also speaks of the dialectical metaphor which is structured so that it cannot be resolved by a selection of one sense of verisimilitude ever a competitor. Rather, as Kazimar Bartoszynski writes, in the dialectical metaphor different senses of veisimilitude are seen not so

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much as competing but rather as parallel. The dialectical metaphor falls into two categories, the echelon and the serial. In the echelon, the opposing senses of verisimilitude balance and cancel each other out. A balanced, unified theatre production may be regarded as a metaphor of the echelon variety. The theatre experience agglomerates a large number of diverse aesthetic languages, each with its own potential for different types of verisimilitude, into a single aesthetic experience. For example, structuralist Keir Elam identifies twenty-nine distinct types of theatrical language systems and finds an equivalent for each within the diverse aesthetic languages displayed in the written dramatic text. These multiple aesthetic languages can be unified only in a metaphorical expression which balances each and refuses the domination of any.

However, theatre seldom if ever maintains an existence on the level of an even, unbroken equivalence of signs. Art demands rupture and the theatrical base in the echelon spirals into what Iser terms the metaphor of the serial. The serial metaphor occurs when the dialectical contrast of the echelon has been so accelerated that resolution into a single vision proves impossible or when an obstinate stylistic element so disrupts the prevailing aesthetic language that the meaning making power of that language is called into question. This is the metaphorical moment when past linguistic expectations stand silenced before the thrust and wonder of new truth, or as put into theatrical terms by

Stanley Homan, the moment when "theatre turns to itself," calling attention to new and ineffable innovations in the body of theatre language. The theatre, an art form which exists primarily by means of a foregrounding of aesthetic language, takes its essential hermeneutic history from the serial metaphor and the technical innovations implied therein. Consequently the theatre tends to draw its inspiration not from the anticultural, the noumenalogical negation of the cultural, but from the uncultural, from the incomprehensible, from that realm which Ricoeur identifies as that of the symbolic, the ritualistic, and the sacred. Theatrical rupture then tends to occur not on the sanctioned structural borders of a society's values but rather on its cognitive frontier. And the hermeneutic theatre historian consequently finds himself in the position to ask questions crucial to the hermeneutic endeavor: What factors constitute the borders of comprehension during a particular period? And what factors constitute that which can cross those borders intact as the mysterious, incomprehensible, sacred Other? Correspondingly as the hermeneutic endeavor gains ascendancy in the academic orthodoxy, the study of theatre history stands to grow in its importance in the university curriculum.

However, great efforts still are needed to establish firmly a hermeneutic revision of aesthetic history as the orthodox disciplinary method. The epistemological foundations of hermeneutics prevent the

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12Stanley Heman, "When Theatre Turns to Itself," _New Literary History_, 2 (Spring 1971), 410.

Catharine Belsey explains, "What divides empiricist criticism from formalism and both from poststructuralism is centrally a debate over meaning; and this debate cannot be resolved because what is at stake is a contest between the different theoretical frameworks within which each group conceptualizes language, subjectivity, and the world." And the same applies to hermeneutics. Either one accepts the intentional nature of all human cognitive processes, either one accepts the linguistic base of all human perception or one does not. As Peter Steiner writes, "Epistemological spaces are not subject to the ballot." However, one can assess the ethical impact of the hermeneutic inquiry as a form of scholarly action; that is, one can judge whether the NLH format for historical inquiry hinders or facilitates one's humanistic desires.

And the writers for NLH display a clear sighted awareness of which values their form of scholarship sacrifices, namely academic professionalism and specialization. Richard Ohmann notes that "a profession is in many ways the nearest approximation offered by bourgeois society to hereditary title and rank," and he cites five criteria on which the attainment of a professional status depends:

1) that they have something that society vitally needs 2) that they offer it in a way that is detached and objective . . . 3) that they 'know better than their clients what ails them or their affairs' . . . 4) that this experience cannot be won by apprenticeship alone, rather, the skills that characterize a profession flow from and are supported by a field of knowledge that has


been organized into a . . . body of theory and 5) that long training in a professional school is necessary to master that knowledge and those skills.

Ohmann proceeds to argue the importance of academic departments in safeguarding the central body of knowledge required for a professional position and in regulating entry into the sanctioned ranks of the professional. Ohmann thus defines academic departments as "the center of our self-image and of the value we set on our professional selves." However, the hermeneutic vision undermines the socially and departmentally sanctioned professional status of the academic professor in several ways: by insisting on the reductive, fictionalized nature of any body of knowledge in the humanities; on the lack of correspondence between this body of knowledge and anything beyond the professor's own perceptual framework; on the nature of all truth as an experience of the isolated individual; and on the inability of the individual to truly communicate the product of such an experience. Consequently the abolition of academic professionalism has been vehemently demanded by such NLH writers as Ohmann, Sparshott, and Hartman. And it may be argued that if the theatre scholar is promised a prominent position in the hermeneutic endeavor only at the cost of a reduced social status, he may be well wary of its full-scale adoption.


17Ibid., 568.

