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The ethics of Mimesis: Postmodernism and the possibility of history

Langford, Larry L., Ph.D.

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THE ETHICS OF MIMESES:
POSTMODERNISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTORY

by

LARRY L. LANGFORD

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Wesley Morris, Professor of English,
Director

Terrence Doody, Professor of English

Meredith Anne Skura, Professor of English

Richard Wolin, Associate Professor of History

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ABSTRACT: The Ethics of Mimesis: Postmodernism and the Possibility of History
Larry L. Langford

Almost every attempt to distinguish literature from history begins in empiricism and ends in ethics. Much depends upon this long-standing distinction and much may potentially be lost if it is compromised or collapses. But as a discipline, historiography today must confront the problem that, as in all polarities and oppositions, historical and fictional discourses adhere to one another in a symbiotic manner that makes the existence and meaning of one impossible without the other. In order to legitimate its claims to truthfulness, history has had to repress a fundamental truth about itself: any attempt to represent the past is actually a literary re-creation that is as much the result of the projection or transference of desire as of objective description and analysis.

At stake in the history/fiction contrast is not just a pedagogical separation of truth from falsehood, but rather the more fundamental question of social relationships and the ability of human beings to transcend the so-called state of nature. Although Nietzsche noted with approval that the animal lives unhistorically, just such a prospect often underlies those arguments seeking to protect history from
fiction. Modern conceptions of the differences between nature and human society, and of history and fiction as well, can be traced back to the Enlightenment and its attempt to universalize the idea of reason as the standard by which to measure historical progression. But the Enlightenment's success at this project proved to be (in the eyes of many) its great failure. From the eighteenth century through to the modernist movement and beyond to postmodernism, we can trace a series of dissensions, not against the idea reason and history per se, but against an idea that promises emancipation through a process of domination, constraint and control of both the natural world and human nature. Within such a process, the "historical" continually places itself in opposition to the "natural," with historical narrative acting as the main line of defense against the expression of individual desire which fiction makes possible.
For Kathryn and for David

"Everywhere a relationship: no loneliness anymore."
Acknowledgments

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And I wish especially to thank Kathryn, my wife, whose love and faith continually creates possibilities and then refuses to let them fail.
This encounter with the limits of language is Ethics.
--Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Zu Heidegger"

For where there is no Desire, there will be no Industry.
--John Locke, Some Thoughts Concerning Education

Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination.
--Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

"I must learn how people live now, how the common life has developed. Then I shall understand these things better..."
"You can get that from our realistic novelists," suggested Ostrog, suddenly preoccupied.
"I want reality," said Graham, "not realism."
--H. G. Wells, When the Sleeper Wakes

Popescu: Can I ask, is Mr. Martins engaged on a new book?
Martins: Yes. Its called The Third Man.
Popescu: A novel, Mr. Martins?
Martins: Its a murder story. I've just started it. Its based on fact...
Popescu: I'd say you were doing something pretty dangerous this time.
Martins: Yes?
Popescu: Mixing fact and fiction.
--Graham Greene, The Third Man
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Part One: The Return of the Repressed

"Lo, the scarlet letter which Hester wears...it hath cast a lurid gleam of awe and horrible repugnance round about her. But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered!"

--Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

Almost every attempt to distinguish literature from history begins in empiricism and ends in ethics. The need to divide fiction (the hallmark of the literary) from historical discourses is both the beginning of scientific positivism as well as the last line of defence against the morally questionable status of subjectivism. "Western historiography," writes Michel de Certeau "struggles against fiction,"¹ but until recently the outcome of this strife was always considered a foregone conclusion if for no other reason than the demands of an ethical distinction between the true and the false. The result has been a hierarchy of genres in which history makes unambiguous claims to the truth while fiction remains suspiciously on the border of falsehood. Like Hester Prynne, fiction has always been made to proclaim openly both its shame and failure in its desire

to represent the world and its incapacity to do so in the manner of history.

A curious though perhaps not surprising consequence of this hierarchical division is that the definitions of history and fiction have remained almost uniformly tautological since the time of Aristotle. In the Poetics, where he subordinates fiction to the modal subjunctive, Aristotle writes, "The historian tells us what happened, the poet what might happen," and few since have found fault with these definitions. Time and again, when the need to distinguish fiction and history continually reformulates this opposition in an almost identical manner.


3 Even when this distinction is not stately as explicitly as it is in Aristotle, it still remains in evidence as an underlying assumption. For example, we can see it in Northrop Frye's classification of fiction according to the hero's power, "which may be greater than our's, less, or roughly the same" (Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 33), or in Terry Eagleton's discussion of the role of ideology in literature, "History, then, operates upon the text by an ideological determination which within the text itself privileges ideology as a dominant structure determining its own imaginary or 'pseudo' history" (Criticism and Ideology (London: Verso, 1976), pp. 74-75). Many similar examples could be cited, but see especially R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); Avrom Fleishman, The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Shalom Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Methuen, 1983); Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); Arthur C. Danto, Narration and
attributes, then, history and fiction have always remained identifiable as the result of a contrast—one is by definition not the other—and thus a negativism has characterized this demarcation of discourses. To write history is to write non-fiction. Though historians and critics have not always been comfortable with this negative distinction, its pragmatic usefulness has overshadowed its dubious theoretical grounding.

Though the truth claims of history have always been recognized as somewhat ambiguous, it should not be surprising that the current debate surrounding the epistemological status of historiography carries with it an undeniable note of scandal, and as in the case of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, this scandal resides not only in the fact that

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With Hegel, for example, history exists in the structural function of categories rather than in the data they seek to embody: "Even the average and mediocre historian, who perhaps believes and pretends that he is merely receptive, merely surrendering himself to data, is not passive in his thinking. He brings his categories with him and sees the data through them . . . To him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back" (G. W. F. Hegel, Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), p. 13.)
it occurred but even more in that it went virtually unacknowledged for so long. Just as Dimmesdale revealed the red stigma on his breast, history (with no little consternation) now openly admits that it has within itself the attributes of its supposed antithesis and must deal with the consequences of its shared narrative identity with fiction. Much depends upon the long-standing distinction of literature from history, and much may potentially be lost if this distinction is compromised or collapses. For if we admit, as does Francoise Gaillard, that "History itself becomes impossible once the minimal conditions for fictionalization are no longer met,"5 or as does Hayden White that "as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another,"6 then we must also admit that we can no longer delineate the true from the false as confidently as we once did; and we must further admit that the traditional negative definitions of history and fiction based on such ethical categories are now of questionable validity and stand in need of extensive reevaluation.

Thus historiography as a discipline is confronted with what we might call "the return of the repressed," that is,


the realization that, as in all polarities or oppositions, historical and fictional discourses actually adhere to one another symbiotically in a manner that makes the existence and meaning of one impossible without the other. De Certeau is rightly notes that within the field of historiography the "repressed" takes the form of literature,7 for in order to legitimize its claims to truthfulness history has had to ignore a fundamental "truth" about itself: any attempt to represent the past is actually a literary re-creation that is as much the result of subjectively chosen emplotments as of objective description and analysis. With the return of the repressed also comes the exposure of how the distinction between fiction and history has rested on a paradox that assumes the hierarchical division of discourses; for whereas historical fiction has long been a recognized sub-genre of literature, the truth claims of historical discourse reduce a designation such as fictional history to nothing more than an oxymoronic absurdity. Truth, whether in ethics or logic, is uncompromisingly absolute and will not tolerate any admixture with falsehood. The opposite, however, is not the case because falsehood can appropriate any amount of truth without transforming into its categorical opposite. Thus

7 De Certeau, p. 219. As a result, he continues, historiography becomes "a science which lacks the means of being one."
fiction, in its assumed role of manifesting the false or untrue, can subsume into itself any amount of the historical record and not lose its generic distinctiveness; but once history begins to take on the attributes of fiction it immediately loses its referential respectability and falls from grace into the domain of literature.

So we move from paradox to paradox in that history has always had within itself the attributes of fictional narrative, and the truth claims of every discourse have always contained an element of arbitrariness. Truth is indeed a thing of the world, as Foucault says, but not as an immanent quality; rather "it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint"8 such as a hierarchy of discourses. But when history admits to these constraints it finds itself, unlike Dimmesdale, condemned without any corresponding expiation of guilt. The reasons for such condemnation are complex, encompassing more than the simple moral and epistemological imperative to distinguish truth from falsehood. The importance of such an imperative is not in question, but the ability of historical narrative to achieve it in any ab-

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8 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 131. Foucault goes on to state that "'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (p. 133).
solute sense certainly is. Fiction and history are perilous categories which will not (and of course never have) remain comfortably segregated: there is a great deal more than fiction in Salmon Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and great deal less than what we might term "straightforward" history in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* or T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

To note this fact, however, does not aggrandize one work or trivialize the other but instead shows how Aristotle's subordination of fiction to the modal subjunctive will no longer serve us well in contrasting it with history. For at stake in this contrast is not just a pedagogical separation of truth from falsehood, but rather the more fundamental question of social relationships and the ability of human beings to transcend any so-called state of nature. Although Nietzsche noted with approval that "the animal lives unhistorically," it is just such a prospect that

9 See de Certeau, p. 200.

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), p. 9. In an interesting contrast to most thinking on this subject, Nietzsche sees ahistoricality as a necessary prerequisite to truth. The animal, he goes on to note, "does not know how to dissimulate, hides nothing, appears at every moment fully as what it is and so cannot but be honest." It would be easy (and wrong) to charge Nietzsche with naive romanticism unless we keep in mind that he considered the historical and the ahistorical as equally
often underlies those arguments seeking to protect history from fiction. Modern conceptions of the difference between nature and human society can be traced back to the Enlightenment and its attempt to universalize the idea of reason as the standard by which to measure historical progression. But as we shall now see, the Enlightenment's success at this project also proved to be (in the eyes of many) its great failure: from the Romantics to Nietzsche to the modernist movement and beyond to postmodernism we can trace a series of dissensions and rebellions, not against reason and history per se, but against an idea of reason and history that promises emancipation (in the broadest sense—political, economic, spiritual) through a process of domination, constraint and control of both the natural world and human nature. Within such a project of emancipation, the separation of history from fiction does not just involve a simple empirical need to discern the truth, but also a way of countering the perceived threat of nature to the entire project of rationality; as a result, the "historical" continually places itself in opposition to the "natural," with historical narrative as the main line of defense (and of constraint) against what we otherwise might become.

important ways of thinking for the overman.
I. Enlightenment and its Discontents

Part of the attraction of science is its innocence. It can offer authoritative explanations of cause and effect without ever raising the issue of responsibility, and can unabashedly identify the process of categorization with that of discovering and understanding the a priori. Reason without prejudice and knowledge without proscriptions characterize the scientific endeavor. Behind such a definition, however, lies a barely disguised utopianism that makes it easier to understand the enduring strength of the Enlightenment and the reasons why science has remained the dominant paradigm of the modern Western world. Identification, calibration, and quantification are only some of the means by which human beings assume positions of power in relation to their environment and become capable of acting upon it rather than reacting to it. The success of this paradigm means that science has become synonymous with truth and that the truth value of other disciplines has in turn become contingent upon their ability to adapt their own procedures and discourses to the scientific model.

To question the innocence of science, however, is to undermine its capacity for totalization and thus to threaten its utopian potential. It should come as no surprise, then, that arguments in defense of the scientific character of the Enlightenment quite often entail the defense of social and
political stability as well. The nature of such arguments has remained fairly constant but the forces arrayed on either side of the question have shifted over the years so that what once posed an apparent threat to the project of the Enlightenment now comes forward as its defender. As a result, we find ourselves today still confronting the question Kant posed—what is Enlightenment? What has changed since Kant's time, however, is how we ask that question. For if the Enlightenment, however specifically conceived, valorizes rationality, progress, and even common sense, the question becomes is it possible to be anti-Enlightenment? Or, can one be critical of the project of the Enlightenment without somehow promoting irrationality and even barbarism?

11 See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 3-14; Richard Wolin, "Modernity vs. Postmodernism," *Telos*, 62 (1984-85), 9-29; Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). Wolin, for example, regards much of the postmodernist opposition to the Enlightenment and its humanistic traditions as "being ultimately in league with the forces of impending barbarism." "In no uncertain terms," he continues, "the demise of the individual, the end of history, rather than being causes for rejoicing, are imminent prospects which must be combatted at all cost" (p. 27). But when I speak of social and political stability I do not mean a right-wing or even simply conservative political agenda, for Marxism has been in the forefront of the critique of postmodernism. Social and political stability merely refers to already legitimiz ed programs of power and regulation which structure society against the threat of anarchy and violence. That the nature of such structures is always problematic gives the postmodernist argument much of its impetus.
The nature of such questions provide insight into the contemporary form of this same debate which now concerns postmodernism's epistemological and political status, and its perceived opposition to modernism and the continuation of the Enlightenment project. The irony of such an opposition, however, is that modernism, with its emphasis on perspective, isolation, disjunction, and juxtaposition, was initially received as the latest threat (in the wake of Nietzsche) to everything the Enlightenment held dear. We can see that the structure of a certain bi-polar opposition has remained intact since the Eighteenth century, but that the nature of that opposition has continually changed. A one-time threat to the rule of reason becomes its very embodiment when a new form of critique appears. An inherent contradiction therefore exists within the Enlightenment, enabling it to function at one time as an important revolutionary force against superstition and dogma and as a catalyst for continuing change in society, but at another time as a bulwark to protect the status quo against such possibilities. An ambiguity surrounds the nature of rationality making it difficult to distinguish its essence from its current manifestations. If rationality rests on a shifting foundation, science and its would-be concomitant disciplines of history and philosophy find themselves in an uncomfortable position regarding conventional notions of truth and fiction. For
Foucault to proclaim in all good faith, "I have never written anything but fictions," 12 is not to reject reason and history and in turn the whole project of the Enlightenment; rather, it is to reject certain programmatic applications of the Enlightenment and to redefine reason and history in a way that straightforwardly takes into account such shifting foundations.

Underlying the contemporary debate as to the relative merits of modernism and postmodernism is a much older debate about the project of the Enlightenment and its claims to universal applicability: claims which to many (with considerable justification) seem self-evident and beyond refutation. Kant's claim that the Enlightenment marked man's coming of age from a state of immaturity is an exaggeration, but it does show he well understood the magnitude and importance of the intellectual and social transformations he witnessed. The attempt to make reason the absolute ruler of human life had as its goal emancipation from the institutional forces of authority, prejudice, convention, and tradition. An important consequence of this attempt was a transformation of the idea of history; whereas church doctrine had regarded it as a largely process of decline and

12 Foucault, p. 193. Foucault continues, "One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth."
deterioration from the time of Adam, it now became one of progression, expansion and ever increasing opportunities. Reason functioned as the principal agent of this progress and as the primary means by which humanity could gain effective control of its physical and cultural environment. Marx succinctly characterizes the world view of the Enlightenment (and in doing so shows its pervasiveness) when he writes that "All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them."13 That Marx would find a place in the Enlightenment tradition shows how the rise of reason did indeed entail a significant victory of materialism over metaphysics and helped remove the encumberances and limitations of mythological, though not ideological, thinking.14 In fact, an optimistic outlook so marked (and continues to mark) En-


14 In other words, whatever changes and disruptions Marxism effected, it still remains an instance of continuity within the Enlightenment. See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 261-262: "At the deepest level of Western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity; it found its place without difficulty, as a full, quiet, comfortable and . . . satisfying form for a time (its own), within an epistemological arrangement that welcomed it gladly . . . Marxism exists in nineteenth-century thought like a fish in water."
lightenment thought that a book such as Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* could not only outline a utopia of uninterrupted progress but also seriously suggest the eventual possibility of human immortality in the flesh.

Not all shared such optimism, however, and reaction to the Enlightenment manifested itself in various ways, such as the popular interest within the Protestant churches with primitive forms of Christianity that often combined an austerely moral and way of living with various forms of spiritual enthusiasm. More important, perhaps, was the aesthetic and philosophical reaction of Romanticism to the Enlightenment's emphasis on the perfectability of reason. Misgivings about the capacity of human reason and the necessity of subjugating the natural world led to the valorization of a certain type of "mythological" thinking which sought perfection in a return to some primal condition that existed before the fall into rationality and scientific thought. Whatever their many differences, however, the shared objection of both the Enthusiasts and Romantics to the Enlightenment was the perceived hubris in its conceptualization of historical progression, one that advocated the rule of reason while carefully constraining manifestations of the supernatural or mythological. But neither belief in religious inspiration nor in the mythological and imaginative powers of the human
mind were enough to stop the Enlightenment as it sought, through industrialization and colonization, to fulfill the global project inherent within it from the beginning.

Modern critics of the Enlightenment, however, rather than focusing on its hubristic character, have been more concerned with its capacity for control and domination. What remains implicit behind the need for gaining mastery over the forces of nature, as Marx put it, is the need for gaining mastery over human nature, both psychologically and politically. Despite its opposition to despotism, the Enlightenment always remained ambivalent toward democracy, fearing the rule of the mob as much as the tyranny of one person. Roman republicanism and Platonic ideals of kingship found more favor than any sort of political reformism that the lower classes might generate. Voltaire remained an advocate of enlightened despotism, whereas Jeremy Bentham, always distrustful of the urban masses, believed political stability depended upon an independent country yeomanry, a conviction shared by Thomas Jefferson and his ideal of a loose confederation of independent landowners. And there always remains a disquieting potential in Rousseau's conviction as to the occasional necessity to compel a man to be free.

The goal of obtaining a totally reasonable world, however, demanded internal as well as external controls.
Whatever its antipathy toward religion, the Enlightenment retained more than a touch of puritanism in its wish to modify human nature. Locke's investigations into human understanding broke the politically and psychologically oppressive notion of human essences and located the source of character formation in individual experiences rather than in metaphysical notions of human "types," thus providing the necessary escape from ideas of religious and biological pre-ordination that future revolutionary movements would find indispensable. But just as much as the possibility of freedom, the possibility of control gives the concept of tabula rasa much of its force. If each human being is a psychological blank slate at birth, then the careful control of experiences will help insure control over the development of the personality. Even in the case of individuals who have reached maturity, however, Locke's writings still provided advocates of character reformation with an important theoretical grounding for their projects. The social and political implications of such a theory are enormous, as Foucault amply demonstrates in his work on prisons, hospitals, and schools.15

Legitimate Prejudices: Hans-Georg Gadamer

A number of important critiques of the Enlightenment focus on this dialectic of freedom and control and examine the capacity of reason and science to fulfill the roles establish for them. Hans-Georg Gadamer understood that the Enlightenment's reliance on scientific and historical objectivity rested on a belief in the possibility of knowledge free from the deformative influences of prejudice and pre-conception. The Enlightenment's critique of religious belief and tradition was in fact a critique of authority, for the tendency in the age of reason was "not to accept any authority and to divide everything before the judgment seat of reason." In this respect, the Enlightenment marked "the conquest of mythos by logos, but this conquest was not as complete as it might have been. As Gadamer and many others have realized, the Enlightenment established its own mythology and perpetuated its own prejudices, the most fundamental being the prejudice against prejudice itself and the wish to establish truth within some realm of value-neutral objectivity. Only by removing this prejudice can we hope to come to "an appropriate understanding of our finitude, which dominates not only our humanity, but also our

17 Gadamer, p. 242.
historical consciousness." 18 Finitude, and the prejudices it engenders, is not the enemy of truth and knowledge, but rather the foundation of an individual's historical reality; limitation and qualification, the very hallmarks of human existence, make the idea of absolute reason an impossibility.

But such relativity does not, for Gadamer, destroy the possibility of objective knowledge, a point which makes clear his intention of saving the Enlightenment even as he critiques it. His purpose is not to do away with the authority of reason and knowledge but to redefine it with awareness of its limitations. Recognizing what he calls "legitimate prejudices," 19 he believes the Enlightenment, though correct in disavowing the old forms of authority, had distorted what he saw as authority's true essence, an essence based "not on the subjugation and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge—knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence, i.e. it has priority over one's own." 20 In other

18 Gadamer, p. 244.

19 Gadamer, p. 246.

20 Gadamer, p. 248. As an example, Gadamer notes the German Enlightenment's recognition of the "true prejudices" of Christianity. The justification of this necessity, which parallels Gadamer's, is that because "the human intellect is too weak to manage without prejudices it is at least
words, authority based on obedience deserves opposition, but
authority based on knowledge is actually the cornerstone of
historical understanding and political legitimation. In the
best spirit of the Enlightenment, Gadamer’s concept of au-
thority rests upon the individual rather than the institu-
tion but still avoids what he considers the Enlightenment’s
extremism on the question of rationality and objective know-
ledge.

What enables Gadamer to posit this type of knowledge
and historical understanding is a hermeneutics that seeks
only provisional truths, that does not attempt "to develop a
procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in
which understanding takes place."\(^{21}\) Meaning remains the
correct goal of interpretation, but it is a meaning only in-
fluenced, and not determined, by the author’s intention. The
"real meaning of the text," for Gadamer, remains in part de-
termined by "the historical situation of the interpreter and
hence by the totality of the objective course of history."\(^{22}\)
But here problems emerge because the objective course of
history is precisely what the legitimation of prejudices
calls into question. The equivalence of truth and prejudice

\(^{21}\) Gadamer, p. 263.

\(^{22}\) Gadamer, p. 263.
seems to rob objectivity of its psychological and philosophical validity; in addition, it seems to make the entire hermeneutical enterprise an excercise in futility. Gadamer confronts these problems, however, not only by distinguishing between true and false prejudices, but by distinguishing between true and false historical objectivity as well. False objectivity fails to take into account the involvement of historical consciousness in the structuring of the past, whereas true objectivity empathetically engages the past and acknowledges the ongoing process of interpretation. Through a temporal perspective that allows for the recognition of continuity and tradition, the true meaning of an object can emerge: "But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that the true meaning has filtered out of it all kinds of things that obscure it, but there emerge continually new sources of understanding, which reveal unsuspected elements of meaning."

23 However, Gadamer fails to resolve the contradiction that there cannot be both an infinite process of interpretation and an infinite exclusion of error. There cannot be a discovery of error without a corresponding discovery of truth, and this discovery (which is, after all,  

23 Gadamer, pp. 265-266.
the purpose of hermeneutics) brings with it an end to interpretation. Truth cannot be interpreted, only restated, so only where truth is in question can the process of interpretation occur.

As has been noted elsewhere, there exists in Gada-
mer's work a certain innocence about the nature of authority and the status of objectivity and truth. Gadamer correctly to notes that we can never remove all the biases that underlie our interpretations, and his belief in authority based upon reason which remains aware of its limitations has great emancipatory promise. The very ambiguity of reason and truth that he acknowledges, however, means that such authority has in no way lost its potential for oppression. Moreover, the incompleteness of history and the infinite process of uncovering prejudices cancels out the hermeneu-
tical process that Gadamer would preserve. His belief in legitimate prejudices and the possibility of objective historical knowledge seems to be, in fact, an attempt to mitigate the effectiveness of his own critique of the Enlight-
enment. Though he wishes to preserve reason and authority by means of redefinition, his insistence on the priority of interpretation makes it impossible for the Enlightenment to

maintain the conservative role it has come to play. For the authority of reason to coexist with prejudice, the former would have to acknowledge the "fictiveness" (in Foucault's sense) of all its attempts at totalization. And it is this conclusion, despite all his efforts to the contrary, that Gadamer's work reaches.

**Fascism and Instrumental Reason: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno**

Gadamer is not alone, however, in his wish to save the Enlightenment even as he critiques it, as we can see in the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Completed in 1944, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* offers a critique of instrumental reason in an attempt to show its totalitarian potential and the role it played in the rise of modern fascism. "Reason comprises the idea of a free, human social life in which men organize themselves as the universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical

25 In an analogous example, Marx notes that the modern state is a fiction because of its continual re-creation from frontier to frontier. For Marx, the trans-national continuities of bourgeois capitalism do not authenticate its claims to totalize all of human historical and social experience. See Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 564. For a defense of Marx against a similar charge of totalization see Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true universality: utopia. At the same time, however, reason constitutes the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material of subjugation."

26 Seen in this light, the Enlightenment appears as a philosophic experiment gone horribly wrong so that history, once freed from the constraints of mythological thinking, fails to fulfill its utopian prospects and becomes instead a process of increasingly efficient oppression. With the possibility of any normative totality within the historical process now lost, the Enlightenment denotes, as Habermas puts it, an "unsuccessful attempt to escape the powers of fate" by the ascension of a new mythology of domination and control in place of the older mythologies of religious belief. What is needed, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is an enlightenment of the Enlightenment, which for them means a reali-


28 See Albrecht Wellmer, "On the Dialectic of Modernism
zation of (and perhaps return to) a type of subjectivity that modern capitalism negates.

In the Dialectic, the Enlightenment begins as a means of liberating humanity from fear and establishing its sovereignty over nature; but instead of abolishing myth it only reaffirms it by the acknowledgment of a rational power that will not permit anything to remain outside of its scope. Such a program of totalization brings with it great technological innovations when its object is nature, and great tyranny and oppression when its object becomes, as it must, humanity. In the Enlightenment, because both the human and natural worlds are equally exploitable, humanity loses its Kantian designation of ends rather than means, takes on the objective status of the "other," and becomes simply one more object targeted by a program of conquest that does not recognize the frontier between inner human reality and the outer natural world. The Enlightenment, say Horkheimer and Adorno, "is as totalitarian as any system" because its ineradicable essence is that of domination.29 Thus what Kant believed to be mankind's coming to maturity was actually a process of awakening that acknowledged the necessary role of power on all levels of existence, a role made necessary by


29 Dialectic of Enlightenment, pp. 24 and 32.
the need to preserve societal structures in a world where a
religious mythology had been replaced by one of individuali-
ty and self-interest.

The prototypical examples in the Dialectic of this new
mythology are Odysseus and de Sade's Juliette. Homer's epic
hero is actually the precursor of Enlightenment values in
which risk-taking and the investment of time and energy pro-
vide the moral justification for profits. Cast adrift in
a naturally and supernaturally hostile environment, he none-
theless manages to overcome all adversity by means of his
innate intelligence and courage. More than simply enabling
him to survive, however, his victory over his environment
also embodies a process of character formation. "The adven-
tures of Odysseus are all dangerous temptations removing the
self from its logical course" to its homeland and a fixed
estate, a self which, as a stable entity, exists in anti-
thesis to the chaos of successive adventures and comes into
being "only in the diversity of that which denies all uni-
ity." But in Odysseus's confrontation with diversity,
which marks both an estrangement from and conquest of the
world he inhabits, Horkheimer and Adorno discover the para-

30 See Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A
History of the Frankfort School and the Institute of Social
Research 1923-1950 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company,
1973).

31 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 47.
dox of Enlightenment subjectivity in which self-preservation and self-renunciation are one in the same. Hence the puritanism of the Enlightenment in that the domination of the environment entails the domination, and even the sacrifice, of the self. Odysseus's wanderings provide the metaphor for this "transformation of sacrifice into subjectivity"\textsuperscript{32}: in order to hear the sirens sing he must be bound helplessly to the mast; in order to defeat Polyphemus he must suppress his own identity. As with Crusoe, Odysseus's presence in the world supplants a natural order with one of his own making, which posits "the realization of utopia through historical labor."\textsuperscript{33} But this rationale of self-interest does not extend to the Lotus-eaters who, in their threatening indolence, must be driven back to the galleys. "Being is apprehended under the aspect of manufacture and administration,"\textsuperscript{34} therefore an assertion of selfhood outside of the scientific conceptions of productivity and progress negates the Enlightenment in a way it can never tolerate.

\textsuperscript{32} Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{33} Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{34} Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 84.
Suppose, however, the Lotus-eaters systematize their pleasures and seek to increase them through a process of experimentation. The potential anarchy of hedonism would then lose its threatening demeanor and hold forth, instead, a possible utopia of sexual pleasure. But as is always the case in the dialectics of power, a possible utopia is also a possible tyranny, and it is the latter that Horkheimer and Adorno explore in de Sade and his regimentation of pleasure. For them, de Sade prefigures the horrible extremes of modern fascism with its brutal and uncompromising rationality: "Juliette believes in science. She wholly despises any form of worship whose rationality cannot be demonstrated .... She operates with semantics and logical syntax like the most up-to-date positivism, but does not anticipate this servant of our own administration in directing her linguistic criticism primarily against thought and philosophy; instead, as a child of the aggressive Enlightenment, she fixes upon religion."35 Thus the difference between Juliette and the fascists is one of degree and not of kind, for each illustrates the capacity of the Enlightenment to abrogate itself in the name of its antithesis. The antiauthoritarian principle of the early Enlightenment has nothing to circumscribe it and

35 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 96.
nothing to prevent scientific rationality from overthrowing all authority but its own. The utopia of reason, then, opens the way for a totalitarian order which "gives full rein to calculation and abides by science as such," as evidenced by the scientific pretensions of Nazism which supported its brutal irrationalities and helped it to flourish in the heart of an enlightened Europe. Rather than provide a defense against irrationality, reason can actually become its opposite through an ambitious project of totalization. The horror that de Sade's work represents for us is not that of an individual freed from the bounds of reason, but of a boundless scientific rationality which carries Cartesian dualism to an absurd degree. The libertine's separation of mind and body which brings with it a notion of love based on instrumentality rather than ethics, and so necessitates the use of control and domination in the pursuit of pleasure.

In this replacement of ethics with biology, Horkheimer and Adorno reveal not only the Enlightenment's sadism toward women as the weaker sex, but also its sadism toward the very concept of weakness. That which is weak (whether women or Jews or aboriginal natives) is despised and subjected to a process of domination for reasons of productivity and pleasure. The need for precision and functionality undermines

36 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 86.
Christian civilization's idea of protecting the weak; instead, it imposes upon them an objectivity that justifies their use (or misuse) as things. The Dialectic blames Nietzsche as much as de Sade for this valorization of power because in the writings of each there is what Martin Jay calls an "anthropomorphic hubris," which is also to be found at the root of Kant's idea of maturity. The man as the measure of all things is also man as the master of nature, and by extension of the beings who live within it. As a result, the subject as oppressor exists simultaneously as the object of oppression. The unitary and ascendent self of the Enlightenment creates as its corollary in the world a systematic and objectifying rationality that respects no limitations. The results are bureaucracies, institutions, and formalized codes of conduct that seek to unify the self primarily as an object of discipline. Civilization is the victory of science over nature, but a victory which objectifies everything as pure nature, even itself.

As Freud had done before them, Horkheimer and Adorno see inner repression as the price of a totalizing rationality, but they seem to lack the Freud's sense of grim resignation before this fact. The Dialectic, too, is at times

37 The Dialectical Imagination, p. 265.
38 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 186.
quite grim, but primarily as a result of its critique of modern capitalism rather than of human nature per se. Although they have been criticized for not offering a programmatic response to the excesses of the Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno nonetheless offer their readers the hope that an "Enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the bounds of enlightenment," a hope which in Adorno's later work would take the form of a negative dialectic capable of resisting the wholesale resolution of contradictions by a ceaseless critique of the union of reason and power. For enlightenment to oppose the Enlightenment demands a redefinition of subjectivity that abandons the notion of unity and works to reverse reason's potentially regressive tendencies through a critique of the myth of the autonomous and stable self, a myth that justifies oppression and the worst forms of irrationality in the name of a scientific rationality that will not tolerate contradiction.

39 Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 208.

40 See Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1973). Despite this hope, however, Adorno remained deeply pessimistic as to its ever being realized. "After the catastrophes that have happened," he writes, "and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. . . No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (p. 320).
Power and Epistemology: Michel Foucault

That such intolerance results from the quest to establish and maintain sovereignty is obvious, but less so is the very nature of that sovereignty. Any attempt to criticize the Enlightenment simply as a revolutionary force brought to heel by industrialized capitalism would misunderstand the source of power in Western society and how its specific manifestations become possible. The work of Michel Foucault demonstrates that the notion of sovereignty cannot be limited to the question of who rules, but must instead focus on the role of knowledge as a structuring process. Foucault is against linear, progressive, cause-and-effect methods of historical interpretation, preferring instead to view the past as a succession of long periods of epistemological stasis periodically disrupted by moments of transformation. Therefore, in each historical era a dominant system of meaning attempts to establish limits to thought, not through overt political pressure, but through a deep pre-conscious structuration that arranges the world into a "knowledge," a thing that can be known. But even so, such epistemological structures (epistemes) are never politically innocent in that their continual monitoring of possibilities precludes the existence of knowledge without some corresponding manifestation of power, a manifestation augmented
by the functional role of discourse. Foucault regards discourse as primarily the practice of language, but in a manner distinct from the Saussurian categories of langue and parole. Encompassing the categories of linguistics, economics, politics, and culture, discourse has forms and rules of operation just like any language, but these rules "define not the dumb existence of a reality, not the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects," the most significant of which is the human. History, therefore, becomes a field of power relations, and in the historical succession of epistemes (progression being, for Foucault, a metaphysics) power increases in subtlety and scope, and thus enables the bourgeois revolutions to effect a more pervasive means of control than the absolute monarchies they overthrew.

Foucault identified four major epistemes—the Renaissance, Classical, Modern, and Contemporary—but for our purposes we will focus on his analysis of the transition from Classical to Modern and its effect on the project of the Enlightenment. In contrast to the Renaissance, whose principal paradigm was the sympathetic interconnection of all existence, the Classical episteme valued analysis, the

discrimination of finite differences, and the certainty of knowledge; and whereas the Renaissance looked for the resemelances between things, the Classical age sought to represent the world in a way that uncovered the distinct particularity of its component parts. To accomplish this representation, Classical epistemology developed a three-part structure: mathesis, or measurement, which forms the basis for science; taxonomy, or tabulation, which makes possible the study of natural history; and genesis, a more ambiguous category which seeks the continuum behind all knowledge and thus provides the basis for history. Because representation was the vehicle for knowledge, the Classical episteme was primarily spatial in its orientation, seeking, through measurement and tabulation, to identify particular entities and to describe their relationship with others.

The sign system that made possible the various discourses of representation in the Classical age was a binary structure of signifier and signified that recognized the arbitrariness of signs. Nonetheless, even though the Classical age rejected the Renaissance notion that a word somehow resembles the thing it signifies, it still held to the

certainty of representation: a word is never the thing itself but it can provide an absolute and certain knowledge of that thing. "In the Classical age, to make use of signs is an attempt to discover the arbitrary language that will authorize the deployment of nature within its space;" 43 for despite the arbitrariness of language, it was still possible, in ascribing a name to something, to name its being as well. So for two centuries, says Foucault, "Western discourse was the locus of ontology." 44 This faith in the capacity of representation followed from the role which the Classical episteme assigned to man, who was not yet the philosophical problem he would later become because he was not yet regarded as a transcendent being; that is, man did not create meaning in the world, he clarified it. The work of classifying, tabulating, and measuring did not seek to impose order on a chaotic world, but to discover the order immanent within it. Man was the observer and participant in a pre-established order that would disclose its secrets to him if he brought the right linguistic tools to bear upon it. In this scheme, language was not, as in the Renaissance, a thing among other things existing in the world but rather a functional process that aided one's comprehension and understanding. 45

43 The Order of Things, p. 62.
44 The Order of Things, p. 120.
The transition from the Classical to the Modern episteme occurred near the end of the Eighteenth century, at the time when the Enlightenment heralded sweeping revolutionary changes and when Kant's important essay, "What is Enlightenment?" called for mankind's release from his self-imposed immaturity. Foucault, however, sees the important aspects of this change as epistemological rather than political in that they brought about both a change in the status of representation and the appearance of Man as a scientific category. With the close of the Classical age, representation loses its clear precision because its focus shifts from nomination to interpretation, meaning that language no longer seeks that taxonomic space in which the form of truth and the form of being are identical. Instead, it throws this whole relationship into question.46 In the Classical age, man was simply one being among many others who existed in the established order of the world, and since language was part of that same order there was no need to make representation possible; it did not have to be created. Once this order begins to collapse, however, man acquires a subjectivity that makes him the source of meaning in the world rather than just its discoverer. Temporality replaces spa-

45 The Order of Things, p. 79.
46 The Order of Things, p. 208.
tiality in the Modern *episteme* because man's relationship with the world is no longer one of static continuity but of historical fluctuation and change. The being of man, rather than his place or role, becomes the goal of knowledge.

As a result, language now faces the problem of its involvement in history. No longer a spectator who uses language to represent the reality of the world, man is now the origin of meaning which he creates through the medium of language, and he is the creator of representation rather than just its utilizer. For language to represent the world, it would now have to represent itself through engaging in the act of representation. This impossibility means language as a sign system loses its absolute relationship with the world and becomes a process of interpretation. Science, as a mode of formalization, remains a powerful concept, but the Modern era separates it from the metaphysical concerns of interpretation which focus on such categories as Life, Being and, most importantly, Man.

"Renaissance 'humanism'," writes Foucault, "and Classical 'rationalism' were indeed able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world, but they were not able to conceive of man,"47 the reason being that the notion of human subjectivity was quite limited in those

47 *The Order of Things*, p. 318.
**epistemes.** Man stood simply as an object among objects before the subjectivity of God. With the advent of the Modern age, however, man becomes a subject among objects and assumes the task of creating whatever order the world is to have, and part of that order is the concept of Man. Consequently, man becomes both the subject and object of knowledge: the organizer of facts and a fact to be studied; the source of history, yet also its product—an intelligibility which struggles to understand itself.48 For Foucault, Man, as a category, comes into being through an analytic of finitude which establishes his limits. Economics, psychology, biology and linguistics all define the category of Man through a series of limitations that thoroughly distinguish the possible from the impossible and then declare these limitations to be the source of all knowledge. By making Man an object of knowledge, the analytic of finitude carefully proscribes the nature of what he is and the possibility of what he will be.

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Foucault directs his critique against such an analytic so as to discover some means to transgress its limits. He does not advocate any specific program of emancipation (such as Marxism) but rather asserts what amounts to an attitude toward the dominant *episteme* that never accepts its limits as self-evident, an attitude in which the Enlightenment figures prominently. Foucault's stance on the project of the Enlightenment resembles that of Gadamer, Horkheimer and Adorno in that through his critique he recognizes its liberating potential. The very concept of the *episteme* reveals his affinities with Gadamer on the prejudicial, perspectival, and even arbitrary nature of knowledge and rationality, whereas his analysis of the Classical and Modern *epistemēs* in particular show his concurrence with Horkheimer and Adorno on the oppressive potential that rationality always carries within itself. Since understanding entails order and limitation, after the extensive ordering of space that occurred in the Classical age, the Modern era turned its attention to temporality so as to achieve a similar ordering of the perceived inner nature of Man. Thus the totalizing project of the Enlightenment strove toward its inevitable goal of control through understanding because knowledge cannot exist without limits of definition that separate the true from the false and in doing so define the areas of pos-
sibility and action. With the creation of the category of Man, the taxonomy of the world expanded to include the human and to subject it to a process of tabulation and measurement, making it almost impossible to conceive of a humanity not rigorously controlled by such processes.

Despite its repressive consequences, however, Foucault regards the Enlightenment as one of humanity's few hopes for challenging domination by the *episteme*. Although his analyses have placed a heavy emphasis on historical rupture and discontinuity, Foucault has always been careful to demonstrate that important elements of one *episteme* can survive and even flourish in the succeeding one. So even though the Enlightenment is "an event, or set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies," it is also true that "Modernity constitutes the sequel to the Enlightenment and its development." In an elaboration of his thinking on discourse (the praxis of the *episteme*) as "a violence we do to things, or . . . as a practice we impose upon them," Foucault returns to Kant's attempted definition of Enlightenment in order to show how such violence is always a con-

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50 *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 229.
textual and not a metaphysical determinant. The historical reality of the power/knowledge relationship does not grant it the mythological status of the eternal return.

According to Foucault, the importance of the Enlightenment as an oppositional stance results from its being not just a historical period but an attitude that "situates contemporary reality with respect to the overall movement [of history] and its basic directions."51 Regarded in this way, Enlightenment and modernity become synonymous for Foucault and signify the nature of the struggle against what he calls "countermodernity." Invoking Baudelaire's definition of modernity as ephemeral, fleeting, and contingent, Foucault sees it not just as an identifiable historical epoch, but as an effort of self-invention in the face of such contingency. To say that modernity is a continuation of the Enlightenment, then, does not mean a continued loyalty to certain programs but "the permanent reactivation of an attitude— that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."52 With Foucault, the Enlightenment regains its revolutionary potential by providing a locus of transgression beyond the limitations of knowledge, but it does so, as it did with Gadamer and

51 "What is Enlightenment?," p. 38.
52 "What is Enlightenment?," p. 42.
with Horkheimer and Adorno, only through a significant process of redefinition. For rather than denoting a program of scientific rationality that in effect masks an historical ontology of control and limitation, the Enlightenment should instead be what enables us "to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits."53 Foucault says this, however, without the least bit of existential despair, for the loss of this hope is what enables us to conceive of an ethos "in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."54 The Enlightenment as a program has undergirded two successive epistemes, but the Enlightenment as an attitude provides the very opportunity for a liberating movement of transgression against them.

II. Modernism and Postmodernism

It might seem that we have come quite far afield from our original intent to examine the contrast between modernism and postmodernism, but the shifting fortunes of the En-

53 "What is Enlightenment?," p. 47.
54 "What is Enlightenment?," p. 50.
lightenment provide the basis of our understanding of these categories. With each change in the status of the Enlighten-ment comes a corresponding change in the perception of the "real" and in language's ability to provide an understanding of it. These changes, however, actually indicate an adapti-bility on the part of the Enlightenment and help explain its continued affiliation with the modern (that is, as a moment in history and not a historical category). The Enlighten-ment's continuous appeal and applicability is a result of the dialectical relationship it has with itself, in that it is both the process and the goal of its own intellectual project. For over two hundred years, the Enlightenment has faced the continual challenge of superseding itself, of re-peatedly rising up in revolt against its previous manifesta-tion. What had been a major weapon in the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the absolute monarchies became in time the justification for capitalism and empire; and, with the rise of modernism and the avant-garde, the Enlightenment stood in the forefront of conservative reaction until the process of institutionalization had drained modernism of much of its revolutionary potential. This process enables Foucault, as we have just seen, to envoke the Enlightenment once again as a weapon against conservatism and as a func-tional entity in the process of historical transformation. Within its self-dialectic, therefore, it loses any claim it
might have on essence or being and instead remains confined to its provisional category within each specific historical context.

The dialectics within the Enlightenment, however, mean that modernism and postmodernism do not themselves exist in a dialectical relationship. Rather than forming a polarity that exemplifies conflict and contradiction, they exist, through the mediation of the Enlightenment, within a dynamic that prevents one from ever negating the other. A tension characterizes their differences, and though critics often describe this tension as being confrontational, it does not stem from postmodernism's wish to do away with the modernist aesthetic but to take it at face value. In many ways, the designation of specific historical periods as modern and postmodern is unfortunate in that it covertly defines the twentieth century's apocalyptic sense of itself as the fulfillment, culmination, and possible termination of what we call Western Civilization rather than accurately defining particular aesthetics or philosophies. Such a sense underlies modernism in particular and largely accounts for the dynamics of its relationship with postmodernism; it does so, however, not because modernism is conservative and postmodernism is radical but because modernism itself is simultaneously both, a contradiction that enabled it to become the paradigmatic art form of the culture it originally tar-
geted for critique. The tension between modernism and postmodernism, then, does not exist because they are so different from each other but because they are so much alike, with the latter emphasizing just those qualities the institutions of bourgeois culture chose to downplay.

Stephen Melville is correct when he notes that the problematic distinction between modernism and postmodernism should probably be reformulated in terms of "traditional" and "antitradi tional" phases within modernism itself.\textsuperscript{55} Like the return of the repressed, postmodernism does not mark a point of disjunction with its precursor, but rather an attempt to bring out certain of its aspects which its adoptive culture had been more comfortable in denying. To equate postmodernism with the antitraditional, however, is somewhat misleading in that it suggests either an indifference toward or rejection of what has come before. Tradition (which is to say, history) plays a role of great importance in both categories, but it does not play the same role. Modernism arose in part out of a reaction to aesthetic modes which had seemingly exhausted their experimental potential and their ability to speak or represent the "truth." Such reaction, however, was carefully circumscribed and amounted

to a breaking with one tradition in order to re-establish ties with another. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for example, Eliot makes quite clear the vital role tradition plays in art, except apparently for that tradition he wrote in reaction to—Romanticism and its emphasis on the independent subjectivity of the artist.56 Historical continuity gained such prominence that even a novel as radically new and innovative as *Ulysses* took as its inspiration a work of almost sacred importance in the Western canon, not to parody it, but to reappropriate it from the academies of culture and grant it a vigorous new relevance. What modernism rejected was a concept of bourgeois art which aspired to self-understanding but which kept these aspirations, as Peter Bürger correctly notes, outside the praxis of life.57 In other words, the modernists wanted an aesthetics which made a difference.

In this respect, however, the story of modernism is the story of failure, for rather than placing the artist's imagination within a historical continuum, it did just the opposite and, as a result, gave individual subjectivity an almost unassailable prominence. Furthermore, the concern with


tradition often masked a strong nostalgic preoccupation for some primeval state of heroic innocence far removed from the modern world of industrialization and mass democracy. In its wish to save art from bourgeois philistinism, modernism adopted an Arnoldian perspective on art's redemptive potential, but it could not incorporate this potential into the life praxis of those social classes which most needed it. Rather, modernism, and such concomitant movements as *l'art pour l'art*, effected what has been called a resacrilization of art in which art supplants religion as the purveyor of ultimate truths.\(^{58}\) But these truths, such as they were, brought with them a subjectivized form of liberation quite similar to that of religious experience in that the newly conceived redemptive process was entirely an individual concern, separate from and often quite unrelated to the pragmatic affairs of everyday existence.

We come, therefore, to an important contradiction within modernism. Despite the wishes of Eliot, Hulme and others to strive for a more classical form of art that remained deliberately conscious of the historical continuum, modernism became the twentieth century's version of a passionate Romanticism with an almost unshakable faith in the creative capability of the individual artist. Tradition and indi-

\(^{58}\) See Bürger, p. 28.
vitalism are not contrary aspects of modernism, however; they are the same aspect. For the one tradition that continually held the allegiance of the modernists was the historical stability of the knowing subject. The historical sense that Eliot believed in, for example, was "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal," in which temporality revealed the possibilities of form while timelessness revealed the continuity of perspective. The apparent diachronic predisposition of modernism, therefore, is really only a collateral concern, for what underlies the whole movement is a strong sense of human synchronicity that downplays the divisiveness of temporal distance. Modernism took the old debate between the Ancients and the Moderns and resolved it by equating the two; that is, through its belief in the stable subject, it made the limitations of tradition the basis for boundless self-expression. Simultaneously devoted to yet frightened by its need for freedom, modernism tried to adhere to both tradition and individuality without seriously compromising either. That it could not do so led to the emergence of postmodernism.

To speak of this emergence, however, is to ignore the fact that what we call postmodern has been an aspect of modernism from its inception and found its earliest expression

59 Eliot, p. 49.
in the various projects of the avant-garde. In his important study, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger describes how it came into being through the contradictory role of art in bourgeois society. Art, he writes, "projects the image of a better order and to that extent protests against the bad order that prevails. But by realizing the image of a better order in fiction . . . it relieves the existing society of the pressure of those forces that make for change." 60 A significant amount of modernist work would in this respect be no different from its nineteenth century predecessors in that the resacrilization of art was merely one more way in which bourgeois society could protect itself from critique. The advent of the avant-garde occurred in reaction to such social and political ineffectiveness, but its chosen mode of reaction was one of self-criticism. In mainstream modernism, the status of art as a product of subjectivity, and the purpose of art as an elevating or redeeming enterprise, goes unquestioned; with the avant-garde, however, the whole idea of individual production and reception comes under scrutiny. Even the uniqueness of the work itself becomes problematical, as when Marcel Duchamp puts a signature (not necessarily his own) to mass-produced objects and then exhibits them. The holistic became the target of the avant-garde, both

60 Bürger, p. 50.
within and without the work of art itself; producer and production were concepts to be undermined in an attempt to deny the consumer any total or totalizing impression.

In one sense, the avant-garde marked a moment of defeat in the struggle of artistic expression with societal conventionality by openly admitting its inability to defeat bourgeois culture through direct confrontation. But in another sense, the avant-garde's lasting (and postmodernism's present) contribution is its refusal to meet bourgeois society on its own terms. By turning its critique upon the artistic enterprise itself, it denies the dominant culture the solace of art that reaffirms politically functioning ideologies. Like their contemporary modernists, the avant-gardistes made great use of tradition, but they did not do so in a way that found a comforting self-affirmation in the historical continuum; rather, they used tradition as a means of self-exposure to show how much of art's power lay in covert strategies of manipulation and in the conventional use of signifiers that in and of themselves lacked any meaningful substance. In this respect, the avant-garde is analogous to passive resistance in the face of overwhelming power; by withdrawing its support, it preys upon the bad conscience of its culture by reminding it of the artificiality and arbitrariness of many of its cherished values. The goal of the avant-garde was the destruction of art as an institution in
order to negate its separation from life praxis, a goal, as Bürger's study shows us, they failed to achieve. What they did achieve, however, was the destruction of any possible claim by a school of art to universality.61 If the institution of art remained intact, the status of art certainly did not and neither did conventional modes of interpretation and judgment.

The Threat of Modernism: Georg Lukács

I do not want to be overly simplistic in distinguishing modernism proper from the avant-garde, for in reality the latter only foregrounded certain aspects that form the basis of modernism as a whole. If bourgeois culture could not make the avant-garde go away, it could at least ignore it, which it did in choosing to emphasize those aspects of modernism which could be safely assimilated. In the wake of an expansive secularism, the stability of tradition could nicely fill the void left by the loss of religious faith. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that by the late 1950's, when modernism seemed securely in place as the artistic paradigm of the twentieth century, Georg Lukács should then choose to warn us of its radically disruptive possibilities.62 Lukács, of course, criticized modernism for its sup-

61 Bürger, p. 87.
62 See Georg Lukács, Realism in Our Time: Literature
posed anti-revolutionary stance, but he could not have been more wrong because the modernism he attacked had already been largely tamed by the cultural institutions of bourgeois society. He correctly condemned its apparent a-historical tendencies as being in league with a conservative political agenda, for in the hands of the bourgeois institutions that is exactly what it was. But he incorrectly perceived how this same tendency was also one of modernism's most radical and revolutionary aspects.