On the other hand, the hermeneutic vision may be judged as offering a means to heal the division long existent in theatre studies and thus as serving to revitalize the discipline. The discipline of theatre studies has been riven since its inception in two essential ways. Keir Elam expresses the first of these when he writes, "The drama has become (and largely remains) an annexe of the property of literary critics, while the stage spectacle, considered too ephemeral a phenomenon for systematic study, had been effectively staked off as the happy hunting ground of reviewers, reminiscing actors, historians and prescriptive theorists."¹⁹ As Elam suggests, traditional theatre scholarship divided itself into two predominant pursuits: theatre history which tends to focus on the theatrical production and dramatic criticism which tends to focus on the dramatic script. The theatrical production has continually been relegated to the stature of a second-order aesthetic system, existing as a derivative, interpretive parole of its langue, the dramatic text. Consequently the domain of theatre studies has always owed a great debt to literary analysis, the application of methods of reading to any type of written material. The principles of literary analysis consequently have controlled and guided much of the work in theatre history. For example, actors are described in terms of the characters they have impersonated; and designers and directors, in terms of their portrayal of certain themes. On the other hand, the principles of theatre history have done little to inform the practice of dramatic criticism. Indeed, as pointed out by Oscar Brockett, the principles of theatre history have themselves been derived from other

fields, especially from history proper. And so extensive is the derivative nature of disciplinary study in the theatre that there has yet to be adopted on a full scale a scholarly method which would unite the study of all the elements of the theatrical endeavor into a single line of inquiry. However, hermeneutics promises, indeed demands, such a methodological approach to the study of the theatrical experience. In identifying the aesthetic event as a holistic experience, hermeneutics has prevented the theatrical event from dividing itself into a number of disconnected elements, each of which the historian must account for. In developing a structural method of identifying the work of art through its relationship to its linguistic context, hermeneutics has provided a means for locating the equibalanced unity of all the aspects comprising a single theatrical expression. In replacing the traditional belief in a universal aesthetic with an acceptance of a large number of particular aesthetics conditioned intentionally and cybernetically by the medium of the work of art and by the scholar's own linguistic environment hermeneutics has provided the philosophical grounds for a unique aesthetic of the theatre and for a correspondent methodology. In merging critical theory with historical praxis, hermeneutics implies a single goal unifying all scholarly endeavor in the field of theatre studies, namely the training to see through a large number of different perceptual frameworks. And, although the full development of a particular hermeneutic for the theatre scholar waits upon further study in the phenomenological nature of the theatrical experience, the writers

for NLH have supplied an expansive methodological structure from which a specialized hermeneutic may be adumerated.

In 1966, a second division within the field of theatre studies was identified by the Princeton Conference on Theatre Research, that between the training of the theatre artist and the education of the theatre scholar. The training of the theatre artist ultimately gears itself to the domain of the imaginatively originative. On the other hand, positivist theatre history and objectivist dramatic criticism concern themselves primarily with the domains of analysis, synthesis, and interpretation, forbidding the domain of the imaginatively originative as the source of overinterpretation. Consequently a cognitive and imaginative leap has been required before the findings of one field can be related to the other. However, hermeneutics promises to bridge this gap between the training of the theatre artist and the work of the theatre scholar. It has done so not by supplying a method for the incorporation of "historical facts" into contemporary production but by stressing the subordinate role that "facts" play in the true task of the scholar. By transforming scholarship in the arts from a process of interpretive analysis to an experience of creative self-expression, hermeneutics unites scholarship and aesthetic practice through the common bond of a particular mode of understanding. Hermeneutics promises to unite all educational endeavors in the field of theatre studies as similar types of cognitive action.

However, the major contribution hermeneutics stands to make to the field of theatre studies stems from its position in contemporary aesthetic thought. In 1980, David Lodge accurately summarized the prevailing conditions in the domain of aesthetic theory; it is marked, he writes, by the belated turning of attention, by English and American critics, to the European tradition of formalism and structuralism, which has without a doubt been the most striking development in the humanities in the last decade. In Britain, and no doubt in America, there are still a few strongholds of dissent, where academics try to convince themselves that if they keep their heads down long enough the structuralist fuss will simply blow over; or, more valiantly, man the periodical ramparts in defense of empiricism, humanism, New Criticism, or whatever. But really the battle has been won (or lost, depending on your point of view), and the question is what to do in the aftermath.

In the contemporary debate between the scientist and the humanists, the predominant voice for the scientists is no longer that of the positivist or of the objectivist but of the structuralist and of the semiotist. And, at least in America and France, the main opposition, the most noted voice for the new humanism, comes from the poststructuralist. One then has a choice between, on the one hand, the scientific dissection of the work of art in a fashion that would reduce all culture to a set of deterministic systems and, on the other, the total silencing of scholarly research in the humanities. Given this arena, the committed scholar in the field of theatre studies can welcome the hermeneutic vision, no matter how underdeveloped its method of study still remains. While hermeneutics does not evade recognizing the demise of the old scholarly tradition and the arrival of the new, it does

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22David Lodge, "Historicism and Literary History: Mapping the Modern Period," *New Literary History*, 10 (Spring 1979), 555.
guarantee the continued study of the work of art without prohibiting its participation in the mysterious and in the divine. The writers for NLH insofor as they bear witness to the hermeneutic vision may serve the theatre scholar as paradigmatic models of how to preserve aesthetic education and scholarship in the wake of positivism and objectivism and in the name of the indefinable, sacred other-ness of one's fellow man.
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VITA

Robert G. Staggenborg, born in Covington, Kentucky on April 21, 1951, received a diploma from Covington Catholic High School in May, 1968. He then studied for the B. A. in English literature and criticism at Thomas More College, graduating in the spring of 1972. Upon the reception of a university scholarship, he entered the University of Cincinnati and a year later, August, 1973, earned a M. A. in theatre. His thesis, written under David Hirvela, was titled, "Heartbreak House and the Shavian Dialectic of Comedy."

In autumn of 1974, Robert became managing-director of WCAL-Cablevision, a public broadcasting video station in northern Ohio. During this time, he also began a career in high school teaching. He has taught English, broadcasting, theatre, speech, and journalism at Calvert High School, Tiffen, Ohio; at Holy Cross High School, Latonia, Kentucky; and at Owensboro City Schools, Owensboro, Kentucky.

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Major Field: Speech Communication, Theatre, and Communication Disorders

Title of Thesis: "New Literary History and the Postmodern Paradigm: Implications for Theatre History"

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Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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