Lukács's Hegelian Marxism led him to criticize what he called the modern novel's static structure, meaning that it did not portray the historical role of the dialectic. In the ideology of modernism, outward reality took on unalterable characteristics which rendered human activity impotent. Modernism's great failure, for Lukács, was that it did not accurately represent the "real," and that it turned its back on realism, which he considered the basis of all literature, in favor of a naturalistic mode that "deprives life of its poetry, reduces all to prose." 63 This designation of the

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63 Lukács, p. 125.

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and the Class Struggle, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), originally published in English under the title The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, Merlin Press, 1962. This work was actually written in 1957, a year after the Hungarian Revolt, an event which highlights the anti-revolutionary potential of the political perspective which Lukács endorsed.
poetic and the prosaic as antipathetic categories gives an important insight to Lukács's conception of the real and of modernism's supposed threat to it. For the dialectic to continue, and for socialism eventually to triumph, reality must contain a potential for transcendence in which the praxis of modern existence designates more than a particular historical context; it must also designate the teleological pattern that creates the future with at least some degree of necessity. For Lukács, the poetic is what breaks the grip of the mundane on our perceptions and enables us to envision a society which by implication would be non-dialectic, and thus a-historical. The poetic is therefore the soul of the revolution, the moment of abstraction and hope that denies the ineluctable appearance of bourgeois reality.

Lukács believed that modernism distorts literature's proper sense of perspective by replacing "concrete typicality with abstract particularity,"64 which once again puts him in the odd position of both affirming and denying certain basic principles about the role of literature as representation. Such oxymoronic designations indicate the lengths to which a critic must at times go to in order to defend a universalizing concept of history against critique. In fairness to Lukács, his argument is primarily an attack on what

64 Lukács, p. 43.
he calls the dogma of the condition humaine in modernism, with its portrayal of human beings as by nature solitary and unable to form effective personal or social relationships. "First of all," he writes, "the portrayal of human character is not a 'technical' question, it is above all a question of applying dialectics in the field of literature ... [W]e emphasize time and again that dialectical thought dissolves the rigid appearance of things, which obtains also in thinking, into the processes that they really are."65 Modernism, then, denies these processes and in doing so denies the true nature of reality and the possibility of meaningful human action. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether modernism actually does this, we should be aware that Lukács grounds his argument firmly within the tradition of the Enlightenment, and its belief in a discernable ontology of rational laws and patterns. When he speaks of something like "concrete typicality," therefore, he abandons the field of historical context (a vital first principle in Marxism) to such non-Marxist thinkers as Foucault, in favor of a metaphysical category of Reason which never completely manifests itself in any one historical particularity. As a result, Lukács collapses the distinction between the typical and the abstract.

That modernism deals with the historically particular in no way redeems it in the eyes of Lukács because it does so in a way that contradicts the project of the Enlightenment as he perceives it and leads to what he believed to be the destruction of literature. The issue transcends any formalistic concerns, however, for at stake in Lukács's argument is humanity's status as the Aristotelian *zoon politikon*, the social animal whose rational communality distinguishes it from what we might call the natural animal.\(^66\)

The use of the Enlightenment as a defense against modernism means that the question of aesthetics also entails those of empiricism and politics, of how we know the world and how we will structure our society on the basis of that knowledge. Because modernism, as Lukács sees it, destroys the possibility of meaningful action it also destroys the possibility of communal co-existence based on the principles of the Enlightenment in which the world (and by extension, those who inhabit it) is something to be mastered by a human subjectivity that remains relatively constant throughout history. The modernist conception of the world as the locale for the more or less ineffectual exercise of the human will cannot be tolerated by an Enlightenment that negates all contradiction. What Lukács does not acknowledge, however, is that

\(^{66}\) See *Realism in Our Time*, p. 19.
the supposed a-historical character of modernism just as effectively critiques bourgeois culture as does his own Hegelian version of Marxism, and perhaps even more so. His lack of acknowledgment stems perhaps from a sense of prudence in that he wishes to supplant one teleology with another rather than to undermine the concept of teleology altogether. Lukács assumes the inseparability of teleology and social cohesiveness, but modernism, especially as exemplified by the avant-garde, calls this concept into question and proposes an alternative to the constraining power of an immanent telos.

When seen in this light, the supposed break between modernism and postmodernism becomes less distinct, and the definition of the postmodern as a sort of explosion of the modern episteme becomes more problematical. The difference between the two is one of degree rather than of kind, with postmodernism emphasizing those aspects of the modernist movement that are its defining characteristics--disjunction, juxtaposition, a non-linear sense of history, a critical stance toward dominant forms of rationality, and a dismantling of bourgeois subjectivity. In other words it was the avant-garde that unflinchingly committed itself to the principles of modernism in the early years of this century,

67 Wellmer, p. 338.
and it is postmodernism that continues to do so today. Rather than being the "still unclear consciousness of an end of a transition," postmodernism reaffirms those aspects of modernity which have the most revolutionary potential. Richard Wolin quite correctly notes that the paradigm of modernity is "the unfettered right of the artist to independent self-expression," yet the postmodern critique of subjectivity in no way diminishes its importance; it fact, it takes it even more seriously than Eliot did in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Similarly, when Habermas writes, "Modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative," we can again see the vital presence of what has come to be called postmodernism with modernism proper.

68 Wellmer, p. 343.

69 Wolin, p. 11. Wolin continues, "We moderns assume this right to be self-evident, whereas in fact it is essentially an achievement of recent origin, post-dating centuries in which art was fully implicated in the legitimation of what Weber termed 'traditional authority'--be it in the form of myth (Homer's Iliad), religion (medieval Christian painting), or the divine right of kings (courtly art)." That modernism can similarly be implicated shows the importance of the postmodern critique.

70 "Modernity versus Postmodernity," p. 5.
The great irony behind this attempt to pit modernism and postmodernism against each other is that the arguments Lukács used to defend socialist realism against modernist aesthetics is now brought to bear upon the postmodern. The critique of postmodernism is widespread across the political and cultural spectrum, but the case of Marxist critical theory provides a particularly interesting example of how ambivalent this critique can be. What Lukács saw as the constraining a-historical bias of modernism now becomes to many the dangerously salient characteristic of a postmodernism that has supposedly given up on the very concept of emancipation.

For example, in describing what he sees as a paradox within the avant-garde (and, by implication, the postmodern), Habermas writes, "The heightened appreciation of the transitory, the celebration of dynamism, and the glorification of this spontaneity of the moment and the new--these are all expressions of the aesthetically motivated sense of time and the longing for an immaculate suspended presence."71 In other words, the postmodern lacks the necessary historical perspective that makes possible the emancipatory goals of revolution, an argument identical to

that of Lukács's against modernism. Within Marxist critical theory, therefore (and within a relatively short period of time), the status of modernism was radically transformed from an anti- to a pro-revolutionary aesthetic, in the process of which it also changed from anti- to pro-Enlightenment. The impetus for this change occurred, I believe, when philosophy began to seriously explore the principles of the avant-garde and apply them to social and political realms of experience, thus bringing about what we now speak of as the emergence of postmodernism. Once philosophy took up this task, it began a withering critique of teleology, including that of classical Marxism, which had to be resisted. The locus of resistance, however, was that version of modernism which bourgeois culture had successfully assimilated to itself, which in turn brought about a split in the modernist aesthetic and a realignment of the project of the Enlightenment. Yesterday's enemies are now welcomed as comrades and the one-time opponent of the Enlightenment now becomes its embodiment. It would nonetheless be a mistake to infer from this resistance some innate antipathy between Marxism and postmodernism, for even though many Marxists openly disagree with the postmodern aesthetics, others, such as Fredric Jameson, do not. Marxism's lack of a unified front against postmodernism largely results from its distrust of the latter's anti-teleological stance which does not in turn pre-
vent a grudging recognition of its profoundly revolutionary potential. Such indebtedness works both ways, however, for even as Marxism finds it difficult to reject postmodernism, so the latter finds it cannot do without Marxism, or at least without the writings of Marx. There results from this mutual dependence a drawing together of the two into positions that are more likely to augment rather than undermine each other. The "debate" (such as it is) between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard is an excellent example of just such an instance in which a careful examination of their arguments makes their differences all the more problematical.

Consensus and Metanarrative: Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard

Central to the thought of both Habermas and Lyotard is the societal function of narrative and its cohesive role within modern democracies. For Habermas, emancipation depends upon communicative ability in which the free exchange of ideas leads to the formation of a democratic consensus and to a non-repressive political pragmatism. A discursive accountability thus strikes the proper balance between the needs of individuals and those of society. "The process of socialization," he writes, "takes place within structures of linguistic intersubjectivity [in which] the choice and re-
alization of organizational goals have to be rendered independent of the influx of narrowly circumscribed motives. This is accomplished by procuring a generalized readiness to consent, which in political systems has the form of mass loyalty." What ultimately induces this readiness to follow, he continues, "is the citizen's conviction that he could be discursively convinced in case of doubt."72 In other words a trade-off exists in which the citizen willingly subordinates his will to that of the group under the supposition that the rationality and goodness of such a decision could, if necessary, be demonstrated. Though Habermas is acutely aware of the potential oppressiveness of such a system he nonetheless believes it to be an unavoidable aspect of human social structures. As with Marcuse and others of the Frankfurt School, he emphasizes the necessity of discerning truth from ideology which he believes can be created through a new, normative ethic of communication that stands in opposition to multi-national capitalism. Within modern capitalism, dissent has been reduced to the level of the "anomie," the individual peculiarity which cannot conform to the overriding concerns of the system; problems, therefore, can never occur on the systemic level and the system itself can never be brought

into question. Proof of such systemic strength, he writes, appears "in the fact that social conflicts can be shifted to the level of psychic problems, that they can be charged to individuals as private matters; and in the fact that mental conflicts that are repoliticized as protest can be shunted aside, made into problems that can be administratively treated, and institutionalized as proof of the extended scope of tolerance."73 The benign face of welfare-state capitalism is only an ideological mask worn by the enemies of discursive accountability.

In order for a truly democratic society to function as such, Habermas believes discursive criteria for the truth claims of statements must be established. In this regard he is a defender of modernism and its emancipatory capability as a continuation of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism, he believes, cut short the modernist experiment before it could reach its full utopian potential of affirming the creative endeavors of individual subjectivity. In order to defend modernism against postmodern reevaluations, he sought to establish criteria for the truth claims of statements which would confirm their intersubjective nature. Empirical truth claims of a scientific type have their own processes of validation, but problematic ones such as those which character-

73 *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 129.
ize the societal basis of intersubjectivity can only be determined discursively, that is within a process of communicative interaction that assumes a willingness to understand and reach a consensus. Any time problematical truth claims are called into question, only argumentation can re-establish, or decisively disprove, their validity; for Habermas, truth not only requires a discursive justification but also an analysis of that justification. He realizes, however, that consensus is not in and of itself the basis of truth, for the real possibility of a false or unjustified consensus makes necessary a method for determining consensual validity, and the way to do so, he believes, is through the "non-coercive coercion of the better argument."74 Legitimation relies on a theory of communication free of constraint and distortion, a situation possible only if every participant has an equal opportunity to take part in the discursive interchange. Such a speech situation can only exist where discussion is free from ideological domination or any other communicative constraint.

Habermas thus situates himself securely within the tradition of the classical Enlightenment, where the concept of truth necessarily entails those of justice and freedom.75

75 For a further discussion of this point, see Thomas McCarthy's introduction to Legitimation Crisis, pp. vii-xxiv.
The very act of discursive communication assumes both the goodwill and the rationality of those involved, and in doing so it also assumes a willingness to negate all forms of unnecessary constraints and domination. His vision of a just society, therefore, is of a democracy free of the ideological distortions of capitalism, where the power of rationality is universally acknowledged as the basis for consensual agreement and action. We should not assume, however; that Habermas is naive about the possibility of achieving such a political arrangement, because he straightforwardly admits that a speech situation free of constraints and domination is probably an unattainable ideal. Nonetheless, such an admission does not diminish its importance for him because, as an ideal, it can still function as a guide to social and political discourse, especially those of an institutional or bureaucratic nature, and as a means of determining the extent to which distortions and constraints are at work within a particular discursive situation. The often counterfactual nature of goodwill, rationality, and freedom within discursive communication does not rob them of their necessity to consensus formation; merely the assumption that such motivations and conditions exist provides the prerequisite, and the possibility, of an ideal speech situation. "We know," he writes, "that institutionalized actions do not as a rule fit this model of pure communicative action, although we
cannot avoid counterfactually proceeding as if the models were really the case--on this **unavoidable fiction** rests the humanity of intercourse among men who are still men" (emphasis added). 76 With this collapsing of truth into untruth as a necessary precondition for any pragmatic communicative interaction, we can see the limitations of the Enlightenment project as a standard for social rationality. To make political structures dependent upon a form of fictional narrative, as does Habermas, is to redefine rationality at the moment of invoking it--and it is to undermine traditional conceptions of the Enlightenment even in the assertion of their validity.

This "unavoidable fiction," or what he elsewhere calls "the everlasting impurity of discourse, 77 opens a seam in Habermas's argument that permits, in the name of rationality and consensus, some rather dangerous possibilities, the foremost of which is the implicit equation of truth with functionality. His concepts of discursive accountability and communicative interaction support a pragmatic positivism that focuses on the necessity for getting things done in the world, of laying out an agreed plan of action and then tak-


ing the necessary steps to effect it. The political and social allure of such practicality within the Enlightenment rationale, however, can result in the blurring of the Kantian distinctions of means and ends in the name of fulfilling a rationally justified consensual agreement. Within an institutional framework, therefore, that which most effectively attains an agreed upon object is more likely to gain the status of truth than that which does not. In addition, especially in technologically complex societies, such practicality can quite easily limit the scope of discursive accountability to those who have the knowledge and technological aptitude to enter into a consensus: in other words, to government by elite. Furthermore, the dangers of constraint, distortion, and domination are not solely intraconsensual but could also play a role in the competition of one consensus with others. In a society that implicitly equates truth with effective implementation of totalizing societal goals, the need arises to assimilate as many differing points of view as possible into a single consensus, which can be done only by ignoring the "unavoidable fiction" that makes a consensus possible in the first place.

Jean-François Lyotard recognizes this seam in Habermas' argument, the potential dangers of which he addresses in *The Postmodern Condition*, a work written in

78 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A
part to refute the model of communicative effectiveness Habermas puts forth. For Lyotard, two false assumptions underlie the attempt to resolve the problem of legitimation through universal consensus: the first is the possibility of agreeing on the rules, or "metaprescriptions," that govern discourse, and the second that the goal of dialogue is consensus. On the contrary, he says, the rules of discourse, or language games, are not monolithic and self-evident but heteromorphous and "subject to heterogeneous sets of pragmatic rules."79 Likewise consensus is not the end of discussion but a particular state within it. Instead, the goal discussion should aim for is really a non-goal which he calls "paralogy," a continuous project to undermine and transform the rules governing social, political, and scientific language games. Not at all destructive in its intent, paralogy makes possible "progress" (the scare quotes are Lyotard's) in knowledge by initiating a new move within the established rules of discursive interchange or by inventing new rules, that is by changing the game entirely.80

Lyotard is not being the least metaphorical when he speaks of discourse and knowledge in terms of games, nor is

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79 Lyotard, p. 65.

80 Lyotard, p. 43.
he seeking to trivialize an important subject; rather, he is emphasizing the concrete reality of rules and proscriptions that constitute our knowledge and legitimate certain social and scientific practices while denigrating others. He sees rules not as denotative but prescriptive utterances which take on the metaphysical aura of ineluctable universality and in turn augment the institutional structures erected to defend and propagate them. They become, in other words, the justification for institutional efforts to dictate the representation of reality. The role of paralogy is to attack this justification and to expose the false idea that "humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation."81 Lyotard does not believe emancipation is a utopian concept, rather he realizes that the regularization of rules is antithetical to emancipatory hopes, and that it serves to equate them with forms of institutional constraints and domination.

For Lyotard, the central question of our time is the status of knowledge, both in terms of its accessibility and definition. The accumulation of knowledge into easily reg-

81 Lyotard, p. 66.
lated data banks makes access to such banks not only a question of learning but also of government, for the technological complexity of our society makes knowledge a powerful tool (or weapon) to either reinforce or challenge existing societal structures. Knowledge as an informational commodity, therefore, has become perhaps the major aspect of the global competition for power. Less obviously political, though fundamentally more important, however, is the means by which we define knowledge, especially the supposedly value-neutral field of scientific knowledge. According to Lyotard there are two types of knowledge, scientific and narrative, the former aspiring to a genuine representation of reality free from the work of the ideological or mythological distortions of the latter. Narrative knowledge is an older and more primitive form of knowing the world that takes as its project criteria for efficiency, justice, happiness, goodness, beauty, and the use of denotative and evaluative utterances. Narrative knowledge serves as a legitimizing process on the cultural level which determines those who belong to the social group and those who do not (i.e. foreigners, criminals, the insane). Narration, therefore, "is the quintessential form of customary knowledge" which "determines in a single stroke what one must say in order to be heard, what one must listen to in order to speak, and what role one must play . . . to be the object of
a narrative."82 Narrative defines "what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question."83

Unlike narrative knowledge, which allows for a multiplicity of language games, scientific knowledge insists on only one, denotation, in which the truth-value of a statement determines its acceptability. Although different from narrative knowledge in that it does not take the form of a social bond, it nonetheless gives rise to professions and institutions in which only the qualified may participate. In addition, scientific knowledge implies a diachronic temporality made possible by memory and a project. The need to make new and different statements about a subject requires a bibliographic knowledge of past statements about it. For Lyotard, the distinctness of scientific and narrative knowledge makes it impossible to judge one by the criteria of the other; yet one cannot get along without the other because each has its own role to play. However, he assigns a primacy to narrative knowledge because the scientific insistence on verifiability cannot, without resorting to tautology, prove the proofs. This dependence means that the question of what constitutes the conditions of truth is a function of narrative knowledge, outside of which scientific knowledge

82 Lyotard, pp. 19 and 21.
83 Lyotard, p. 23.
could not find a means of expressing itself. Rather than being simply the tool of a legitimizing process scientific knowledge is also its subject because of a legislative mode within such knowledge that determines a statement's worthiness for scientific consideration. For Lyotard, knowledge, whether scientific or narrative, "has no final legitimacy outside of serving the goals envisioned by the practical subject." 84

As a result, Lyotard believes there is no longer a place in modern society for a grand narrative, or metanarrative, which assimilates the fragmentary and heterogeneous aspects of knowledge and experience into one over-arching teleology or mode of self-explanation. Metanarratives are the discourse of legitimation, a metaphysical grounding that seeks to authenticate a philosophy of history and a corresponding political structure; and it is incredulity toward such metanarratives that Lyotard defines as postmodernism. Instead of insisting on the political necessity of consensus, Lyotard stresses the unavoidable pluralism of language games as well as the locality (rather than universality) of rules of discourse and communicative interaction. As Wellmer accurately describes it, Lyotard's sense of justice is the recognition of the autonomy of language games and a

84 Lyotard, p. 36.
refusal to reduce them to the service of a metanarrative. Postmodern knowledge opposes consensual legitimation as terroristic, as seeking to increase efficiency through the elimination of players from the language game. As a negation of such terrorism, postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; "it refines," he writes, "our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy."  

Despite the great theoretical differences between them, Habermas and Lyotard are probably not too far apart on the level of pragmatic political action. Habermas does not, of course, endorse a policy of consensual terrorism but aims at precisely the opposite, as full an emancipation as possible within human social structures (although he shares Freud's pessimism as to its possibility). Similarly, Lyotard's postmodern knowledge is not the reactionary, or even proto-fascist, program Habermas suggests it is; it does not valorize the status quo nor does it make concerted and effective revolutionary action impossible. Nor does Lyotard deserve the appellation "Young Conservative"(!), a name Habermas applies to postmodern thinkers in general. Instead, we

85 See Wellmer, p. 341.
86 Lyotard, p. xxv.
can regard Lyotard's thinking as a necessary manifestation of Habermas's emancipatory goals. Implicit within any notion of consensus is the need at some point to call a halt to dialogue and to exclude or suppress those points of view that remain outside the consensual agreement, and such a move can only be justified by an appeal to metanarrative constraints. Lyotard thus opposes Habermas in order to deny any sort of authoritarianism a comfortable institutional basis. At the same time, however, Lyotard must admit that paralogy demands not the interaction of individuals alone, but that of individuals in consensus. The pluralism of postmodern knowledge must be the pluralism of many different types of consensuses. But even so, Lyotard does take a step which Habermas seems unwilling to do: he accepts the concept of "unavoidable fiction" without regret or embarrassment and fully exploit its potentialities. Although motivated by the best of intentions, Habermas is openly ideological on this point (and perhaps even guilty of Sartrean bad faith) in advocating that this fictiveness, once admitted to, should then be ignored in communicative practice. Lyotard's refusal to do so strikes at the heart of the metanarrative Habermas wishes to preserve, and thus makes Lyotard's analysis of postmodern knowledge perhaps the more realistic of the two.

This same refusal is what separates these two on the
question of aesthetics as well. Just as in his concept of consensual legitimation, Habermas bases his aesthetics on the idea of unity, both within and without the work of art. The unity of modernist art and literature, like its nineteenth century predecessors, functions in two ways: the work itself is a unified whole, with each constituent part augmenting the others; and the work attempts to unify the fragmentary nature of human experience by combining its various discourses (political, ethical, social, cognitive) into a comprehensive wholeness. For Habermas, then, art maintains its separateness from the praxis of everyday life as an overt and highly visible aspect of the legitimation process. He believes the bourgeois ideal of maintaining the autonomy of art was correct but that capitalist economic and political structures prevented this autonomy from fully developing. The dangers of an overly technocratic society, which Habermas fully realizes, can be counteracted by, as we read earlier in Wolin, "the unfettered subjectivity of the artist," which provides a reserve of meanings, perspectives, and critiques unavailable elsewhere. He thus profoundly distrusts both avant-garde and postmodern art for its attempts to deaesthetize the artistic and to deny society any aesthetic consolation. The reconciliation that bourgeois art aspired to remains vital for Habermas and his concept of legitimation, a concept he believes the project of
Modernism fully supports.

Lyotard, however, does not share Habermas's concern nor does he see the role of art as one of providing a unity of experience. With Lyotard the question is not what art should or should not do, but what it does or does not do; for somewhat surprisingly he, too, believes in the modernist project, only in a way quite different from that of Habermas. Rather than as a stabilizing entity within a utopian metanarrative, Lyotard believes that modernity "cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities."88 There is, therefore, a continuous philosophical and ontological upheaval that occurs within Modernism and that opposes the establishment of any complacent notions of unification. That such notions do take hold, however, only confirms the vital role postmodernism plays within its modernist counterpart. Lyotard also sees the modern and postmodern in a continuous and unresolvable dynamic that occurs throughout history: "Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant."89

88 Lyotard, p. 77.
89 Lyotard, p. 79.
The primary difference between the two is that modernism is an aesthetic motivated by nostalgic yearning for the consolation of form. The postmodern, however, far from being a separate entity, is that part of the modern which:

puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.\textsuperscript{90}

For Lyotard, we always have the postmodern with us because it is the new modernism as it emerges, the new rules in the process of being written, the new categories in the process of being formed. And this newness, rather than being a

\textsuperscript{90} Lyotard, p. 81.
threat, struggles against authoritarianism masquerading as unity and oppression calling itself consensus.

Postmodernism and Political Complicity

Lyotard's success at dismantling the antagonistic distinctions so often drawn between modernism and postmodernism becomes even more evident when we shift our focus to the level of particular works. Fredric Jameson has written that every position on postmodernism entails a political stance; but if we attempt to disentangle the aesthetic from the political in this debate, it becomes increasingly difficult to see how a particular politics necessarily results from a particular aesthetics. Wellmer, in commenting on Adorno, writes that "modern art brings to bear an emancipatory potential of modernity against the dominant form of rationality of modern society," a claim that both modernism and postmodernism would no doubt wish to make on their own behalf. What often happens, however, is that the dialectic within the Enlightenment, as I have described it, overrides the simple dynamics of modernism and postmodernism and transforms the debate from one on the forms of


92 Wellmer, p. 357.
rationality to that of the possibility of reason itself. Once stated in these terms, the debate then hardens into an opposition of irreconcilables and becomes a polemics that subordinates questions of aesthetics to those of politics. I do not wish to imply any absolute distinction here, but the extent to which we can speak of politics and aesthetics as separate categories will enable us to see why postmodernism does not deserve the often apocalyptic condemnations thrown against it.

For example, both Habermas and Terry Eagleton object to postmodernism on the basis of its supposed complicity with the culture of late capitalism; the non-linearity of a postmodern narrative, or the aestheticization of commodities in art, implicitly aligns itself with existing power structures, they believe, because it does not endorse a specific political program of opposition. If Habermas, at times, barely conceals his anger toward postmodern aesthetics, Eagleton is downright vituperative on the subject, which is somewhat surprising in that he actually seems to be of two minds about it. On one occasion, in analyzing the revolutionary importance of the women's movement, he writes that it will not do "to dismiss post-structuralism as a simple anarchism or hedonism, much in evidence though such motifs have been. Post-structuralism was right to upbraid the orthodox Left politics of its time with having failed: in
the late 1960s and early 1970s, new political forms began to emerge before which the traditional Left stood mesmerized and indecisive."93 Elsewhere, however, he writes that post-modernism is "a sick joke at the expense of . . . revolutionary avant-gardism" and "a grisly parody of socialist utopia," and that the directorial boards of corporations are filled with "spontaneous post-structuralists" whose goal "is no longer truth but performativity, not reason but power."94 Eagleton believes postmodern art parodies the revolutionary art of the early twentieth century, especially in its mimicry of the unification of art and life attempted by the avant-garde. He approves (as does Habermas) of the modernist attempt to preserve a unique space for art, even though he realizes it partially reaffirms the bourgeois ideal of subjective autonomy, because he feels this modernist form of reification will resist the reification of the marketplace that postmodernism willingly accepts. Both modernism and postmodernism confront the dilemma of aesthetic commodification, but postmodernism, by openly accepting the forms of

93 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 148. Eagleton's use of the term "post-structuralism" does not complicate the argument because he uses it synonymously with "postmodernism".

mechanically reproducible objects, dissolves "its own boundaries and become[s] coextensive with ordinary commodified life itself, whose ceaseless exchanges and mutations in any case recognize no formal frontiers which are not constantly transgressed."95 The result, therefore, is camp, kitsch, and caricature rather than any liberating aesthetic experience.

But Eagleton also gives a nod of approval to Lyotard (whom he calls "rashly celebratory") and draws upon the latter's definition of postmodernism in order to formulate his own conception of the modernist project:

"Modernism" as a term at once expresses and mystifies a sense of one's particular historical conjuncture as being somehow peculiarly pregnant with crisis and change. It signifies a portentous, confused yet curiously heightened self-consciousness of one's own historical moment, at once self-doubting and self-congratulatory, anxious and triumphalistic together. It suggests at one and the same time an arresting and denial of history in the violent shock of the immediate present, from which vantage-point all previous developments may be complacently consigned to the

95 "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism," p. 68.
ashcan of "tradition," and a disorienting sense of history moving with peculiar force and urgency within one's immediate experience, pressingly actual yet tantalizingly opaque.\footnote{"Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism," p. 66.}

The question I wish to raise is not whether this is a good definition of modernism, but whether this definition differs in any significant way from Lyotard's of postmodernism; for like Lyotard, Eagleton believes that all historical periods are modern to themselves and that the sense of the modern always entails a break with dominant ideological structures and a reevaluation of modes of temporality and meaning. If this is so, how can we concretely distinguish the anxious self-doubt of modernism from postmodernism's denial of the solace of good forms; and does modernism's tantalizing opacity really entail a different experience from postmodernism's wish for the work of art itself to establish its own categories and determining judgments? Eagleton gives us no real help in clarifying these points, but he does give the impression that his antipathy toward postmodernism actually stems from its denial of a certain form of realism that modernism, as he conceives it, still makes possible.
ernism merits only his grudging approval and that his deepest sympathies are actually with Lukács and socialist realism. The Enlightenment project and a particular representation of the real are what Eagleton wishes to preserve, and the extent to which modernism will protect them is the extent to which he will support it against this latest postmodern threat.

A different, and perhaps more serious, critique of postmodernism comes from Peter Bürger who, if we may return once again to his study of the avant-garde, believes that the aesthetic accomplishment of the latter, limited though it was, has not been furthered by its postmodern successors. The distinguishing characteristic of avant-garde art, he writes, is that "the individual elements have a much higher degree of autonomy and can therefore also be read and interpreted individually or in groups without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole."97 Avant-garde art does not create a total impression nor does it allow a totalistic interpretation because the sum of its parts is somehow greater than the whole. In its attempt to break down the barriers between art and life, Bürger believes the avant-garde did make possible a new kind of engagement that does away with old distinctions of "pure" and "political" art,

97 Bürger, p. 72.
but that it failed in its attempt to do away with art as an institution. Instead, it succeeded (as I earlier noted) in destroying the possibility that any aesthetic school could claim for itself a universal validity. What avant-garde art does give us is an aesthetic conscious of "the enigmatic quality of the forms, their resistance to the attempt to wrest meaning from them."\(^{98}\)

As with Eagleton's endorsement of modernism there is a sense in Bürger of making the best of a bad situation, whatever admirable qualities he believes the avant-garde possesses, they in no way atone for its shortcomings. In order to distinguish avant-garde (and by extention postmodernist) art from other types, he uses the designations "organic" and "non-organic." Organic art, by which he means everything except the avant-garde, requires a hermeneutic interpretation: "This means that an anticipating comprehension of the whole guides, and is simultaneously corrected by, the comprehension of the parts. The fundamental precondition for this type of reception is the assumption of a necessary congruence between the meaning of the individual parts and the meaning of the whole."\(^{99}\) Inorganic art, on the contrary, no longer requires its parts to be essential elements of the

\(^{98}\) Bürger, p. 81.

\(^{99}\) Bürger, pp. 79-80.
whole: "They become less important as constituent elements of a totality of meaning and simultaneously more important as relatively autonomous signs."¹⁰⁰ Now even though Bürger attempts to use these categories denotatively, the opposition of organic and inorganic is an ideologically loaded one that unavoidably leads the argument in a particular direction. The designation "inorganic" characterizes its referent as some inert, non-living mass that obstructs rather than facilitates the praxis of life. Rather than opening a way for humanity's progression, the inorganic is a stumbling block, a point of resistance that must be overcome. And resistent is exactly how Bürger describes avant-garde and postmodern (or, neo-avant-garde, as he calls it) aesthetics. A critique of the commodity fetish, he believes, is evident in Andy Warhol's Cambell's soup cans only to the person who wishes to see it. "The neo-avant-garde," he writes, "which stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatsoever."¹⁰¹ We can see, therefore, that Bürger uses the term "resistence" in a particular sense and so defines his true objections to postmodernism and the avant-garde by construing this resis-

¹⁰⁰ Bürger, p. 84.
¹⁰¹ Bürger, p. 61.
tence not as an absolute refusal to posit any meaning whatsoever, but as a refusal to endorse one that has been specifically prescribed. Whatever potential they may have for a new aesthetics of engagement, they apparently still stand mute before the hermeneutical process and, much to his discomfort, resist the gesture of totalization that makes possible the discovery or articulation of the real that he finds in organic art. For him, such an aesthetics reflects the pervasive irrationality of late capitalism and its capacity to resist any explanatory theory; but it would be more correct, I believe, to understand the so-called "inorganicity" of the avant-garde and its successors as an antagonism toward metanarratives and a deep reluctance to participate in a political program except, perhaps, as so redefined by Lyotard's sense of the postmodern.

Within both Bürger and Eagleton, therefore, there exists an ambivalence toward postmodernism that forces them to take an oppositional stance which favors a moralistic return to origins, a temporal back-tracking to that historical point before the fall into postmodernism—to modernism, in other words. As I have been trying to demonstrate, however, even if such a thing were possible it would do no good, for postmodernism has always been that (more or less) repressed aspect of modernism that gives it an historical vitality and a revolutionary potential. Opposition to postmodernism in
the name of modernism is one of the crowning ironies of the Enlightenment's dialectics with itself because it repeats once again the defensive gesture of one mode of representation when confronted by the critique of another. When empiricism and aesthetics combine, as they always do, debates about the mimetic status of any artistic mode ultimately reduce themselves to one issue, namely, what questions does this work permit us to ask of it? It might seem that the more likely issue would be what answers a particular work gives to our questions, but answers (which have the appearance, if not the substance, of truth) are always various and even contradictory without causing any major disturbance within the episteme. To change the questions, however, can necessitate a fundamental empirical and temporal realignment that in turn changes the status of realism, the definition of the rational, and the capacity of sign systems to express the "reality" of their referents. Lukács's opposition to modernism in the name of socialist realism and the opposition of Habermas, Eagleton, and Bürger to postmodernism in the name of modernism are all actually one in the same, an opposition to an aesthetic that challenges the interrogative mode which has gained cultural and institutional acceptance.

This opposition, however, actually has little to do with aesthetics, choosing instead to focus on the political repercussions it fears in the wake of the new modernity.
The supposed irrationality of postmodernism, for example, is seen as having been cut from the same cloth as some of the more barbarous political irrationalities of the twentieth century and, therefore, as posing an equivalent threat to Western Enlightenment. As with the political complicity of fascist aesthetics, postmodernism stands charged with cultural complicity in an era of multi-national capitalism, neo-colonialism, and media manipulation. The burden of proof in such matters lies with the accusers, however, and proof is always a matter of particularities. If postmodernism is guilty as charged then we should be able to look at particular works and find specific evidence as to its hegemonic association with the dominant culture. But on the level of specificity, I believe, one searches in vain to find any points of equivalence between, on the one hand, the architecture of Albert Speer, the sculpture of Arno Brecker, or the films of Leni Riefenstahl, and, on the other, the prints of Andy Warhol, the music of Philip Glass, or the novels of Thomas Pynchon or Robert Coover.

That such a charge could even be made has to do with the reconciliation of art and life to which fascist aesthetics openly aspires but which postmodernism attempts only in order to show its already extensive reality. The difference between the two, however, is that whereas fascist politics and culture appropriates art for use as propaganda, post-
modernism in turn appropriates politics and culture for purposes all its own. Susan Sontag writes that fascist aesthetics glorifies surrender, exalts mindlessness, and glamorizes death, but the postmodernist art of Andy Warhol, to choose one example, satirizes these same elements as they function in the mass-produced images and objects of late capitalism. In Sontag, we read that the Nazi propagandist Goebbels proclaimed that politics is "the highest and most comprehensive art there is . . . and we who shape modern German policy feel ourselves to be artists . . . the task of art and the artist [being] to form, to give shape, to remove the diseased and create freedom for the healthy." What the work of Warhol (but not only Warhol) shows us is that these same sentiments still exist, sublimated though not radically transformed, within the image-dominated Western

102 Susan Sontag, Under the Sign of Saturn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), p. 91. Fascist aesthetics, she writes, "flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude. The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force." Sontag believes that the fascist utopian aesthetics of physical perfection makes it only a variant among other forms of totalitarian art. Aesthetics in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, for example, support a utopian morality in the name of their own brand of realism.

103 Sontag, p. 92.
milieu of politics, merchandizing, and entertainment. The focus of postmodernism on the commodification of art is not an implicit endorsement, but rather a new set of questions that need to be asked within a culture that allows the boundaries between life and art to give way. Unlike fascist aesthetics, however, which seeks to limit the questions we may ask of it, postmodernism proliferates them by detonating an interrogative explosion within a society that allows its commodities to offer the false solace of form and expects its art to do the same.

In the fallout from this explosion, the hollowness of the old forms of subjective reification becomes manifest, but this discovery is not the most disconcerting aspect of postmodernism. Rather it is an unwillingness to posit a new form of reification, under the Enlightenment rubric of emancipation, as a substitute for the old. In Foucault's famous phrase, Man has come to an end, but not in such a way as to legitimize the politics of the herd, the ant hill, or the beehive as its necessary successor. Just the opposite, in fact, for it is just such politics that reification never ceases to make possible. Fredric Jameson correctly understands this phenomenon when he writes of postmodernism as a new aesthetic of "cognitive mapping" that recognizes the gap between existential experience and scientific knowledge and how the "Imaginary," in Lacan's sense, always mediates our
relationship with the real. His point is that even though Marxist conventional wisdom believes that functioning ideologies necessarily mediate between this experience and knowledge, there may be historical periods when such mediation is not possible, of which postmodernism seems to be one.

The implications of this non-mediation for the study of narrative are extensive and enable us to probe that ambiguous netherworld that separates history from fiction. In Lacanian terms, history functions as the imaginary order which allows us to see ourselves as the ideal image of the unified Other. In other words, to the extent that history appears coordinated and coherent so, too, does our own subjectivity. What postmodernism does, however, is shift the focus of the imaginary order away from the ideal image and onto the process of image making, so that what had been assumed to be an example of self-recognition becomes knowable as a series of mis-recognitions in which the solidity of history reveals its dependence upon "unavoidable fictions." As a result, fiction loses its necessary identification with untruth and becomes one more mode in which history, like the Lacanian symbolic, can find expression. Just as Lacan's idea of the phallus defines the place, priv-

104 See Jameson, pp. 89-92.
ileges, and prerogatives of the masculine in a patriarchal society, history signifies the true and the real in a culture that believes in the denotative capabilities of its sign systems. Question these capabilities, and you discover, as Jameson has done, the convenience rather than the necessity of dividing social and political texts from those that are not. He understands Marxism as the only adequate account of the collective struggle to wrest freedom from necessity, a struggle in which the division of texts into political and non-political, or historical and non-historical, is "a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life . . . To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already exists a realm of freedom . . . is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical--indeed, that everything is 'in the last analysis' political."105

But if there is nothing that is not social, there is also nothing that is not individual and to some degree contingent upon private subjectivity. The extent to which we distinguish between public and private is also the extent to which we distinguish history from fiction, and so designate a genuine social discourse as opposed to the perceived pseudo-social discourse of literature. That such designations, in the light of Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, become progressively ambiguous is another aspect of the dialectics that occur within the Enlightenment and of the efforts of rationality to supersede that which it once was.
Part Two: The Will to Truth

There shall be no message, unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts, that are so often more enigmatic than the craftiest arrangement of words.

Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim

A common misconception about the Sirens in the Odyssey is that their allure to passing sailors is one of sexual desirability. How else could these female creatures work their enchantments and lure men to their deaths if not for the promise of sexual favors such as no mortal woman could provide? If we read their song, however, we discover it contains no such promise, that the hope of sexual intercourse is not what blinds sailors to the dangers of the rocks, nor is it sexual frustration that afflicts Odysseus as he listens while bound to the mast. What the Sirens promise their unwary victims is not sex but knowledge. Whoever stops to hear their song, they say, will leave knowing more than he did: "Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens."¹ Homer's story does not imply some

¹ Book XII, line 191. Translation by Richmond Lattimore.
equivalence between knowledge and sexuality, as does the Old Testament's characterization of sexual intimacy as a man "knowing" a woman, but, instead, shows that no essential identification exists between desire and sexuality. Desirability makes the Sirens deadly but knowledge makes them desirable.

This articulation of knowledge and desire is not unique to Homer, however, for it also underlies the dialectics of the Enlightenment in its attempts to define and designate truth and validity. There has, of course, always been a recognition of the component function desire plays in the accumulation of knowledge, usually in the form of some supposedly innate human desire which drives us toward the discovery and accumulation of facts which exist in the world as the objectification of truth. My point is not to suggest that knowledge has no material foundation but that this scenario misrepresents the role of desire in the delineation of knowledge and truthfulness. Within the scientific discourse of the Enlightenment, desire remains a subsidiary component of the search for knowledge, an initial curiosity or motivating factor in the accumulation of facts, which eventually leads to the discovery of truths. But a critique of the Enlightenment such as attempted by postmodernism, suggests that desire plays more than an auxiliary role in this process and is instead a principle aspect of its structure and application.
The work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari comes immediately to mind, but as we shall see later, one need not necessarily subscribe to their concept of schizoanalysis in order to appreciate the emphasis modern society, with its need for effectiveness and productivity, places on the control and/or suppression of desire. For the Enlightenment, truth and desire exist as separate entities; they do so, however, within a relationship that is antithetical. Desire may lead to the discovery of truth, but truth leads to the limits of desire because whatever its emancipatory potential, truth always defines the scope of the possible. In telling us what we can do, it just as emphatically tells us what we cannot. Whether for good or ill, therefore, desire must continually acknowledge its subservience to truth and proclaim the benefits of constraint and limitation. Yet all the while, desire probes its frontiers, looking for that weak point which will permit it to transgress this limit and bring about a redefinition of what is true and what has the force of necessity.


3 See Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 34: "Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes . . . to experience its
By focusing on this moment of transgression, postmodernism goes beyond the analysis of those entities which we designate as either true or false, and looks instead on truth and falsehood as oppositional categories. Postmodernism does not deny the possibility of telling the true from the false; instead it analyzes the functional use of such concepts so as to raise the possibility that they stand in need of extensive reevaluation and even redefinition. In other words, what may be true or false is not at issue. At issue is what does it mean for something to be true or false and how do such designations maintain their validity. The empirical truthfulness of statements is not the primary concern of postmodernism but rather how truth itself is used as a structuring principle for the organization of empirical data. In conjunction with this analysis, postmodernism also makes necessary a reevaluation of the relationship of truth and desire, a repositioning of desire within empirical and scientific methodologies so it functions not simply as some existential state that leads to the discovery of truth, but as an originating factor that also participates in its constitution.

The prominence of desire, however, does not mean that humanity faces the imminent threat of moral and political
anarchy, or that no valid basis exists for distinguishing a 
Hitler from a Gandhi. Nor does it mean that truth is noth-
ing more than self interest. Such apocalyptic visions often 
haunt critiques of postmodernism and usually have their ori-
gins in a misreading of Nietzsche's will to truth and will 
to power, misreadings which are then transferred onto the 
 writings of contemporary thinkers. Having said this, how-
ever, I must also say that such misconceptions are not en-
tirely groundless because Nietzsche and postmodernism do 
deliberately, and at times radically, undermine many long-
standing ethical and philosophical foundations of truth; 
but the critical mistake that often occurs in attempts to 
 refute these critiques is the oversimplification of the role 
of desire and of the will to truth. To many, such concepts 
amount to little more than a willful, selfish or even perni-
cious disregard of obvious truths. But the investigations 
 begun by Nietzsche in philosophy and Freud in psychology, 
and now continued in postmodernism, show that desire is a 
complex and multifaceted entity that functions in the praxis 
of everyday life in ways that have gone unacknowledged for 
centuries. Ethical and philosophical writings in the Chris-
tian West have long been suspiciously antagonistic toward 
the influence of desire, and modern reactions to the re-
evaluation of desire's epistemological function share a good 
deal of the same tone and attitude. What these reevalua-
tions enable us to do, however, is shed certain long-used moralistic apparatus in our approach to the subject of desire in order to examine it for what its: an initiatory principle of progress rather than its enemy.

Let me apologize if I am stating what may be obvious, but I do so because I am continually surprised by critics of postmodernism who fail to understand these basic points. Such misunderstandings arise from the mistaken notion that to grant desire any sort of epistemological primacy marks the end of critical reasoning and rational discourse, whereas in fact it actually marks the beginning. For all its importance, however, the main issue in the study of desire and empirical knowledge is not really desire in itself, because like the unconscious, desire remains accessible only through its manifestations. On an individual level desire manifests itself in diverse ways, but on a communal or societal level it manifests itself primarily, I believe, in narrative. Narrative explains, defines and interprets; it takes truth as its ultimate object so as to both assign and appropriate

4 For example, see Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society (The University of Chicago Press, 1979); Eugene Goodheart, The Skeptic Disposition in Contemporary Criticism (Princeton University Press, 1984); and E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Although Hirsch's book predates much of what we now call postmodern criticism, it still addresses many of the same issues. Also, his recent work reaffirms his earlier positions.
identity. Once desire becomes a constituent aspect of narrative, however, truth becomes problematic through a loss of that firm grounding we are accustomed to it having. If Jameson is correct in that we live in an age of ideological failure to mediate between knowledge and experience, then the whole enterprise of speaking the truth comes into question through a foregrounding of empirical methodology and narrative strategy. Especially when examining the denotive capabilities of narrative, the first questions to be answered must be those which ask what it means for something to be true or false, and how we separate that which is real from that which is imagined.

Although the dialectic of the Enlightenment provides the context for the debate over the truth value of narratives, it is itself an aspect of a more fundamental dialectic, that of the Real and the Imaginary. I make deliberate use of Lacanian terminology for reasons that will later become clear, but let me say for now that the dialectical interplay between the Real and the Imaginary occurs in narrative along the boundary that divides history from fiction and makes problematic their categorical distinctiveness. Just as the Enlightenment can only define itself in contrast to irrationality and superstition, history, as I showed earlier, can only define itself in contrast to fiction. Both history and the Enlightenment speak the truth against the
manifest falsehood of their opposition. The obvious pragmatic applicability of scientific discourse explains why other disciplines such as history aspire to the same level of clarity and exactitude as a standard for truth. The continual stumbling block to such aspirations, however, is narrative where tropic and rhetorical conventions show how the workings of desire undermine the essentiality of truth and fact. Although science is in no way immune to the pitfalls of narrative configurations, the apparent difference in the degree of narrative dependence of science and history currently gives the former a perceived surer basis for its claims to truthfulness. What science believes it has achieved, and what disciplines such as history, psychology and philosophy hope for, is a materiality of truth that makes the concepts of origin and presence both accessible and verifiable. However its particularities, and however


6 See Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 10: "History and knowledge, istoria and epistémē, have always been determined . . . as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence."
handled by scientific and non-scientific discourses alike, for truth to maintain its distinction from falsehood (and history from fiction), it must (so the reasoning goes) originate in the world as the object of our perceptions, understanding and interpretations, and not as a structure human subjectivity projects outward as a means of mitigating and controlling the threatening chaos of experience.

The empirical rejoinder to any challenge to the objectification of truth usually bases itself on the unassailable reality of facts and the materiality of experience that stands as the ultimate challenge to idealism. The status of factual evidence, however, like that of truth, largely depends upon a strategy of definition and upon a recognition of the profound difference between science and history. The scientific fact that no two objects can occupy the same place at the same time may currently be beyond question, but historical facts rarely, if ever, achieve a similar absoluteness. As a result, the question arises as to what relationship exists between facts and truth, and what degree of factual understanding leads to a state of truthful knowledge.

7 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 257: "Historical facts are no more given than any other. It is the historian, or the agent of history, who constitutes them by abstraction and as though under the threat of infinite regress."
The inadequacy of the fact is the dilemma that faces Marlow in *Lord Jim*, for as he piled up fact upon fact and interpretation upon interpretation, an irreducible enigma repeatedly thwarts his desire to create a truthful narrative about Jim's life. The conclusion Marlow reaches, however, is that facts are of no help in answering these questions. Instead they provide the starting point for the continually rewritten narrative of Jim's life that comprises *Lord Jim*, a narrative written by Jim himself, by Marlow, by the court of inquiry, by the Malaysian natives and, perhaps most importantly, by Gentleman Brown. Marlow's despair stems from his realization that the "language of facts" is either an alien tongue of the Real which is yet to be translated or else an Imaginary construction that tells us only what we expect to hear.

The question as to whether facts are indeed more enigmatic than words, as Marlow thought, provides the starting point for the next phase of our inquiry, the influence of Nietzsche. Just as it has been said that all Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato, so can we say that the contemporary debate about narrative is to one degree or another a response to Nietzsche, whose presence remains unfutated even if unaccepted. Nietzsche's critique of truth and rationality terrifies only those who cannot see beyond it, or who can only see what his uncompromising analyses
deny us and not the possibilities they offer. Such selective blindness is what prevented many, such as Lukács, from understanding the emancipatory qualities of modernism, just as it still prevents many from understanding postmodernism. Erich Auerbach understood, however, both the costs and the benefits of moving from one mode of representation to another. In modernism he sensed, as did many others, what he called an atmosphere of universal doom, and how in the confused haziness of the modernist novel there seemed to be a hostility to the reality it tried to represent. The modernist novel lacked, or at least tried to dispense with, a sense of totalization upon which psychological and social stability seemed to depend. But writing in Istanbul from 1942-1945, where he had fled to escape the Nazis, Auerbach realized that the wish for totalization was also one of the root causes of the conflagration that had engulfed Europe. "The temptation," he writes, "to entrust oneself to a sect which solved all problems with a single formula, whose power of suggestion imposed solidarity, and which ostracized everything which would not fit in and submit--this temptation was so great that, with many people, fascism hardly had to employ force when the time came for it to spread through the countries of old European culture."\(^8\) However uneasy he

may have felt about the fragmentation and randomness in the modernist novel, Auerbach still recognized its potential to free us from the horrors of totalization. "It is still a long way to a common life of mankind on earth, but the goal begins to be visible. And it is most concretely visible now in the unprejudiced, precise, interior and exterior representation of the random moment in the lives of different people." Such a hope might be too much to hang on modernism, but Auerbach's sense of its capacity to liberate shows how well he understood the stakes involved in choosing a mode of representation. In his analysis of the Arabian Nights, Tzvetan Todorov noted how, for the tale tellers, narrating equals living, but this principle has a much broader applicability than the narrative strategy of single literary work. How we tell stories, whether history or fiction, will to a large extent determine how we live.

We should listen to Auerbach's words, therefore, when we examine postmodernism, for as I have attempted to show in the previous chapter, its methods, goals and revolutionary potential are really those of the modernist movement. Antipathy to modernism initially arose in response to its strong

9 Auerbach, p. 552.

Dionysian nature. That modernism eventually gained institutional acceptance was the result of its almost equally strong commitment to the Apollonian ideal of art and culture. Antipathy to postmodernism seems to arise out of a feeling that Dionysus threatens to run rampant and completely overwhelm its Apollonian counterpart, which would mean that desire, as it manifests itself in the wants and drives of the individual subject, would have nothing to hold it in check. By turning its critique against totalization, postmodernism has come under the charge of irrevocably denying the possibility of organization, cooperation and security on a societal level that does not also entail the arbitrary and willful exercise of power or use of force. What usually goes unacknowledged in such accusations, however, is the euphemistic and metaphoric, rather than denotative, use such terms often have. The Spanish grammarian Antonia de Nebrija writes, in sentiments that echo those of Auerbach, "Language has always been the companion of empire," and it is in opposition to such linguistic usage that postmodernism uncompromisingly casts itself.

11 See Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 35: "If any god personifies modernism, it is Dionysus."

In an analysis of historical, political and scientific narratives, such issues have an obvious pertinence and come immediately to the foreground, but in the case of literary narrative the stakes remain equally as high. Eugene Goodheart, in a study that is in many ways sympathetic to postmodernism and deconstruction, says that a repudiation of Arnoldian inspired criticism necessarily entails a dissolution of the basis for distinguishing "between honest and deceitful uses of language or between enlightened and barbarous cultural institutions."  

Furthermore, he declares the deconstructive critic to be only a philosopher manqué whose disavowal of truth and logic is also a disavowal of historical responsibility or effectiveness. Similarly, Gerald Graff holds that the weakness of much postmodernist fiction "is its inability or refusal to retain any moorings in social reality." Postmodernism, says Graff, entails a deliberate refusal of social responsibility; and if liter-

13 Goodheart, p. 28.

14 Goodheart, pp. 133 and 177. "It is inconceivable (at least to me)," he writes, "that a deconstructive attitude could exist in the time of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, or in Solzhenitsyn's Soviet Union."

15 Graff, p. 209.

16 Graff, p. 26: "The sophisticated skepticism of the literary culture is mirrored in the popular desire to be told that our knowledge and perceptions cannot be trusted, that we . . . are lovably mixed-up people who therefore cannot be blamed for the horrors of modern society."
ature is to continue to fulfill its necessary function it must return to the work of preserving the distinction between the real and the fictive and of shoring up what Graff calls "the sense of reality" (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{17}

I hope my argument thus far shows how extremely problematic, and how committed to the status quo, such statements are. "The sense of reality" is exactly what is at issue in postmodernism and in the narrative conventions used to maintain the distinction between history and fiction. The work of Nietzsche, and of those who acknowledge their debt to him, is such that we can no longer be complacent about these concepts and distinctions. "What our society must prevent," writes Philippe Sollers, "with its network of codes, its monetary obsession, its legislation, its literature, is an awareness of the fact that we are signs among other signs, signs producing signs."\textsuperscript{18} This awareness is what Nietzsche tried to teach us, and what we still, whatever our position on postmodernism, have difficulty in understanding or accepting.

\textsuperscript{17} Graff, p. 12.

I. The Empiricism of Desire

But why this difficulty? And why this need to prevent an awareness of ourselves as signs? Nietzsche provides an answer in his description of what he calls the lethargic element in the Dionysian state. Once an individual renounces certain false and comforting illusions about existence, a feeling of nausea sets in that threatens to negate all actions and manifestations of the will. In a brief but brilliant analysis of *Hamlet*, Nietzsche compares the Danish prince with the Dionysian man for whom both the knowledge that life lacks transcendent meaning or value destroys any motive for action. Knowledge cuts the supposedly solid ground of existence out from beneath us and leaves us with the nauseating feeling that no course of action is worth undertaking because no action will in any way mitigate the absurdity of life. Illusions are necessary, he writes, for action to proceed, because in order to act, we must have the assurance that we serve some purpose or goal beyond ourselves and the immediate needs of the present.19

Nietzsche is speaking provisionally, of course, because he does not believe this state of nausea need be absolute nor terminal. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, at least, the artistic mode of apprehension, especially as exemplified by

19 See *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 7.
its ability to direct feelings of sublimity and comedy, provides the antidote to nausea. For many readers of Nietzsche, however, this cure is just as bad as the disease, for the surrendering of life to the artistic is the one thing theories of narrative and literature have been trying to avoid since Plato, whose reasons for distrusting poets were, on the whole, political. Social stability depended upon the "right" representation of reality, and poetic imitation could ruin understanding (especially in the young) unless true knowledge was readily available to counteract its pernicious influence of poetry. That such knowledge might not always be accessible led Plato to consign poets a place well outside the city gates.

Until Nietzsche, however, Plato's fears were mostly of secondary importance in literary theory and philosophy. The division of fiction from history seemed clear and well defined because the categories of truth and falsehood were largely taken for granted. One may have difficulty in discerning the truth, and one may be taken in by lies, but the possibility of truth remained beyond question. That it did so opened the way for the occasional inverting of history and fiction in Plato's moral hierarchy without raising any alarms as to the epistemological consequences of such a

move. In his *Apologie*, for example, Sidney proclaims that history and not poetry sets the bad example for readers, and that the poet's ability to "effect another nature" properly counterbalances history, wherein the litany of human misconduct might be "an encouragement to unbridled wickedness." Joseph Addison suggests the insufficiency of history and science as the basis for one's life because "the mind of man requires something more perfect in matter" than what it finds in nature, and that the poet does us all a good service by "mending and perfecting nature where he describes a reality, and by adding greater beauties than are put there by nature." 21 Samuel Johnson, in perhaps the most direct challenge to Plato, believes that the distortion that occurs in poetic imitation is vital to the well-being of society. Even though art should aspire to the imitation of nature, it should only imitate virtue and not vice. "It is not therefore a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears... nor of a narrative, that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience;" rather, he says, evil must be portrayed in a manner that teaches us to be on guard against it. The portrayal of evil actions may be unavoidable in a historical narrative, but the greatness of poetry is that such evil can always be por-

21 *The Spectator*, no. 418.
trayed in a manner to discredit the action and disgust the reader.

The significance, for our purposes, of these arguments is the suggestion that referentiality has no vital relationship to truth and morality. In fact, just the opposite seems to be the case. History is what we need protection from, and the poet is just the person to do the job. Also interesting is the apparent equivalence these arguments grant to poetry and history; each suggests that the poetic and the historical are both discourses of the exemplum, records of the standard of behavior that humanity has achieved or should attempt to achieve. If, however, poetry and history are somehow equivalent, these arguments make it quite evident that poetry is the first among equals. The truth history tells us is potentially dangerous, but the truth poetry tells can save us from ourselves by offering the example, and the possibility, of a human nature superior to what it has been in the past. Therefore history comes to mark the limits of the possible, the line beyond which we cannot hope to cross; but poetry manifests itself as the discourse of desire, the place where desire, much to our benefit and well-being, can throw off almost all constraints and forge a type of human subjectivity that can claim a different genealogy than the evil deeds of the past.

22 *The Rambler*, no. 4.
Still, these suggested possibilities remain no more than that--furtive implications on the edge of an analysis that never fully acknowledges them. Had literary theory and philosophy continued in the tradition of Sidney, Addison and Johnson we would not have the crisis of narrative we face today because, having taken up the question of truth as a moral and empirical principle, they remained satisfied with leaving the discussion on the level of content rather than focusing on that category itself which gives such content its meaning. Even though they questioned the moral efficacy and empirical capabilities of historical discourse, they never abandoned their belief in the absolute distinction of history from fiction. As a result, the beneficial, and even utopian, possibilities that poetry offered became little more than wishful thinking. Nietzsche forced a crisis in empiricism and narrative, however, because he did not hesitate to abandon such a belief nor to carry such arguments to their logical conclusion.
Nietzsche and the Fiction of Truth

Nietzsche's importance to the study of narrative derives from his critique of that which is both the beginning and end of narrative theory: human subjectivity. To define what it means to be human, to describe how experience and knowledge articulate with one another and what role sign systems play within that articulation, will to a large extent depend upon whether we assign narrative an a priori or a posteriori degree of importance. Science and history assume that at some basic level of experience knowledge is accessible to human beings without the mediation of language. Events occur in the world which we can witness but which require nothing further than some human awareness for them to be intelligible. Two assumptions underlie such thinking: that language has the primary function of denotation in which things and events, once comprehended, need only the application of some sign system in order to make their essentiality communicable; and that the perceiving subject also has an essential nature which uses signification for its own purposes but is itself not dependent upon signs for its identity. All knowledge must therefore rest upon a certain number of givens whose unchangeability imposes a structure upon human experience: the primarily descriptive function of language, and the stability of the subject.

The profound disorientation that Nietzsche brings to
Western philosophy results from his denial of these principles, a denial which suggests the "infiniteness" of experience. For both science and history, knowledge must be finite. Vast it certainly is, and without a doubt beyond the capacity of a single mind to encompass; but when truth is based on the accumulation of facts, it is itself limited by the materiality of the universe. Advancement in knowledge is measured by more expansive and more precise gatherings of facts, but this advancement cannot be an infinite process because (assuming the universe itself is not infinite) there are only a finite number of things in the universe to be identified, measured and categorized. Within Enlightenment conceptions of science and history, it is logically possible to know everything there is to be known about the universe.

Nietzsche throws all such conceptions into disarray, however, by insisting that interpretation, and not factuality, is the basic component of experience. What makes the world infinite, he says, is the possibility of infinite interpretation, unencumbered by the false and, as he believes, unhealthy limitations of factual knowledge. To the positivist's insistence that there are only facts, he replies that facts are exactly what there is not, that interpretation and not explanation produces meaning and that within

23 The Joyful Wisdom, section 374.
the incomprehensible fluidity of experience, the only truly enduring reality is that of our opinions. Knowledge, therefore, becomes what he calls the biggest fable of all, and truth something which must be created rather than found or discovered.\textsuperscript{24}

This extensive emphasis upon interpretation does not mean, however, that Nietzsche's argument necessarily leads to solipsism or some other crude form of idealism. His rhetoric gets him into trouble with many people but we should remember that his grandeloquence of tone and style are part of his strategy to force a response from a scientific and philosophic establishment even more complacent than it is today. So when he insists that the world and knowledge are fables, that they are ever changing falsehoods that never get any nearer to the truth (because there is no truth), he does so as a means to make us look full-face into the implications of denying transcendental meaning and value in favor of what might be called perspectival or provisional claims to truth. For Nietzsche, the truth claims of all philosophies rested on a need to deny their reliance on figurative language through an insistence on the incapacity of signs to represent and embody truth. He saw life as a struggle against many things, but perhaps the greatest was against knowledge that masqueraded as truth.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} The Will to Power, sections 481, 552, 555 and 604.
Nietzsche does not believe that the concept of truth has absolutely no validity whatsoever. Rather, he tries to demonstrate that the category of truth, as conceived of by Western philosophy, is really a euphemism for the workings of will and desire. As Gilles Deleuze points out, Nietzsche critiques science because its insistence upon a system of checks and balances is actually an insistence upon the inherent egalitarianism of the universe and a disavowal of the true theory of force as the origin of meaning and value.26 What we should not lose sight of, however, (though Nietzsche himself at times seems to lose sight of it) is the deep strain of empiricism that runs through his argument. When he claims that truth is inertia, for example, he directs his attack at the truth that is not the truth, at the truth that does not begin with an examination of the world as it is, but which begins with a defense and reaffirmation of certain metaphysical principles whose sole purpose is to deny the


workings of force and desire in the constitution of meaning. So even though Nietzsche believes that rational thought is actually interpretation within an empirical structure we cannot get out of, he also believes that only the senses provide evidence for truth and that truth is in fact the will to master the chaotic varieties of sensations.27

27 Beyond Good and Evil, section 134; The Will to Power, sections 517, 522 and 537.
Nietzsche built his empiricism, therefore, upon the insistence that science take as its object the individuality and idiosyncrasy of the real and that it abandon the comfort of generalities which are actually ruling metaphors of reason. His critique of the real, however, did more than tear down the ruling metaphors of the world as object; it also turned against those philosophies of the subject whose long acceptance had made them seem unassailable. His theory of the subject is perhaps his most important contribution to modern philosophy and psychology, yet it is a theory based on a paradox: the will to power seems to demand a subject to exercise it, but Nietzsche dissolves the subject even as he makes its existence necessary. At times his work appears to fall into convenient dualities—Apollo/Dionysus, master/slave, sickness/health, self/world; yet he never permits these dualities to become distinct and wholly oppositional polarities. In the case of Apollo and Dionysus, he makes the attributes and forcefulness of each dependent upon those of the other; with the master/slave and sickness/health dualities, he interiorizes them and makes them aspects of the

133 See Wilcox, p. 135 and Norris, p. 61.
self rather than of different individuals or classes of people; and in the case of the self and the world, he breaks each down into ever smaller components so that we end up searching in vain for that entity which is the self or the world.

As Freud would do after him, Nietzsche understood the inadequacy of identifying the self with consciousness. Conscious thought was not its own master but subject to the drives and compulsions of the instincts. Whatever the intentions behind our actions, other intentions unknown to ourselves remained concealed within the instinctual drives. Therefore, just as we need ruling metaphors to take command over the chaotic plurality of the world, so do we need them to take command over and organize the forces and drives within us. The subject, says Nietzsche, is not a given but an invention; even the claim that an interpreter is necessary for interpretation he believes to be nothing more than a hypothesis. Categories such as "self" and "individual," therefore, are fictional constructs used both to conceal and to manage the plurality of forces at work within us. Even the will is a plurality, a site where instincts and drives conflict with one another for

135 Beyond Good and Evil, sections 3 and 32.
136 The Will to Power, section 481.
expression and satisfaction. As Michel Haar writes, "An analysis of the individual's 'I will' shows that what we call will is the result of a reduction, according to the dictates of a practical necessity as well as to those of linguistic structure, and that it represents merely an imaginary entity, a pure fiction."\textsuperscript{137}

Fictionality, therefore, is an aspect of the self, an aspect of science and, unavoidably, of history, where Nietzsche saw the concept of objectivity as a veil for any number of illusions. What passes for objective history, he believed, was actually the work of the dramatist who could create a coherent unity out of isolated and diverse entities. What is more, he writes, it is altogether possible to conceive of a historical objectivity that does not rely upon empirical truth.\textsuperscript{138} It might seem at this point that Nietzsche has fallen victim to his own sense of hyperbole but we should remember that he has quite deliberately stepped into what appears to be an oxymoronic impasse. How can we have a historical empiricism that disdains empirical truth? We cannot unless we, as did Nietzsche, redefine the term in a manner that frees it from the incrustation of values and preconceptions that have made it the tool of illusory strategies that

\textsuperscript{137} Haar, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{138} On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History, section 6.
would deny the dynamics of desire and truth. The extremity of Nietzsche's position stems from his belief that the shortcomings of empiricism cannot be rectified by an appeal to what Christopher Norris calls "some alternative logic of figurative language,"139 and that a truly empirical mode of thought must begin with the recognition that truth and objectivity (as traditionally conceived) dissolve in the free-play of signifiers and the force of desire.

Thus, despite all of Nietzsche's claims to the contrary, there seems to be a general consensus that such a recognition has tragic overtones and that it unleashes an empirical mode which has no other motivation than the destruction of truth.140 This conclusion is at best itself a half-truth, as I have tried to show, because Nietzsche's supposed discovery of the falseness of empirical reality is actually the discovery of how an attempt at representation has failed to fulfill its potential. Through his emphasis on interpretation, he changes fiction and fabrication from categories of negative content and moral ambiguity to categories grounded them in an empiricism of desire that structures human experience. We must, he insists, acknowledge that untruth is a condition and that a greater

139 Norris, p. 59.
140 See de Man, p. 93.
part of our experience originates in a process of fabrication. He admits the danger in resisting customary value statements, but he feels it is imperative that we contemplate events as their inventors rather than simply their observers. "All this means," he writes, is that "we are from the very heart and from the very first--accustomed to lying. Or, to express it more virtuously and hypocritically, in short more pleasantly: one is much is more of an artist than one realizes."141

Although his tone may have changed since The Birth of Tragedy, when he first suggested this possibility as an antidote for existential nausea, his attitude has not. We may deny but we cannot avoid the responsibility that we create and fabricate our existence through the workings of desire; knowing is a process of law-giving and the will to truth is really another aspect of the will to power. The familiarization of the unknown through representation is so pleasurable that it gains the status of truth, making pleasure a criterion of truthfulness.142 What Nietzsche's empiricism of desire would hope to make possible, then, is a truthfulness independent of pleasure--in short, a truth that

141 Beyond Good and Evil, section 192, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. See also section 4.

142 Beyond Good and Evil, section 211; and The Twilight of the Gods, section IV 5.
hurts. And it does hurt, but not for the reasons often assumed. Nietzsche does not try to supplant an empiricism based on objectivity and truth with an empiricism of desire; rather, he tries to demonstrate that an empiricism of desire is all we have ever had but have been unwilling to acknowledge it. He offers us here another of his paradoxes in that within classical empiricism what we have most desired is that the world not conform to our desires, that it have a structure and meaning independent of our wills. Thus the world would be most contiguous with our desires just at those points where contiguity seems nonexistent because at those points everything we honor and find pleasurable would have an apparently natural validity quite independent of our wishes and desires.\textsuperscript{143} With a recognition of the empiricism of desire comes the possibility of life without the benefit of illusions and of truth which can forego the privilege of eternal solidarity.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{143} The Will to Power, section 585.

\textsuperscript{144} Due in large part to the Nazi's adaptation of his terminology and to his sister's endorsement (in his name) of their cause, Nietzsche has suffered much guilt by association because of his concept of the Overman who will live the the kind of life just described. His writings on the subject are too complex to summarize here and bear almost no resemblance to the crude parodies one often reads. Let me just note that his conception of the noble race has almost nothing to do with biology and includes Arabs, Japanese and Greeks as well as Germans and Scandinavians (The Genealogy of Morals, section I I I), and that he extensively repudiates both German nationalism and anti-Semitism in The Twilight of the Gods. Elsewhere he notes
The Nietzschean critique of truth weighs heavily on any theory of narrative because it forces the consideration of questions once thought too sophomoric or self-evident to even ask. If truth originates in an act of will rather than in empirical phenomena that to one degree or another resist or curtail the force of the will, what basis remains for distinguishing the true from the false? And for narrative specifically, what basis remains for distinguishing fiction from non-fiction, or literature from history? I remember an occasion when an encyclopedia salesman said I would never have to worry about the set becoming out-dated because ninety percent of the information it contained was historical and therefore would never change. His sales-pitch exemplifies the widely held belief that an empiricism of facts stands impervious to the workings of an empiricism of desire, circumscribing and containing it on all fronts. His conception of history actually differs little from that of

that the Jews are "beyond all doubt the strongest, toughest and purest race at present living in Europe" (Beyond Good and Evil, section 251, trans. R. J. Hollingdale). Having defended Nietzsche on this point, however, I must also note, as does Derrida, the difficulty of absolving completely on the issue of Nazism. See The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation, trans. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985). Although Derrida writes that "there is nothing absolutely contingent about the fact that the only political regimen to have effectively brandished his name as a major and official banner was Nazi" (p. 31), the fact remains that Nietzsche has always been a source of justification for ideologies of force and not for those of democracy or socialism.
Merleau-Ponty, who believed that men make their history as they make their language.\textsuperscript{145} When he says this, however, he does not mean history at all, but the future. Men make their future as they make their language, but once made, the future solidifies into history, the thing that cannot be unmade.

History, then, becomes synonymous with validity, logic and actuality—categories which may or may not coincide with the will and desire but which in their essentiality have an \textit{a priori} claim to the truth. What Nietzsche has done, however, is reverse this relationship of desire and validity and thus make history (as that which has already happened) the focus of an act of creation rather than of description. Nietzsche describes three types of historical inquiry—monumental, antiquarian and critical—all of which have their value but two of which are potentially detrimental for the well-being of humanity.\textsuperscript{146} Monumental history sees the past as a continuum of ever-present greatness, in which the heroism, brilliance and achievements of the past are accessible in the present; it gives us a past which inspires emulation in those who study it. Whoever would achieve something


\textsuperscript{146} On the \textit{Advantage and Disadvantage of History}, sections 2 and 3.
great should look to monumental history, which contains previous examples of similar greatness as models for present actions. The danger such history poses is that it tends to either consign such monumentality primarily to the past, so that it remains beyond the reach of present aspirations, or else it encourages a conception of historical circularity which confuses mimicry with the will to power. Antiquarian history is really the monumental carried to its logical extreme. Whereas the monumental would inspire those who attempt deeds of greatness, the antiquarian amounts to a veneration of the past and tradition, and would preserve the historical by revering it. Nietzsche most disliked this type of history because it denigrated the present in favor of the past; in its worst manifestations it not only lacks vitality and creativity, it actively opposes them.

As a result of the dangers these two types of histories pose, Nietzsche posited a third type, critical history. In order to deny historical precedent the force of necessity that monumental and antiquarian attitudes would give it, the critical sets itself against history in order to judge and condemn it. However much the past may be worthy of reverence or emulation, it is always, says Nietzsche, worthy of condemnation. Whoever suffers oppression or has some burden to throw off has a need for critical history, for it allows one to choose a past from which to be descended instead of
the one history has apparently chosen. Nietzsche's grandiosity should not blind us to his point, for he does not, of course, suggest that we can actually change our genetic or cultural heritage. Rather, he suggests that we need not necessarily be determined by them and that critical history provides the tool to resist such determination. Whatever its particularities, therefore, critical history is always the history of freedom.

Nietzsche recognized a danger even in critical history, however, this being the difficulty of limiting denials of the past. As Arthur Danto observes, in a critique of relativism, one cannot be skeptical about history without also being skeptical about everything else.\footnote{Arthur C. Danto, \textit{Narration and Knowledge} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 110.} That Nietzsche recognized such a danger and chose to embrace rather than guard against it makes him the potent force in what might well be critical history's current embodiment, postmodernism. For once we accept Nietzsche's conclusions we must then admit, as does Lévi-Strauss, that history is not the essentiality of its phenomena but is instead a methodology plain and simple. History is not the discovery of significance, therefore, but the ascription of it.\footnote{See Lévi-Strauss, \textit{The Savage Mind}, pp. 257-262.} As a result, concepts such as truth and validity acquire a meaning in-
dependent of and prior to that of empirical fact, and a theory of narrative (especially non-fiction narrative) must maintain that clarity; coherence and consistency are self-generated and not derived from the phenomena under consideration. "A confusion of value and existence," writes Derrida, "and more generally, of all types of realities and all types of idealities is sheltered beneath the equivocal category of the historical," and the purpose of narrative heretofore has largely been to obscure this confusion.

Nature and History

If we can discern the origins of this purpose, however, we will discover not only the motives behind the perceived need to oppose the Nietzschean denial of the past, but also why the generic distinctions of literature and history have become so indispensable. As Derrida also notes, a "critical reading of the history (and) of genre-theory is based on an opposition between nature and history and, more generally... on an opposition between nature and what can be called the series of all its others." Nature has always been placed in opposition to history, for reasons we will


now examine, and the distinction between literature and history still relies on this opposition. But whereas in philosophy this opposition rested primarily on empirical and psychological distinctions between what is human and what is not, in narrative theory such an opposition is primarily moral. In reaffirming the equivalence of history and humanity, such theory implicitly endorses the notion that what is not history (i.e. literature) is unavoidably other than or even opposed to the human and the humane.

How we define history and literature, therefore, depends to a significant degree upon how we define the otherness of nature; that is, it depends upon what place and role we assign to the non-human within human affairs. Philosophy has never quite been able to make up its mind as to whether nature is that system within which humanity finds its place and understands its purpose, or whether it is that from which humanity must extricate itself and in so doing bring nature under its control. Kant, for example, inclines toward the first possibility in suggesting that there might be a plan of nature which humanity fulfills without even realizing it. Nature endows humanity with reason in order that we may in turn fully realize our moral freedom. The span of a single lifetime being too short to completely develop reason, however, this process must work itself out in the history of the human race. Marx, on the other hand, regarded
nature as the raw material out of which man created both himself and his history. Industry, therefore, embodies the historical relationship of humanity and nature, and is nothing other than the creation of man through his own labor and the development of nature for his own purposes.

Whatever the differences between these two positions, however, they both implicitly agree that teleology ultimately distinguishes the human from the natural. As a linear sequence of events in time, history has (at the very least) the appearance of progression and development from which philosophy and religion continually deduce goals and objectives. Nature, however, is an endless series of cycles and repetitions that continue without will or purpose; and even though science could at one time think of itself as natural history, there can be no such thing. Nature has no history because it cannot differ from what it has always been; history, on the other hand, never repeats itself because human actions and intentions, whatever their similarities through time, are always unique manifestations of individual subjectivity. Nature is always the same but history never can be.

Each of these two positions also implicitly agree on the ontological simplicity, and even superficiality, of the natural when compared to the human, whose complexity derives from the inside/outside distinction which nature does not have. This distinction makes possible the differentiation
of nature and history by describing the former as a series of events and the latter as a series of acts. Again, the Cartesian duality of body and mind comes into play through the assumption that humanity has a dual essentiality which nature does not. Astronomy, geology or meteorology, for example, present us with a series of events that are not history because they are only manifestations of brute force and not of will and desire; they are, in other words, body without any animating mind or soul. History, however, presents us with a series of actions rather than events because it enables us to see the reality behind the reality. The movement of bodies through time and space constitute only one part (and that a secondary one) of what we call history; rather, history concerns itself with the primary and "invisible" reality of thought, will and desire in attempting to tell the story of the past. History, and the human, finds its essence in a non-materiality that distinguishes it from nature.

R. G. Collingwood provides an example of how this nature/history distinction functions within the philosophy of history after Nietzsche. Collingwood firmly believes that nature has no inside/outside characteristics because its essence is no more than the materiality of its processes. Because humanity does have this duality, however, the "inside"—by which he means thought—constitutes the true
object of history. In fact, for Collingwood the historical process in and of itself is the process of thought, and of everything other than thought there can be no history. The historian who attempts to reconstruct events of the past faces a quite different task than the scientist because he must not only discover the "mere event," as Collingwood calls it, but also the thought behind it.151 Even more, however, the historian must push beyond simply reporting what mind has done in the past and somehow reexperience it for himself. Historical knowledge, then, as the reexperiencing of past thoughts, involves "the perpetuation of past acts in the present."152

This equivalence of thought and action further enhances Collingwood's distinction of nature and history by making clearer its reliance upon the Cartesian duality of mind and body. Nature is only a series of events because it has no mind, but history is a series of acts because it ultimately and implicitly needs no body. From the historical perspective, to think is to act, and it is action as so defined that presents history with its true object. Furthermore, such a definition requires that historical knowledge be one of specificity rather than generality. Nature, of course,

has an infinite number of individual events but their individuality has almost no importance or consequence. The individuality of the natural event matters only insofar as it exemplifies certain recurrent and unvarying natural processes. The historical act, however, by definition embodies singularity and uniqueness, otherwise we would have only to examine our present lives to understand all that has come before us. Therefore, historical knowledge, says Collingwood, first and foremost entails a knowledge of the individual, and specifically of the individual's thought. That it can be so, however, results of its being primarily a process of self-consciousness, meaning that historical thinking involves a conscious and deliberate attempt to think what has been thought by another person in a previous time.\textsuperscript{153} The Cartesian duality necessitates such an attempt, for were it not for the inner, and separate, reality of thought, history would have no meaning and everything in existence would be nothing but nature. But how does one think another's past thought and thus hold nature at bay? Collingwood's quite interesting attempt to answer this question raises more questions than it resolves, and shows how the pervasive influence of Nietzsche comes into play even where, as in this

case, it goes unacknowledged.

To begin his answer, Collingwood addresses an issue that history must continually confront, namely, how does one really know what happened in the past? After all, the past itself is irrevocably lost to us and will never be available, as is natural phenomena, to first-hand observation and examination. What we have instead of the past is narrative, either accounts written by participants or observers of historical acts, or else objects and relics used in past actions and from which the historian, archaeologist and anthropologist can deduce a narrative account explaining their existence. Collingwood raises the question, however, of how we can possibly determine the accuracy of these narratives. A narrator, or even a number of narrators may of course lie about the acts they report; but even assuming good faith attempts to preserve historical knowledge, how can we ascertain their correctness? The existence of numerous separate accounts of the same act that agree at least in their essentials greatly enhances the veracity of each; even so, however, it only increases the probability of truth. A pictoral record provides even greater certitude, but the story told by a photograph also

154 See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 27: "Historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing."
faces some important limitations.\textsuperscript{155} As a result, Collingwood feels that the only possible conclusion to be drawn about historical certitude is that there is no such thing. We can have a knowledge of the past, but not a complete knowledge. "Truth and error," he writes, "are at any given moment inextricably confused together," and history must be content with achieving only "the presentation of thought to itself of a world of half-ascertained fact." No fact can be wholly ascertained, but it can be progressively ascertained.\textsuperscript{156} That is, knowledge of an historical fact may through study become better understood, but no historical statement can express the complete truth about a fact.

\textsuperscript{155} See Susan Sontag, \textit{On Photography} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 6-7: "Despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth . . . Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are. Those occasions when the taking of photographs is relatively undiscriminating, promiscuous, or self-effacing do not lessen the didacticism of the whole enterprise. This very passivity--and ubiquity--of the photographic record is photography's 'message,' its aggression." See also Roland Barthes, \textit{Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography}, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 115: "Until this day no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the Photograph, my certitude is immediate: no one in the world can undeceive me. The Photograph then becomes a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination."

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Essays}, pp. 43-44.
For Collingwood, therefore, historical inquiry becomes something of a Sisyphean endeavor, a continuous struggle against the inevitability of failure. The extent of this failure may be greater than he admits, however. The process of progressively ascertaining a fact so as to make past thought the object of present thought is the result of what he calls the a priori, or historical, imagination.157 Collingwood realizes that the mere compilation of facts does not in itself make for historical inquiry; in addition, there must also be a means to ascribe continuity and coherence to these facts, to bridge the gaps between them and make them into a comprehensible whole, a means which the work of the imagination provides. As Hayden White would later do, Collingwood readily concedes that as products of the imagination "the historian's work and the novelist's do not differ";158 but where he attempts to save history from the literary is in the definition of the imaginary. His inconsistency on this point, however, shows his lack of success in untangling its philosophical and theoretical ambiguities.

Collingwood clearly felt uncomfortable with the conclusion that the historical and literary imaginations were

essentially the same thing. So great was his uneasiness, in fact, that he would contradict himself in order to maintain a clear distinction between the two. In *Essays*, for example, he claims that the historical imagination, because of its discipline, aids in the pursuit of truth. Just a few lines later, however, he informs us that historical material ceases to be history and becomes what he calls "pure art" (history's poorer cousin) by being imaginatively handled.159 And elsewhere he writes that the historian's work, whatever its claims to truthfulness, is actually a "web of imaginative construction" from which the narrative derives its coherence.160 In order to reaffirm the position of history, therefore, Collingwood states that the *a priori* imagination has three methodological rules that govern it.161 One is that the historian's picture of the past must be localized in space and time, and the second is that it must also be consistent with other histories. Collingwood does not note, however, the similarity of these rules to the Aristotelian unities of literary form. The third method, which he considers the most important, states that the historical work has a special relationship to evidence which the literary

159 *Essays*, p. 48.


work does not. This statement is true as far as it goes but when we begin to examine what qualifies as evidence, the distinction of history and literature as endeavors of the imagination once again begins to collapse.

Collingwood claims that the whole of the perceptible world is potentially historical evidence.162 This may be so, but according to his argument, the perceptible world as object and event (as nature) is not the historian's primary object; rather, thought is its object, for the whole historical enterprise, as he says, is the presentation to itself of thought by thought. And to accomplish this goal requires not the perception of facts but the use of a web of imaginative construction about what we believe must have actually taken place. Furthermore, if the evidence within a narrative is other narratives, other imaginative webs (as it almost always is), then the solidity of historical fact begins to weaken and we find ourselves faced with a world of endless interpretation. In other words, we find ourselves back with Nietzsche. Collingwood's claim that historical thinking is an original and fundamental activity of the human mind, therefore, may be correct, but not in the sense that he means, because his argument implicitly concludes that historical thinking is in fact another name for imagi-

native thinking, and that the imaginary, and not the factual, lies at the basis of historical thought.

If Collingwood attempts to avoid this conclusion even as his argument makes it necessary, Michael Oakeshott does not, choosing instead to follow out the logical implications of conceding an imaginary component of historical thought. Again, the debt to Nietzsche goes unacknowledged though this time not for reasons of philosophical uneasiness. Though not responding directly to Collingwood, Oakeshott does make clear the contradiction which undermines his argument. If history is indeed the reenactment and reexperience of past thoughts, then it must be at the same time in the past and in the present; it must, that is, be simultaneously present and absent. What Oakeshott suggests (and Collingwood does not) is that the past as past remains utterly lost and beyond our reach, but that the past as history does not. More than one kind of past exists. In a simple and straightforward sense, the past is nothing other than that which has preceded this moment, but in a historical sense the past is really not the past at all. For Oakeshott, the historical past, as an identifiable entity, is nothing other than a present world of ideas, the truth of which depends upon coherence as much as (or more than) on referentiality.163

Where most historical thought goes wrong, he believes, (and here he lends Collingwood some support) is in trying to maintain the distinction between the past as what really happened and how one conceives this past. Collingwood's Sisyphean conception of historical inquiry rests on what Oakeshott calls "this notion of a complete and virgin world of past events which history would discover if it could, but which it cannot discover on account of some radical defect in human knowledge." To pursue "what really happened," is "to pursue a phantom" and to do away with history altogether by equating it with a "fixed, finished and independent past." 164 Our understanding of the past does not rely on what really happened but on what evidence obliges us to believe. Oakeshott, unlike Collingwood, does not believe we can experience what is not present, and history, as that which is past, is not accessible to us as experience. Evidence is accessible but only as an experience of the present and not of the past. History, therefore, does not exist separate from the present world of experience but is instead "a special organization of that world," an abstraction by which we organize experience in terms of pastness. "The historical past is always present," he writes, "and yet historical experience is always in the form of the past." 165

164 Experience and Its Modes, pp. 110 and 108.

165 Experience and Its Modes, p. 111.
Coherence, therefore, becomes synonymous with truth as the hallmark of historical veracity. But, does the existence of evidence somehow undercut Oakeshott's belief in the inaccessibility of the past and grant the referential a priority over the coherent? No, he says, because history is not a correspondence of events and ideas; rather, there is no event in history which is not an idea or inference, and no historical fact which is not a judgment. The same holds true for nature. The materiality of nature does not separate it from the world of ideas but makes it all the more a part of it. As conceived by science, that which is not material, and therefore not quantifiable, is simply not nature. "Nature, in short, is the world conceived coherently under the category of quantity."\textsuperscript{166} Even in science, coherence takes precedent because nature, like history, is an abstraction, a way of dividing experience, in short, "the creation of the scientific mind for the sole purpose of satisfying that mind."\textsuperscript{167} In history and science both, no object reveals its essentiality to observation alone; each creates its sources in a way that endows them with authenticity, a much more important attribute than authority.\textsuperscript{168}

\begin{flushleft}
166 \textit{Experience and Its Modes}, p. 190.\\
167 \textit{Experience and Its Modes}, p. 193.\\
168 See Michael Oakeshott, \textit{On History and Other Essays}
\end{flushleft}
And each does this through an imaginary abstraction: in the one case, history, and in the other, nature. Evidence, therefore, does not provide a way to the past, as is often assumed; instead, it provides the basis for coherence. For Oakeshott, the historian's work does not begin with the collection of facts, isolated and distinct particles of data. It begins with a homogeneous world of ideas out of which the historian creates and constructs his object rather than discovers or even interprets. For to speak of history as something to be discovered or interpreted implies that it has an existence independent of present experience. If history is a world of ideas, it is the historian's ideas and not those of the past.169

Oakeshott's insistence on the ideational character of historical knowledge pushes beyond the limitations of Collingwood's thought without losing the material basis that the latter wanted to maintain. In doing so, however, he has rearticulated Nietzsche's empiricism of desire and gone even further than Collingwood in ascertaining the ambiguous distinctions between fiction and history. Both Oakeshott and Collingwood agree on the primacy of the imagination in historical inquiry, and both agree that it is only

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169 Experience and Its Modes, pp. 93 and 98.
in thought that history exists at all. As we have seen, however, Collingwood could not finally accept the logical conclusion of these premises and tried to limit the importance of the imagination even as he made it the basis of his philosophy of history. Oakeshott felt no such compunction and openly stated what he felt could not be avoided, that the historian does not engage in an explanatory exercise but instead infers, discursively understands and imagines the character of a historical event.\textsuperscript{170} As a result, the historian's work becomes so close to that of the novelist, it becomes difficult to tell them apart. He still believes we can tell them apart, but he makes our reasons for doing so seem more and more arbitrary. By conflating history and nature into the world of ideas, he denies both their apparent self-evident factuality and makes them the result of an imaginary engagement rather than its basis. "When we wish to give our beliefs the force and liveliness which belong to them," he writes, "we find in the language of history a ready means for expressing our desires."\textsuperscript{171} The empiricist never starts with facts but with desire, that most fundamental of building blocks.

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By designating history as the locale of thought and
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\textsuperscript{170} \textit{On History}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Experience and Its Modes}, p. 104.
nature as that of materiality, Collingwood and Oakeshott attempt to maintain the ontological validity of historical inquiry by making it the undisputed standard of human reality, as opposed to the pseudo-reality of nature. Such a contrast does not consign nature to the category of the unreal, it merely makes nature irrelevant in any discussion of meaning and value. More specifically, nature begins at the frontier of anthropology (in its broadest sense) and so encompasses everything history is not. Conversely, and for our purposes more importantly, history becomes the categorical designation of the human by claiming thought as its particular object. History and anthropology thus become equivalent categories, and everything which is not history becomes by default an aspect of nature.

An unresolved paradox haunts this mode of distinction, however, and prevents history from establishing itself in a morally superior opposition to nature. If thought is the true object of history, and if history is impossible without the concurrent intervention of imagination and desire, then history cannot possibly function as the unmediated representation of "what actually happened." Instead history can only function as the representation of what is thought to have actually happened. Let me be clear about this point because the importance of such provisionality cannot be over emphasized. The paradoxical character of historical inquiry
is that it must and must not, simultaneously, be a work of the imagination, and that it must and must not be nature. History cannot avoid, and therefore readily admits, the admission that its work depends upon both imagination and desire, whether individual or collective. At the same time, however, in order to maintain its distinctiveness from literature or other so-called "imaginary" works, it also insists upon the possibility of unmediated referentiality, so that the story the historian tells is simply a repetition of the story the facts or evidence manifest through their existence. In other words, history must have the same separateness from human thought, imagination and desire as nature does.

Gaston Bachelard notes that within Western epistemology mute experience is not possible, but that at the same time the belief in reality depends upon the conviction that the essence of any given phenomenon transcends mere sense perception, that it has a reality within itself greater than that of its materiality.172 The appointed function of both history and science has been to make this reality clear and understandable. But in making it clear, as I have just pointed out, history and science are assumed not to be actually "making" anything; rather, they reflect their own

chosen aspects of reality because reality can presumably speak for itself. By granting imagination and desire a foundational role in the study of history, however, the strength of such a presumption becomes increasingly questionable. The designation itself of mute experience shows the difficulties that history as a discipline dependent upon narrative encounters. When Bachelard writes of mute experience, he really means experience which speaks and makes itself known, and it is the possibility of such experience that history regards as indispensable. The very use of the term "mute experience," then, shows the simultaneous acceptance and denial of this possibility. If experience can speak for itself, it can only do so through the mediation of another's voice, be it that of the historian or the scientist; even when it speaks for itself, therefore, it is not really doing so. "History," writes Françoise Gaillard, "is a neutral surface for recording facts, an indifferent memory of men's words and deeds. It says nothing unless forced to speak." 173 Gaillard does not mean that history is like a recalcitrant prisoner under interrogation, from whom we must extract the truth about the past; he means that it is an inert entity which has nothing of its own to say. It is mute experience in the literal sense of the term, experience

which the empiricism of desire provides with language and therefore with meaning and significance.

What do we mean, however, when we say the empiricism of desire provides language with these things? Exactly who or what does this providing? The point I have been trying to make is that in the aftermath of Nietzsche, it has become impossible to speak of history as something "out there" and "back when" which requires only to be made the object of observation in order to reveal its inherent truth and significance. Nietzsche's radical critique of empiricism exposed the whole notion of inherent or transcendent truth as a comforting fable which (as Sartre would later make clear) we erect in order to mask our absolute responsibility for the definitions of such categories as truth, objectivity, science and history. Just as Marx claimed to have turned Hegel on his head, so Nietzsche does to Marx by a movement of Zarathustrian irony in which he takes literally the dictum that men make their own history. Rather than simply being a product of labor, however, history becomes a product of imagination and desire, a definitional fiction that straddles the often indistinguishable categories of truth, ideology and myth. Like Saussure's empty signifier, history becomes the form that awaits its content, a locale of meaning which, like language, flourishes precisely because of its embodiment of the arbitrary.
Written by whom, however? On what level does the empiricism of desire function, and who writes the fictions of definition by which we structure our existence? The answer to these questions lies at the heart of much of modern philosophy and psychology and helps illuminate the broad applicability of theories of narrative. In any moral distinction between humanity and nature, the discussion always reverts back to Hobbes and the degrees of freedom. According to the Hobbsian argument (and I oversimplify here, I realize), freedom and liberty are all well and good but the best way to ensure their continuance is to carefully circumscribe them. Too much freedom equals a state of nature and the forfeiture of all humane values. The existence of history fulfills the same function because it limits what may or may not be said about the past. Not in any absolute sense, of course, for we may choose to say anything we please about the past, but if what we say does not fulfill certain criteria then it will be denied the status of history and relegated to some other category of

175 See B. C. Hurst, "The Myth of Historical Evidence," History and Theory, 20(1981), 285. Hurst also states, "The historian does not start from 'evidence' from which he then builds up a narrative of historical change. Instead, he starts with an object or objects to which he wishes to give change-refering datum descriptions" (283). If Hurst is correct, then the issue to be explored is the relationship between the historian's wishes and the final form of these change-refering descriptions.
narrative, such as literature. With the adaptation of the
Saussurian linguistic model as the paradigm for empirical
and philosophical studies, the scope of our freedom to write
historical narratives broadly widens making fictionalization
a constitutional aspect of human relations and not something
done in deliberate contradiction to history.

V. N. Vološinov is one of the early thinkers of this
century to take his cue from Saussure and explore the
broader sociological implications of the latter's writings.
As a Marxist, Vološinov is concerned with the origins of
ideological thought and how signification, as the creation
of meaning, is also a means of production. One of the
important conclusions he reaches (though he does not state
it quite this way) is that fictionalization, far from being
the threat of the individual to the socially restructuring
work of history, is in fact an unavoidable aspect of any
social structure and that what I have called the empiricism
of desire always functions on a societal level. Thus I must
qualify my earlier statements about the emancipatory poten-
tial of fictiveness by pointing out that in the face of his-
tory the individual does not necessarily have the ability to
write whatever he or she pleases about the past but a cul-
ture or society may do just that without ever fully realiz-

176 See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*
ing it. In other words, the fictions we live by are more often chosen for us than by us, but fictions they remain and as such they strengthen societal bonds against the always dreaded state of nature.

Acceding to Saussure's insistence on the emptiness of the sign, Vološinov goes on to note that signification is never a personal but always a transindividual concern. There cannot be signification without societal relationships, and more importantly there cannot be signification without ideology. Ideology and society become so inextricably bound together that it becomes impossible to imagine one without the other. "Any cognitive thought whatever," he writes, "comes into existence... with an orientation toward an ideological system of knowledge where that thought will find place." Furthermore, "Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality." In light of such statements, the question that now arises as to where the real ends and the ideological begin? In classical Marxism the distinction has always been straightforward, the real being the oppression and exploitation of the workers and the revolutionary process by which they would overthrow

and destroy the capitalist system, whereas the ideological has been that which denies or covers up these facts. With Vološinov, however, (and later with Althusser, as we shall see) reality and ideology become something quite different; no longer a strict opposition, they assume an equivalency that makes their distinction not only difficult but actually unnecessary. The world as it is comes more and more to be the world as we think it is. The empty signifier of history, in other words, awaits the content we would give it.

We should understand that Vološinov means this conclusion to be indicative of current conceptions of reality which, he feels, can and should be changed. He is not optimistic about this possibility, however, because he sees the problem of ideology as fundamentally interconnected with the structure and functioning of the human psyche. In fact, from the standpoint of content, the difference between the psyche and ideology is for him merely one of degree and not of kind because the content of each is nothing other than the sign; the reality of the psyche and that of ideology cannot be differentiated because both depend upon a Saussurean process of signification. For Vološinov, therefore, the psyche and ideology are not twin entities which occur, respectively, on the individual and societal levels: they are the same entity, with ideology being the material embodiment of signs which makes possible the rise of con-
sciousness itself. "The processes that basically define the content of the psyche," he writes, "occur not inside but outside the individual organism, although they involve its participation . . . . The psyche and ideology dialectically interpenetrate in the unitary and objective process of social intercourse."\textsuperscript{178} As a consequence of this dialectic, the reality of the psyche becomes the same reality as that of the sign, and individual experience derives its existence only from the materiality of signs. To resolve the problem of ideology, therefore, is also to resolve the problem of the psyche.

\textbf{Lacan and the Enveloping Symbol}

Such a resolution, however, as Vološinov himself admitted, is easier said than done. The question that should be asked at this point, however, is whether the psyche and ideology are really problems in need of resolution. One implication of Vološinov's argument is that the pervasiveness of ideology is such that any attempt to distinguish it from reality becomes a mere redundancy. Although Vološinov himself would probably have rejected this conclusion, the force of his argument does lend support to such pessimism. Part of his greatness, however, is that he showed the way

\textsuperscript{178} Vološinov, pp. 25 and 41.
out of this empirical quagmire even as he posed the problem. The originality of his thought is such that it anticipates the work of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, who were able to go a long way in resolving the problem Vološinov posed, not so much by finding an answer as by changing the question. In the work of both, signification ceases to be that which hopelessly entangles truth and instead becomes that out of which truth, or what we choose to call truth, emerges. In psychology and philosophy, Lacan and Althusser respectively demonstrate how the empty signifier marks the beginning and not the eradication of meaning, and in so doing explore the larger implications of Vološinov's belief that meaning is not a preliminary condition of existence but is instead the resulting effect of interaction between subjects.179

Perhaps the most fundamental issue in the attempt to find and situate a definite locale of history is subjectivity. If we can define the subject we can, in turn, define history. The difficulties that immediately confront any such attempt, however, arise out of a consistent, and consistently unresolved, paradox within almost all definitions of the subject: namely, whatever the subject appears to be, it is so only because it first and foremost exists as an

179 Vološinov, pp. 102-103.
object. Christianity, for example, recognizes two types of human nature which it at various times refers to as fallen and redeemed, old man and new man, or Adam and Christ. Whichever type a particular individual happens to be does not originate within the self, however, but within the being of the Other. According to this scheme, subjectivity either precedes individual existence because it stands as an object to the consequences of the fall of Adam, or else it remains an unrealized potential until it becomes the object of the intervening work of Christ. This same paradox also troubles Locke's concept of the tabula rasa. Even though Locke did not believe the human character to be an absolutely blank slate at birth, the importance he granted to experience and environment meant that from birth and throughout life the subject never ceases to be an object and that this being an object is in fact the very definition of subjectivity.

The same holds true for Freud's theory of personality development which regards the human psyche at birth as a mass of inchoate drives and desires. If we define subjectivity as a knowing engagement with one's environment, however, this state of being does not qualify as such, nor did

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Freud imply that it did. If, as he said, ego shall be where id was, subjectivity only comes about by adapting to the limitations and frustrations imposed upon desire. To the degree that one lives as an object largely determines the degree to which one is a subject.

As these three examples demonstrate, attempts to define the subject always struggle against the sense that subjectivity, though present, can never quite be located. The reason for such elusiveness stems from a continued insistence on Cartesian duality with the self existing (somehow) as an entity separate and distinct from its environment. Such separateness, however, never seems to hold true. A subject can never be a subject unless it is first an object, which in turn implies that subjectivity must be both inside and outside the self. Sartre understood this point (though he would later obscure it) when he wrote that "the ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, in the world. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another,"181 by which he means that the ego, or self, does not structure consciousness by means of personality traits but is instead actually an object of consciousness. The self, as traditionally understood, is actually the ob-

ject of another self, and it is the identification of this self (or perhaps, selves) that Lacan sets as his task.

In his attempt to refute Husserl, Sartre maintained that the concepts of self and personal identity were actually unifying constructs which had no single and specific entity as their referent. Whereas analyses of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* tend to focus on the word "*sum*" as the most important element of this thesis, Sartre reversed this tendency by insisting that "*cogito*" demands our primary attention because it is not as straightforwardly identifiable as it often seems. In fact, says Sartre, the self is not the self at all but a plurality of selves, each with a specific function: "The 'I' is the ego as the unity of actions. The 'me' is the ego as the unity of states and of qualities." 182 Sartre would later return to a more Cartesian view of the human psyche (for which Lacan would take him to task) but it is at least of historical interest to note that early in his career his writings on subjectivity brought him to some of the same conclusions that Lacan would later broadly develop. 183


For Lacan, the subject is not just an entity to itself but a dependent aspect of a symbolic-linguistic system which one inescapably enters into at birth. "Symbols," he writes, "in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood.'"¹⁸⁴ Symbols, that is, engender a person even before he or she is engendered in that they significantly predetermine (meaning limit) the possibilities of what a person may be. Never the originator or source of discourse, the subject occupies a place along the signifying chain of language from which it derives its meaning and what we call its sense of identity. What does this mean? To briefly characterize a forbiddingly complex theory, Lacan rejects as simplistic the idea of the conscious ego which adjusts to its environment in the interests of survival by synthesizing experience. In fact, in a manner remarkably similar to that of Locke, he believes that the newborn infant for all practical purposes lacks anything that could be identified as individuality or subjectivity and that it acquires these attributes through the experience, and awareness, of Otherness. In acquiring subjectivity, however, the infant does not acquire something unified and coherent, but something fragmented, diverse and poly-

valent. It acquires, says Lacan, a three-fold type of sub-
jectivity: the speaking subject, or je; the alienated and
objectified subject, or moi; and what he calls the uncon-
scious subject of truth, or the Other (A).

Just as Freud saw psychic development progress from id
to ego and superego, so does Lacan see a similar progression
from moi to an almost simultaneous entrance into the stages
je and Other (A). But whereas je and Other (A) in some ways
correspond to ego and superego, respectively, the category
moi, as the initial stage of psychic development, differs
radically from the Freudian conception of the id. This
difference illustrates why the often repeated phrase "the
return to Freud" only partially describes the work of Lacan-
ian psychoanalysis and its understanding of the origin and
function of desire. For Freud, desire was more or less a
given in the human psyche. Born with certain appetites and
drives, human beings must learn to curb, channel or repress
them in order to establish any type of social cohesion. For
Lacan, however, desire is not simply there from the begin-
nung, but comes into being as we interact with the Imaginary
and Symbolic registrars. Lacan would agree with Freud, of
course, that we are born with a sexual drive, but he would
not agree that the need for sexual gratification assumes an
a priori position in the process of character formation.
Instead, sexuality becomes only one aspect (and perhaps not
even the primary aspect) of a network of desire, not born with us, but created by the linguistic-symbolic system which structures our lives. In other words, we do not become who we are in opposition to desire, as Freud would have it; we do so, instead, through the acquisition of desire which results from our participation in the socially structuring activities of language and other symbolic systems.

It should be obvious, therefore, that when Freud and Lacan speak about desire they are not speaking about exactly the same thing. Freud's belief that psychological problems would eventually find their cure in the fields of biology and chemistry does not mean his approach is more materialistic than that of Lacan with his emphasis on language. Rather, each concerns himself with a different type of materialism, the one seeing a fundamental role played by neural and hormonal processes, the other seeing the production of Symbolic and Imaginary relationships as that which primarily structures the psyche. For when Lacan speaks of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, he does not at all mean unreal or non-existent; he means, instead, a process for the production of meaning that in many ways resembles Volosinov's theory of symbolization and ideological thought.

One of the most important principle's of Lacan's work is that there can be no conception of the subject, or self, without a corresponding conception of the Other. He does
not simply mean, however, that one necessarily entails the
other. He takes the more radical position that at some
level the categories of self and Other cease to be contin-
gent entities and become the same entity: the only reason
there can even be a conception of the self is because of a
preceding conception of the Other. The Other plays a cen-
tral role in Lacanian psychoanalysis and an integral part in
each of Lacan's three psychic subdivisions, with moi and
Other (A) defining and in turn being defined by the Other
outside the self, and je by the Otherness of the self. For
Lacan, what has come to be known as the ego is in fact
frustration in its essence, but not the frustration of a
subject's desire; instead, the ego encompasss frustration
by an object in which desire is alienated.185 Desire origi-
nates outside the self in an object in which the self vainly
seeks its own subjectivity. The desire to be a subject
arises in an unacknowledged and, of course, unfulfillable
desire to be the Other.

This desire to be the Other originates with the for-
mation of the moi in what Lacan calls the mirror stage,
which occurs sometime between the ages of six months and
eighteen months. According to this theory, when the child
sees its reflection or image, he appropriates the attributes

185 Écrits, p. 42.
of unity, coordination and sufficiency he believes to be a part of that image, attributes which the child does not himself possess. Such an image, or ego ideal, need not come from his own reflection, however, but also (and probably most often) comes from his perception of the mother or whoever takes care of the child at this age. The mirror stage, writes Lacan, "manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the visual Gestalt of his own body: in relation to the still very profound lack of coordination of his own mobility, it represents an ideal unity, a salutary imago."186 The formation of the self therefore begins with a movement of desire, wish-fulfillment and imagination by which the individual experiences its subjectivity as something outside of itself. What we may call this Other-self, or outer subjectivity, situates the individual in what Lacan calls "a fictional direction" that will always remain irreducible because it inaugurates a "succession of phantasies" that attempt to transform the fragmented image of the self into a totality.187 It inaugurates, in other words, the moi.

Although the mirror stage occurs during infancy or earliest childhood, it does in a sense remain with us

186 Œuvres, pp. 18-19.
187 Œuvres, pp. 2-4.
throughout our lives by means of the agency of the moi, that aspect of the psyche by which we experience ourselves through our experience of others. Within the moi exist the unstable and ever-changing conceptions of the self precipitated by interactions with others. The moi, writes Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "can only experience itself in relation to external images and to the gaze of others... It began as a dialectical experience and, throughout life, each metamorphosis and successive indentification with others again challenge its delimitations." 

188 Lacan's concept of the moi, therefore, does not involve any definition of the self as it is but of the self as it wishes to be; that is, on the level of the moi, the self only exists through a process of fictionalization. Because of the formation of the moi, the mirror stage is one of the decisive moments in psychological development, but it is a moment that forever prevents the self from becoming a stable and unified entity even as it continually attempts to do so, and it situates the self not in the Real but in the imagination of the real. As Jane Gallop writes, the mirror stage "produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an

illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion." Within the mirror stage, the need to distinguish between the real and the imaginary ceases to be a matter of difficulty and becomes instead one of irrelevance.

After the mirror stage of infancy, however, the perceptions of one's environment and one's sense of self assume a stability and coherence that increase with maturity. They also, not coincidentally, increase with the acquisition and mastery of language. According to Lacan, this movement into language facilitates the formation of the je, or speaking subject, which derives its sense of subjectivity from making the world the object of its discourse. Its primary function, however, is not so much to designate the world, but to designate the self by controlling the shifting indentifications of the moi, which it does through a process of definition and classification quite similar to the paradigm of Enlightenment empiricism. By its use of discourse, the je identifies and tabulates its experiences not only to discriminate between different entities in the world but also to discriminate between itself and Otherness. In this respect, the je closely corresponds to the Freudian ego in that it constitutes the conscious sense of the self as distinct and absolutely separate from whatever entails

Otherness.

The limitations of the je, however, are such that it remains unaware that the basis of its identity is not its separateness from the world, but its separateness from the self. In other words, the true object of the je is not the world but the moi whose deceptiveness, fluctuation and inherent sense of alienation it seeks to counteract through a sense of wholeness and stability. As je, the speaking subject "undertakes all its quests (sexual, intellectual, or material) in relation to its Otherness to itself."\textsuperscript{190} Instead of unifying the self, the work of the je only further fragments it by making a permanent division and sense of alienation within the psyche an unavoidable aspect of personality. Just as Lacan said that the mirror stage orients the individual in a fictional direction, so too does the je, only it does so in spite of itself. For Lacan, therefore, the je is somewhat ludicrous for, it lies immersed in self-deception even as it condemns the moi for doing the same. "The privilege of the ego," he writes, "in relation to things is to be sought elsewhere than in this false recurrence to infinity of reflexion that the mirage of consciousness consists of, and which, despite its perfect inanity, still to some extent excites those who work with thought.

\textsuperscript{190} Ragland-Sullivan, p. 15. For a further discussion of the je, see also pp. 58-67.
into seeing in it some supposed progress in interiority, whereas it is a topological phenomenon whose distribution in nature is as sporadic as the dispositions of pure exteriority that condition it. 191

Where then should it be sought? In answer to this question, Lacan brings forth his most complex and far-reaching critique of the unified and self-contained subject. The failure of both je and moi to establish subjectivity results from the failure of each to realize that their apparent success at self-recognition is actually a process of mis-recognition, or méconnaissance. The je, as the speaking subject, defines self as a wholly interior phenomenon and an unambiguous instance of unified presence; but the moi, as the alienated and objectified subject, defines self as wholly exterior and makes it equivalent with the existence of the Other. In order to mitigate this opposition Lacan postulates a third aspect of the psyche which has the attributes of both its counterparts without being identified with either. Unknown to both the je and the moi, the real subject of "truth" is the unconscious subject, or Other (A).

191 Écrits, p. 134.
The Other (A) derives its importance from its ability to collapse the inner/outer distinction which the je insists upon, yet without displacing the sense of self-identity with an Other-identity, as does the moi. With Lacan, subjectivity ceases to rely on self/other distinctions and becomes something in which Otherness actually constitutes a major portion of the self without, however, subsuming it. As the true subject, the Other (A) occupies the place of the unconscious and makes possible the interaction of the individual with the Symbolic order. In this respect, we can see its similarities with both the other two psychic categories. As with the moi, there are important ways in which the Other (A) derives its sense of subjectivity from the existence of the Other; but as with the je, the Other (A) also participates in that dialectic which reaffirms its sense of identity and which, as Lacan says, "link the 'I' to socially elaborated situations." 192 Such scope gives it broad applicability in Lacan's theory, permitting him to use it to refer to different things at different times. As the designation for those external forces which impinge upon the individual psyche, the Other (A) in infancy is more or less coextensive with the mirror stage and the child's

192 Écrits, p. 5.
identification with the unitary image of the Other. Once participation in the social dialectic begins, however, the Other (A) comes to refer to the Symbolic order—the language, rules, prohibitions, obligations and the real and symbolic relationships which characterize and structure our lives. In a patriarchal society, therefore, the Other (A) arises when the unitary sameness of the mother gives way to the alienating otherness of the father and everything fatherhood (and by extension masculinity, power and authority) represents. As Lacan says, libidinal normativity and cultural normativity are "bound up from the dawn of history with the imago of the father." 193

The function of the father imago, the name-of-the-father and the symbolic phallus have been extensively analyzed elsewhere, and their importance to the study of narrative amply demonstrated. 194 More germane to the

193 Écrits, p. 22.

study of the representational capabilities of narrative, however, is Lacan's division of human cognition and desire into three broad areas of experience which segment and give meaning to such psychological entities—the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. My purpose above in examining the tripartite structure of the Lacanian subject was to show the difficulty in grounding the subject, and thus history, upon anything solid and unambiguously "real." Mis-recognition, desire, imagination and linguistic-symbolic structures all play a role in the constitution of subjectivity; but where among all these things is the "real" self and "real" world it comprehends and reacts to? The moi sees itself in the supposed unity of the Other; the je sees the Other through the supposed unity of itself; and the Other (A) makes possible what Lacan calls the true subject only through a process of Saussurian signification that bases reality in a signifier that no longer requires a signified. If the concept of self no longer has the same meaning it did in traditional ego psychology, then the question arises as to whether the concept of history can retain its unequivocal meaning as the designation of the real as opposed to that of the imaginary. The fictional orientation of the self, as we shall now see, necessarily entails the same of history, but not in a way that eliminates the pragmatics of the real from everyday life. In this instance, orientation in no way amounts to nullification.
The important thing to remember is that when Lacan speaks of the Real, he does so in contradistinction to Reality which, unlike the former, is perfectly knowable. The Real, for Lacan, is something akin to brute existence: that realm beyond the reach of signification and impervious to the manipulative efforts of the Imaginary and Symbolic. As Jameson writes, the Real "resists symbolization absolutely," and in so doing remains somewhat vague and indeterminate. The Real, according to Alan Sheridan, "stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. What is prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its 'raw' state ... may only be supposed, it is an algebraic 'x'." It would seem, therefore, that because the Real lies outside the chain of signification in which human beings define their existence, it must also lie outside the scope of human experience, but Lacan does not in any way endorse such a conclusion. Charles Sanders Peirce has noted that whereas we do have direct experience of things in themselves, "Our knowledge of things in themselves is entirely relative." Peirce thus

196 Alan Sheridan, translator's note to Œuvres, pp. ix-x.
makes the distinction between experience and knowledge in the same way that Lacan distinguishes the Real from Reality. We live in the Real, we enter act with it and respond to its existence; our knowledge, however, remains on the level of signification and therefore stands at one remove from the Real, in Reality as an affect of the signifier. Thus even though Reality possesses what Lacan calls "the unity of signification," it also "proves never to be resolved into a pure indication of the real, but always refers back to another signification." 198 The Real may be where we live, but because of the work of signification, Reality is what we know.

Therefore, even though Jameson may correctly surmise that history is what hurts, 199 he has much less basis for his assertion, "The Real in Lacan . . . is simply History itself." 200 As the algebraic "x", it would seem that the Real is anything but history due to its absolute resistence to any form of symbolization and the consequent nullification of all attempts at unity, logic, coherence and necessity--attributes indispensable to the practice of

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University Press, 1931), vol. VI, p. 73. See also Silverman, pp. 14-25.

198 Écrits, p. 126.

199 The Political Unconscious, p. 102.

history. We are not driven to conclude, however, that such attributes are therefore meaningless, only that their applicability pertains wholly to Reality and not to the Real. Once again, the Marxist imperative that men create their history gains new, though perhaps unanticipated, relevance in the Lacanian empiricism of desire. The distinction between direct experience and indirect knowledge means the impossibility of unmediated cognition, so that what has heretofore been known as history becomes the product of the Imaginary projections of the moi and je or of the Symbolic significations of the Other (A). "Reality," writes Ragland-Sullivan, in contrasting it with the Real, "is perfectly knowable as a projected perception of the world, as one's subjectivity," which brings us back to the ambiguous bases for distinguishing self from Other, and reveals a principle of inversion in Lacan's thought which gives it a necessary symmetry. Just as the Other is a constituent element of personal subjectivity so is such subjectivity an element of the Other. If the distinction between the two now seems hopelessly blurred, then Lacan's point becomes clear. The relationship of self and Other is never simply a matter of interaction but also of a sort of equivalency.

201 Ragland-Sullivan, p. 188.
Such equivalency still does not condemn us to anarchy and solipsism, however, because two factors protect us from an empirical creativity immune to any principle of negation. One is the existence of the Real and the other is the conflict between the Imaginary and Symbolic realms of experience. Being may be a construct of the imaginary, as Lacan says, but it is so only with these two important qualifications. As I stated earlier, the Real denotes brute existence and the limits of possibility, and as such remains beyond the limits of signification and symbolization. The existence of the Real marks the limit of the power of the signifier. The conflict between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, in turn, marks the limit of the narcissistic identifications of the moi. In this conflict, the power of the signifier is never in question, only the source of signification. In a manner reminiscent of the Freudian ego and superego cooperating to control the drives of the id, the je and the Other (A) work to restrict the influence of moi objectifications; in other words, the Symbolic strives to gain the recognition of the Imaginary. According to Lacan, this recognition is the basis of psychic health, for, by disrupting the Imaginary, the Symbolic can effectively limit the pervasive narcissism of the moi and force a recognition.

202 Écrits, p. 42.
that subjectivity is more than a projection of personal desire. What occurs, therefore, in the movement away from the Imaginary and into the Symbolic, is a movement "from subjective distortion to objective truth," but only if we understand the special sense the latter has for Lacan. Whatever objectivity and truth the Symbolic possesses, it does so by the power of communal acceptance. The rules governing the semiotic field and designating the laws of relationships therein constitute the Symbolic. Whatever essence the Real may by chance possess has no relevancy here and provides no criteria for objective truth. Though the Symbolic constitutes the objective, the inverse is not true due to the predominance within psychic processes of the Saussurean principle of signification combined with the continued, even if circumscribed, work of the Imaginary. Thus even though we master the Imaginary through the acquisition of the Symbolic, with its laws of signification, we never do away with it. It remains active and influential within the gap that separates the Real from the Symbolic, and works to mediate the demands of both.

This mediation, coupled with the inaccesibility of the Real and the role of the signifier in the linguistic-

204 Carroll, p. 35.
symbolic field, means that any conception of Reality remains
inextricably tied to individual perspective and desire.
Furthermore, "The introjective/projective interplay of Real
events, Imaginary representations, and symbolic meanings to
produce an act of consciousness precludes any possibility of
a finally totalized system of mind." And in this case,
what applies to mind applies to history as well. To make
this claim, however, does not constitute a denial that
Reality, because it is different from the Real, is not "out
there" in the world with an existence independent of our
subjectivity. Reality is indeed "out there" but only as the
continual displacement of one signifier by another that
never brings us to a knowledge of the Real which has been
purged of all traces of the empiricism of desire. Reality
is the linguistic-symbolic field we inhabit where the moi
carries out its objectifications, the je seeks to stabilize
the fluctuating identifications of the moi, and the Other
(A) undergirds both as it constitutes the unconscious
through its mediation between the individual and the Sym-
bolic realm of law and meaning. Through the acquisition of
language and other semiotic systems, the Real assumes cer-
tain parameters that are never coextensive with it. Rather
they are coextensive with Reality as the realm of the semi-

205 Ragland-Sullivan, p. 136.
otic, which in its turn is the realm of subjectivity.
Jameson's equation of the Real with history, therefore,
fails to account for the role of semiotics and for the in-
ability of human cognition to assume a place prior to or
outside of it. "The slightest alteration," writes Lacan,
"in the relation between man and the signifier . . . changes
the whole course of history by modifying the moorings that
anchor his being."206 Because the Real offers no place for
signification, such alteration cannot occur there, and be-
cause history is itself irretrievably tied to the signifier,
the historical cannot occur in the Real either.

It should be apparent now that Lacan's radical redefi-
nition of the subject away from the dictates of ego psychol-
ogy and from the moral and religious concerns of various es-
sentialisms brings with it a redefinition of the factual and
fictive, the true and the false. If history and subjectiv-
ity have only an indirect connection with the Real, and if
both have their origins in a type of fictional orientation,
then it may seem that a disavowal of any materialist philo-
sophy of history becomes an unavoidable conclusion; and if
so, then we are once again dangerously close to the rampant
idealism, solipsism and its attendant social anarchy that we
have been assiduously trying to avoid. We are not, however,

206 Écrits, p. 174.
in any real danger on this point because Lacan's theory of the subject does not take an antipathetic stand in regards to materialism, it simply rearticulates the Real in a manner that closes the Cartesian gap between the self and the Other and reverses the assumed priority of material existence over symbolic meaning. Lacan's point is that subjectivity does not take shape as a result of the demands of the Real, but that the Real takes shape through the demands of subjectivity and in doing so becomes Reality, or the realm of semiotic relationships and effectiveness. That human cognition takes place within and interacts with Reality as the manifestation of Symbolic laws and meanings does not deny the Real its importance; rather, it denies it any essence or telos. By placing the Real outside of knowledge (though not outside of experience), Reality and fictionality begin more and more to lose their distinctiveness without any of the expected apocalyptic consequences. As in Lacan's reevaluation of the self and the Other that does away with their eternal separateness, the congruence of history and fiction does away with their supposed diametrical opposition and instead inaugurates their dialectical interconnection.

Althusser and the Ideology of Empiricism

Still, even though Lacan's theory does not do away with materialism, it does entail profound consequences for a m-
terialist philosophy of history. Marxism, though never den
ying the semiotic its predominence, has characterized it as
integral to exploitative material relations and oppressive
political programs. Seen as the handmaiden to capitalist
industrial and colonial enterprises, the semiotic stood in
alliance with ideology as the imaginative reconstruction of
the world which justified such exploitation and co-opted all
attempts at revolutionary resistance. "An ideology," writes
Althusser, "(in the strict Marxist sense of the term—the
sense in which Marxism is not itself an ideology) can be re-
garded as characterized . . . by the fact that its own prob-
lematic is not conscious of itself."207 Ideology, there-
fore, must maintain a close alliance with the unconscious,
for once subjected to scrutinization, its falseness would
become manifest and its continued existence intolerable.
Just as its falseness forces the ideological to operate pri-
marily in the unconscious, however, so too does its need for
representation force its reliance upon the semiotic. As a
system of representations, ideology imposes structures upon
the lives of human beings in the form of symbolizations
which are "perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects" and
which "act functionally on men via a process that escapes

207 Louis Althusser, For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster
them."208 Thus the symbolic and the unconscious seem to act in concert to bar the way to emancipation. When Althusser rereads Marx in the light of Lacan's theories, however, the symbolic/unconscious conjunction ceases to be the cruel deceptiveness of ideology and instead becomes the cornerstone of human subjectivity. Even ideology ceases to be ideology, at least as Marxism has traditionally understood it, and becomes a functional aspect of all societal relationships, including those of a classless society.

Althusser finds his justification for such a radical reevaluation of ideology in Lacan's concept of the Symbolic and the role it plays in structuring the subject. As we noted earlier, Lacan believes symbols envelop us in such a totality that they in effect, as he writes, "engender" us. In other words, the individual acquisition of the Symbolic, which largely occurs through the acquisition of language, may be said to bring with it a certain type of subjectivity in that any particular semiotic system extensively influences the possible directions of psychological development and action. As Althusser himself writes, "Individuals are always-already subjects . . . Before its birth, the child is . . . appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected'

208 For Marx, p. 233.
Once it has been conceived."209 Once again, as with Lacan, we are born before we are born due to the pre-existing configurations of the Symbolic. It would be a mistake, however, to equate the Symbolic with some crude form of determinism, for one of the achievements of Marx, as Althusser notes, is the destruction of any theoretical basis for a philosophy of the essence of man. As an aspect of the semiotic, the Symbolic resides in Reality and not in the Real; therefore, however extensive its determining influence may be, it is so only in a provisional and not in any absolute sense. The relationship of human beings to the semiotic can change, but when it does so, as Lacan said, it also changes the whole course of history.

Althusser's decision to place ideology along side of the Symbolic stems from his belief that in matters of representation (which is what both are concerned with) the distinction of truth and falsehood loses its usual impetus. Because of its basis in the Symbolic, ideology does not have an explanatory function—that is, it does not tell lies in the place of a truth that could and should be told; rather, it has the practical function of enabling individuals to live in concourse with their society and to adjust to the conditions of existence particular to it.210 Deception and

209 Lenin and Philosophy, p. 176.
210 See For Marx, p. 231. See also Steven B. Smith,
mythology may play a role in this process, but they do so only incidentally. The first and primary task of all ideology is not the deception of the subject but its constitution. The practice of ideology, says Althusser, "guarantees for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects." In fact, he continues, "All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of subject," which in consequence means that "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing."211

Thus, individuality and subjectivity are not the same thing, and though the former may have precedence over the latter simply by virtue of the body, it is within subjectivity as a manifestation of the semiotic functions of ideology and the Symbolic that we find the category of self.

Ideology does not constitute the subject as though by a sort of divine interdiction, however, but by the material conditions and practices of the particular society. "An ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice, or practices. This existence is material," by which Althusser means there is no practice without ideology just as there is


211 See Lenin and Philosophy, pp. 172-175.
no ideology without the constitution of the subject. Because of the role of the Symbolic, ideology adheres to the practices of every society as a fictional orientation by which it establishes value and meaning. No longer just a weapon used by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat (though it may be used as such), ideology becomes an organic part of any society, even a classless one. "Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies without ideology." That ideology can have such a function, says Althusser, is because it does not try to represent the real conditions of existence, or the real world, but because it represents the relationship of human beings to those conditions. Ideology never represents a thing; it represents an abstraction. "In ideology the real relation [between men and their world] is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will . . . a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality." Such representation may still be exploitative and oppressive, but in either case the imaginary character of

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212 Lenin and Philosophy, pp. 166 and 170.
213 For Marx, p. 232.
214 For Marx, p. 234. See also Lenin and Philosophy, p. 164.
the relationship it represents does not alter.

Thus, ideology not only has a revolutionary and emancipatory potential, it also remains an indispensable element in a classless society. "In a classless society ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is lived to the profit of all men." Smith characterizes this position as indicating future communist societies will be "immersed in the fantasies" of ideology, and thus suggests that Althusser's attitude is one of hopeless resignation before the problem of the ideological. However, when Althusser claims, "Ideology is eternal exactly like the unconscious," his point is that ideology poses a problem only insofar as the semiotic does, too. Smith may be technically correct only if we identify such "fantasms" as components of the Saussurean langue and therefore of the Lacanian Symbolic. The degree to which signification and desire play a role in the praxis of life is the degree to which ideology structures our existence.

Althusser's theory of ideology and the subject has important ramifications for epistemology and the philosophy

215 For Marx, p. 236.
216 Smith, p. 73.
of history. By equating ideology with the Lacanian Symbolic, and by locating subjectivity within a dialectic of semiotic functions and relationships, he does away with the essentiality of knowledge and the teleology of history. Just as ideology constitutes the subject, so does knowledge constitute the object. In other words, there can never be an object of knowledge unless there is first a conception of knowledge underlying it. For this reason, there can never be an innocent reading (in history, science or philosophy) because any claim to objective knowledge always reflects the abstraction by which we subdivide the real into the essential and the inessential in order to extract "the essence from the real which contains it."218

Althusser's distinction of the essential and inessential aspects of the real is an important critique of the empiricist concept of knowledge, especially as exemplified by Collingwood and the inner/outer duality by which he distinguished history from nature. For Collingwood, we recall, nature was mere event because it had no "inside" to it, no thought or motivation behind the materiality of its existence, whereas history was nothing but thought, which the historian tried to recreate and reexperience in order to

understand the past. Althusser explains, however, that for empirical analysis every object of knowledge, whether in nature or history, has an inner and outer component simply by virtue of being made into such an object. The outside of an object, or the visible, he calls its inessential part, while the essential resides inside the object as its invisible kernel. And what is this kernel? According to Althusser, this interiority or essence has nothing to do with the object itself but comes into being only through a process of abstraction by which empiricism designates an object worthy of study. The value of an entity as an object of knowledge (its kernel) has little to do with individual attributes, but comes instead from the scientific, philosophical, sociological, etc., category it supposedly exemplifies. Empiricism, therefore, takes as its true object this invisible kernel and not the particularities of surface qualities, all the while unaware that this kernel is not in the thing itself but in that process of abstraction which makes it an object of knowledge in the first place. By ignoring this process, empiricism can represent knowledge as something inscribed and actually present in the real and made evident through the difference between inner and outer, the essential and the inessential. By confronting us with this process, however, Althusser lays open the paradox of essentiality and how, as an object of knowledge, it is never in the thing it-
self but in some prior and preeminent moment of abstraction. 219

In a distinction similar to the Lacanian Real and Reality, Althusser distinguishes between the real and what he calls thought-about-the-real, and like Lacan designates the latter as the place of value, meaning, knowledge and history. There must be, of course, a relation between the two categories, but, he says, not a real relation, meaning a relation in which thought about an object is in and of itself knowledge of the same. "Thought about the real, the conception of the real, and all the operations of thought by which the real is thought and conceived, belong to the order of thought, the elements of thought, which must not be confused with the order of the real." 220 What Althusser would have us keep in mind is that this disjunction does not reduce the real to thought, as idealism would have it, nor does it equate thinking about the real with the real itself, as does empiricism. The two remain irrevocably distinct. The relationship between the real and thought-about-the-real, therefore, becomes one of inadequacy in which the guarantees of truth and falsehood lie not in the thing i-

219 See Reading Capital, pp. 34-40.

220 Reading Capital, p. 87. Althusser also quotes the Grundrisse at this point, "The whole, as it appears in the mind as a thought-whole, is a product of the thinking mind" (p. 22).
self but in the theoretical (by which Althusser means actual) preconstitution of the thing into an object of knowledge.\textsuperscript{221} Truth and falsehood do not then lose their meaning, but whatever meaning they may have remains immanent only within knowledge itself and not within the real.

In this respect, Althusser creates a history of science and a history of history very much indebted to the work of Gaston Bachelard, in that epistemology must always confess its inability to overcome alienation and discontinuity. By adopting from Bachelard the concept of epistemological breaks, Althusser demonstrates how the so-called progress of knowledge is actually a series of disjunctions and breaks with the rationality of the past, and that new theoretical structures come into being through a critique of these past structures and not through the simple and straightforward observation of the real.\textsuperscript{222} One need only read the opening sentences of \textit{The Psychoanalysis of Fire} to understand that Althusser drew his inspiration for the distinction of the real from thought-about-the-real as much from Bachelard as from Lacan: "We have only to speak of an object to think

\textsuperscript{221} See \textit{Reading Capital}, p. 179.

that we are being objective. But, because we chose it in 
the first place, the object reveals more about us than we do 
about it."223 Just as Althusser accuses empiricism of fail-
ing to understand how it distinguishes between the inessen-
tial outer and the essential inner of every thing it makes 
into an object of knowledge, so does Bachelard identify the 
empirical belief in reality as one which postulates that 
every entity in some way transcends immediate sense data and 
thus has a hidden content more real than its obvious exter-
nal features. This content is, as in Althusser, the theo-
retical structuration of things into a system of knowledge 
which assigns a role to every entity that is more important 
than the particularities of its individual existence.224

If we assume a unitary epistemology, therefore, we do 
so at our peril because the apparent unity of science belies 
its inherent instability. The emergence of a new truth or 
new theory, says Bachelard, comes about only in spite of the 
evidence at hand because the very status of truth as an 
undentifiable entity precludes anything that would exist in 
contradiction to it. With any genuine scientific revolu-

223 Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, 

Bachelard continues, "The whole problem of scientific 
knowledge of the real turns on the initial choice of 
mathematics" (p. 41).
tion, therefore, comes "a profound revision of the categories of the real," meaning that whatever we may identify as the real actually only constitutes a special case of the possible. Science does not find its basis in the real but in the possible configurations of the real. Nor does it find its object in the real but in the prior theoretical structures whereby an entity gains the more salutary status of being an object.

By assimilating Bachelard's analysis of science into his own analysis of history, Althusser brings out a further implication of Bachelard's work, that history is the production of reason in unreason. Althusser does not mean that history is essentially irrational, for unreason and irrationality are not for him synonymous. Instead, he means that the category of reason is not a transcendent one but, again, simply another of the many possible configurations of the real. "The real history of the development of knowledge," he writes,

appears to us today to be subject to laws quite different from this teleological hope for the religious triumph of reason. We are beginning to conceive this history as a history punctuated by


226 See For Marx, p. 226.
radical discontinuities . . . profound reorganiza-
tions which . . . inaugurate with their rupture
the reign of a new logic, which, far from being a
mere development, the 'truth' or 'inversion' of
the old one, literally takes its place."227

Such a reading of history means that the concept of a linear
progression of continuous development cannot stand as the
actual identity of the real but as its representation, as an
example of thought-about-the-real.228 For the Enlightenment
and, as one of its many embodiments, for a traditional type
of Marxism, history has been something of a great drama in
which Reason is immanent in the real and gradually, over the
centuries, comes to manifest itself with greater and greater
force in the pragmatics of everyday life. Althusser, as we
noted earlier, would certainly agree that reason is imma-
nent, but only within the process of abstraction by which we
designate objects of knowledge and, therefore, designate
history. So when he writes that history is the production
of reason in unreason, he does not mean that an irrationali-
ty such as the Freudian id lies at the root of human actions
and motivations, and that we struggle against it more or

227 Reading Capital, p. 44.

228 See Reading Capital, p. 103: "There is nothing in
ture history which allows it to be read in the ideological
continuum of a linear time that need be punctuated and
divided."
less succesfully; he means that as an abstraction, reason has no stability other than the temporary ascendancy of its current manifestation. Unreason is the Other of reason, the epistemological break that displaces its predecessor and rewrites the rules for transforming things into objects of knowledge.

For Althusser, therefore, the great failure of history as a discipline has been its harboring of the illusion that it can function without a theory of the object or without a definition of its theoretical object. The long-standing assumption has been that the object of history is Man and that whatever tells the story of Man and of his progression necessarily qualifies as history. Two difficulties confront this definition, however. As a consequence of Lacan's theory of the subject and of Althusser's theory of ideology, the category Man becomes so increasingly fragmented that it seems to be a signifier without a definite and identifiable referent. The empirical conception of self as the unqualified ground of presence and origin of perception begins to dissolve in designation of the subject as something ultimately indistinguishable from the Other. The equation of the self with the "inside" loses its validity when subsumed into the sliding identifications of the Imaginary, the web

229 Reading Capital, p. 109.
of signification in the Symbolic and the subject-constituting work of ideology. As a result, the subject, as the basis of history, becomes itself a historical designation that has no transcendent stability. Whether we identify the Other as the name-of-the-father or as the means of production, subjectivity will always be a part of it, just as the Other will always be a part of subjectivity. The subject, or self, however conceived and identified, has its basis in Reality and thought-about-the-real rather than in the Real itself. As dual aspects of the semiotic, Subjectivity and Reality may share an inextricable correspondence, but the Real remains entirely separate, both from signification and knowledge.

The second difficulty has to do with the idea of history as a story. If the Real and the semiotic exist without the possibility of mutual resolution, then the question arises as to the referent of the story of history. If Nietzsche, Lacan and Althusser are correct, then history is never about the Real but about conceptions of the Real. That is, history does not so much tell us the story of what happened as it tells the story of the story of what happened. Even in a first-person, eye-witness narrative such as Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (The New American Library, 1968) we can recognize that the perspective of one individual does not in itself constitute history but remains
closer to the type of fictionalization we associate with the novel. Only when combined and synthesized with other perspectives does the individual experience enter into history proper, but never in such a way, as Mailer shows, that eradicates the presence of the novel.

I realize that this last point needs extensive justification and support. The issues we will now turn our attention to are the ones we have been carefully circling in the preceding pages: What are the capabilities of narrative? What can narrative speak of with certainty, and is that in turn history? And what is the place of fiction in relation to and within the "real"? Or the truth? The extensive scope of the semiotic suggests that as with the self and the Other, and as with history and ideology, fiction is an indispensable aspect of any and every thing we designate as true, factual or historical. But again, as I have said, such a designation does not mean the eradication of concepts like truth or history, only their radical redefinition that takes into account the semiotic structure into which subjectivity and otherness merge. The empiricism of desire does not invalidate meaning and value, it only makes fiercer demands upon them and upon us in that we can never, even for a moment, afford to divert our attention away from them.
II. The Ethics of Mimesis

Let me begin with a grammatical illustration. If I make the statement, "We live in narrative," such a claim may cause some uneasiness in certain circles, but it no longer has (if it ever did) the radical edge by which originality severs us from the past and thus prevents us from continuing to understand the world as we did before. The pervasive acknowledgment of narrative's role in psychological, empirical and epistemological paradigms enables even the most conservative world view to endorse such a statement and still legitimately maintain an absolute distinction between the subject of the sentence and the object of the adverbial preposition. If I amend my statement to say, "We are narrative," I have, through the use of a linking verb, established an equivalency between the subject and the predicate object such as the first statement did not, but I have done so only provisionally. As an example of what Habermas calls the "unavoidable fiction" by which we maintain social cohesiveness, this statement places its entire emphasis on the predicate object and leaves unexamined the referent of the subject "we." Fiction can therefore gain a prominent place in the body politic, but only after a process of careful mitigation that drains it of its potential disruptiveness. Fiction may indeed be one of the means by which we establish
community bonds, but it is a fiction that knows its limits and that falters before the undeniable presence of the self.

If, however, I amend my statement even further to say, "I am narrative," I have done much more than simply move from the plural to the singular mode. I have established an equivalency that is also one of identity because I have erased the distinction between the subject of the sentence and its predicate object by denying the concept of subjectivity any place of further retreat. The difference between "We are narrative" and "I am narrative" reveals itself at the frontier of signification, that place where the displacement of one signifier by another confronts the limits of its possibilities and acknowledges the existence of something beyond its reach. The first statement may admit the extensive influence of narrative as a structuring entity, but it does so only eventually to deny the same by positing the individual subject as an instance of non-narrative existence, that is, as an instance of the Real and not of Reality. The pronoun "we," therefore, assumes a wholeness on the basis of being the sum of its individual parts and thus place itself unambiguously within the Real and beyond the interplay of signifiers which make up Reality. The pronoun "I" offers no such avenue of escape, however. As the ontological bottom line, the I-subject has been assumed to use signification as it would any number of other means
or tools at its disposal in order to establish its mastery over the Real. As the fount of signification, the "I" has never been its object, not even under the expediency of proper names and pronouns.\textsuperscript{230} In the sentence "I am narrative," the signifier irrevocably subsumes the subject and removes it from its place of ontological certitude. The subject does not then disappear as an entity, nor does it lose its ability to use and manipulate signifiers, but its ability to do so now depends in turn upon its being the object of any number of semiotic systems.

The point I am making is that the generation of narrative and the configuration of the Real both occur in the assignment of meaning to the concepts "I" and "we." All narratives, whatever their status or purpose, have as their first principle an implicit definition of subjectivity at work either within or without the narrative structure, and often both. By such a principle I mean that because every narrative puts forth this configuration of the Real, it in turn necessitates a certain configuration of the knowing subject. Subjectivity, or at least the idea of subjectivity, exists within the parameters of the narrative itself so that every narrative of any kind, whether fiction or non-

fiction, has as its object the relationship of subjectivity to the unsignifiable Real. Such a broad generalization does not deny that the principle theme of most narratives is the relationship of subject to subject or that of subject to Reality, it only means that any narrative, no matter how conventional or experimental, has its origins in the often unarticulated assumptions as to the capabilities of signification and the extent to which it impinges upon the transcendence of certain values.

**Narrative and Subjectivity**

The narrative configuration of the subject also reaches beyond any individual textual parameters, however, by demanding a certain kind of relationship between the reader and the text, a relationship determined by whether the text has the status of fiction or whether it has that of history, science or philosophy. Every narrative, therefore, contains a double-view of subjectivity, the subject-in-the-narrative and the subject-for-the-narrative, the first being the representation of subjectivity within the narrative itself, the second being the epistemological relationship between the reader and the text, which the narrative's place in a specific genre dictates. If the configuration of the subject-for-the-narrative seems to depend upon considerations other than those of narrative structure, such as in-
stitutional or cultural forces, we must remember that the work of Foucault, Lyotard, Lacan, Althusser and others raises the strong possibility that such forces are themselves aspects of a larger narrative structure which similarly demands a specific type of subjectivity.

We can, for example, see quite distinct conceptions of the subject in *Tristram Shandy* and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. In regards to the subject-in-the-narrative, the freewheeling and exuberant anarchy exercised by the narrator in Sterne's work ("I should beg Mr. Horace's pardon;--for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived.") contrasts sharply with the ironically rational yet empirically prescriptive attitude of Franklin ([virtue no. 13] "HUMILITY. Imitate Jesus and Socrates."). Against Sterne's determination to say what he pleases whenever he pleases and still insist on the coherence of his narrative, we have Franklin's controlled recitation of his own life in a mode of temporal linearity that forestalls any question of coherence even before it can be asked. Limitation characterizes Franklin's narrative in that he may say only certain things and in a certain manner, whereas Sterne labors under no such burden.

The obvious objection to be raised at this point is that, of course, Sterne labors under no such burden because
he is writing fiction while Franklin is writing autobiogra-
phy, literally, history. My example would then seem to
lack validity because it compares two entities without tak-
ing into consideration the fundamental differences between
the them. In response I must, at first, concede the point.
As long as the definitions of fiction and history depend
upon their mutual opposition, any comparison between the two
can only be provisional; such a comparison must remain aware
that the author of fiction can write (almost) anything he or
she pleases without fear of contradiction, but the historian
may not; and it must also remain aware that to some degree
at least the historian performs a civic duty in acknowl-
edging this limitation, whereas by not doing so, the fiction
writer is not necessarily guilty of a similar dereliction.
By ascribing to Truth, the historian upholds rationality and
order (even if oppositional or revolutionary in character)
in a manner largely irrelevant to the task facing the writer
of fiction. If, however, we can conclude that the defini-
tion of fiction and history as oppositional categories is
itself an ideological imperative (in Althusser's sense),
then we can begin to understand some of the complexities and
problematics that surround this opposition, especially as
they pertain to the formation of the subject-for-the-narrative.

To return to our example of Sterne and Franklin, we can
see that the differences between the subject-in-the-narrative generated by each can be accounted for by the obvious generic distinctions of narrative purpose. Franklin's story is about himself and the events he actually experienced and therefore qualifies as history. Sterne's story, however, is about, as Yorick says at its conclusion, "A COCK and a BULL... And one of the best of its kind, I ever heard." Indeed it may well be, but this evaluation also helps illuminate the opposition between fiction and history. The seriousness with which we take fiction is always a relative matter that has meaning only within its own genre. On this basis we assume a much more serious attitude toward the work of Virginia Woolf than we do toward that of Louis L'Amour. The seriousness of any work of fiction, however, pales in comparison to that of history. Whatever the importance of the individual work of fiction, however much it seems to be a work of complexity, perceptiveness and even genius, it is always at some level the story of a cock and a bull when placed in relation to the work of history. This relationship does not mean that any particular historical work is an intrinsically more important text than, say, Ulysses. It does mean that history without question undertakes a more important task because any work of fiction may always be dismissed and thus discredited as the creation, opinion or fantasy of a single individual. The work of any historian
can never be similarly treated because even though an individual text has an individual author, history is always the product of multiple authorship. By definition, history incorporates different narratives into a unified and coherent structure, thus making it at all times a communal project. Of course, critics may attempt to dismiss and discredit a work on the basis of distortions or inaccuracies, but they cannot in so doing accuse the author of writing non-history. If, however, a work of fiction disregards or takes liberties with the historical record, as almost everyone does to some degree, its solid and irrefutable defense can always be that, after all, it is only a novel.231

In contrast to the subject-in-the-narrative, therefore, we have a dual origin for the subject-for-the-narrative—the style and structure of the individual work and the larger extrinsic constraints of the history/fiction opposition. The playful looseness of Sterne's novel requires a different

231 See Karlheinz Stierle, "The Reading of Fictional Texts," The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation, eds. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 84: "The fictional situation is presented in such a manner that it has no real consequence for the reader." Such complacency about fiction is characteristic of Western attitudes toward literature as one of many forms of entertainment appropriate for leisure time activity. This perceived need to reduce literature to irrelevancy contrasts sharply with the attitudes of totalitarian states which suppress all literature not officially sanctioned. Such states obviously disagree with the above evaluation of fiction and so raise the question as to who takes literature more seriously.
kind of attitude, engagement and responsiveness on the part of the reader than does the tight precision of Franklin's autobiography. This difference is somewhat illusory, however, for behind it lies a fundamental sameness. Although the differences between fiction and history do to some degree entail differences in the subject-for-the-narrative, the fact that every narrative, as I said, examines the relationship of subjectivity to the unsignifiable Real, in addition to the fact that history and fiction exist in a relationship of oppositional dependence, means that the subject-for-the-narrative must be the same for each. For fiction and history to have any meaning whatsoever, the subject-for-the-narrative must be one that assumes the accessibility of the Real through a process of signification; it must also be one that grants the highest empirical and ethical status to those narratives that strive the hardest to gain that accessibility—that is, to history. As a consequence, whatever narrative purposefully disavows such a goal by failing to show the necessary connection between the Real and the signifier, automatically consigns itself to relative triviality or perhaps even to falsehood. Such a conclusion does not deny the cultural importance granted to fiction, not only as a mode of entertainment but also as a forum for ideas; it only reiterates that the glory of fiction is a reflected one, a lunar softness when compared to
the solar glare of history. The further a work moves away from referentiality, the easier it becomes to deny its importance to any considerations other than those of a "literary" nature; likewise, the closer a work adheres to the historical record, the greater its possible repercussions on the practice of everyday life. For this reason, the canon of modern fiction is composed almost entirely of works of realism, with those works that seek to break with the realist tradition (such as avant-garde and postmodern literature) often suffering consignment to the fringes of acceptability.

The subject-for-the-narrative, therefore, is always "we" and never "I" because the oppositional dependence of fiction and history means that we evaluate our relationship to any narrative on the basis of its ability to claim the status of history. Those that cannot claim that status fail to do so because of their proximity to the individual subject, while those that can have effected a distance from the individual and placed themselves firmly in the communal "we." Such a mode of distinction is not one of academic convenience but clearly illustrates that how we segment and categorize our narratives cannot be changed without a fundamental reconceptualization of both Reality and the Real. However much we valorize creativity and originality, we also realize that such attributes are in fact the tamer images of
anarchy and, therefore, we carefully guard against them, principally by means of the historian in the role of mouth-piece and sounding board for the voices of the past. I do not make such a characterization pejoratively, but only to show that we have given recitation and reiteration a higher ethical standing than we have creativity and originality. To the degree that we can repeat what has happened previously, and in so doing repeat the Real, to that extent is the validity of the "we" reaffirmed against the potential threat of the "I."

An important objection remains unanswered, however, one that could possibly render irrelevant any consideration of the ethics of mimesis as a way of explaining the relationship of fiction and history. It would seem that my argument must inevitably run aground on the reef of referentiality because the common sense distinction of history from fiction as that which did happen and that which did not remains fundamental and unalterable. When so worded, it would be unwise to challenge the obvious validity of such a statement; its alluring simplicity, however, obscures its tautological character. Of course history is what happened and fiction is what did not, but only because both are already so defined. I do not mean that a rose by any other name is somehow not a rose, but that the designation of the past which we call history is just as much a semiotic, ideological and
symbolic structure as the designation of the past which we call fiction. Even so, I have still not adequately answered the objection because the fact remains that Benjamin Franklin, to return to our example, actually existed but Tristram Shandy, Uncle Toby and Yorick did not. Without a doubt, and therein lies the difference between Franklin's autobiography and Sterne's novel, but not the difference between fiction and history. That difference lies at some point where signification ceases and the uncompromisable materiality of the Real demands our accommodation to its existence. The force of Lacan's and Althusser's distinction of the Real from Reality, or thought-about-the-real, however, makes the possible existence of such a point all the more problematic.

As with Lacan and Althusser (or even Nietzsche), I have no intention of denying the existence of the Real, or of the possibility of history. My point is that history has as its basis a network of self-validating criteria from which we may deduce one overriding principle, the end of signification. Whenever we designate something as history, we also designate where signification stops and the unambiguous presence of the signified begins. The difference between fiction and history (such as it is) resides in the designation of this presence. The important point to remember, however, is that the difference resides within the designation and not in the presence. What the past twenty-five years of
literary theory has taught us is that language, in and of itself, invalidates all claims to presence. The Real, whatever its attributes and however accessible to human cognition it may finally be, has no embodiment in language and no ability to incorporate itself into the exchange of signifiers. The symbiotic relationship between language and the Real which history requires remains, unavoidably, a metaphysical, imaginative or (more to the point) fictional construct by which we establish the connection between the two. The greater the insistence on the referentiality of language, the greater the need to obscure the origin of this connection.

This argument does not lead to the conclusion that there is no distinction between history and fiction; rather that the actual existence of persons portrayed in the narrative, or the actual occurrence of events, in no way establishes the basis for such a distinction. This fact has long been acknowledged in regards to fiction where the incorporation of historical materials into plays and novels is a centuries-old practice. Less apparent, however, is that this fact holds equally true for history itself. As I stated earlier in this study, just as a false statement can contain almost any degree of truth and still be false, so can a work of fiction incorporate almost any amount of the historical record and still not cease to be fictional. But
history, in order to stand as the co-equal of truth, must remain free of the contaminating presence of fiction. What I attempted to make clear in my analysis of the empiricism of desire, however, is that history is never free of such contamination; indeed, not only is it never free, the very possibility of history relies upon a process of fictionali-
zation that has nothing to do with the question of referen-
tiality. If the Real stands inaccessible to the work of signification, and if history is itself an example of that work, then the disjunction between history and the Real remains as absolute as that of fiction and the Real.

This last point is a crucial one because we are accus-
tomed to distinguishing fiction from history on the basis of what is believed to have actually occurred. Even though works such as Richard III, War and Peace and Ragtime contain extensive amounts of the historical record, we still regard them as fiction because they also contain much material not found there. We must remember, however, that even if a work contains nothing but what is in the historical record, it has not therefore purged itself of fictionality; and not only has it not purged itself, but fictionality remains an integral part of what history purports to be. Nietzsche's conception of truth, Lacan's of the Symbolic and the Imag-
nary, and Althusser's of ideology make this conclusion ap-
parent. Writing history does not bring the Real into sub-
jection to the understanding; rather, it is a specific type of embellishment of what Collingwood called the web of imaginative construction that stands in constant imposition between ourselves and the Real.

Can we still, then, speak of narrative differences based on what actually happened and what did not? Of course we can; but we have to keep in mind what it means to use such terms. It would seem that when we speak about history, we speak about facts, but as Harriet Gilliam has pointed out, "In most historical contexts it is unclear whether 'fact' refers to the deed itself or to a statement implying a judgement that the deed was done."\textsuperscript{232} If we also keep in mind Lévi-Strauss's contention that history is always "history-for" we begin to see how a fact does not have the existential simplicity usually assigned to it because no fact exists independent of a narrative configuration, and most exist only through or by means of one. To return again to Collingwood:

> When we speak of the battle of Hastings we are not speaking of something known but of something partly known and partly unknown; and the confidence with which we speak of it is like the con-

fidence with which we read a label on a bottle and say this is arsenic; without anything like an accurate knowledge of what arsenic is . . . . In the phrase "the battle of Hastings was fought in 1066," the battle of Hastings is a label for something which, no doubt, did happen that year, but no one knows, no one has ever known, and no one will know what exactly it was that happened . . . Ideally, historical thought is the apprehension of a world of fact. Actually it is the presentation by thought to itself of a world of half-ascertained fact: a world in which truth and error are at any given moment inextricably confused together.233

Through Collingwood's distinction of apprehension and presentation, we can see how, when we speak of facts, we must understand whether we mean facts of the Real or those of Reality. We can also see how problematic it is to ever speak of something such as the facts of the Real because once spoken of, or once incorporated into signification, they tend to cease their affiliation with the Real and become part of the symbolic, imaginary and ideological makeup of Reality. For example, a fact of the Real might be the

233 Essays, pp. 42-44.
scientific principle that no solid object can pass through another solid object; or, it might be the fact of death, that all living beings at some point cease to exist. As components of the Real, these facts, as Lacan said, denote the limits of signification and stand as the algebraic "x" over which the signifier stumbles. As facts, they are there in the world, and no signifier can alter their absoluteness. A signifier can, however, alter the relationship of that absoluteness to human cognition and thus their place within any epistemology. Through the process of signification, death ceases to be just a fact of the Real and become one of Reality. The very existence of religion, for example, can be ascribed to the felt need to mitigate the undeniability of death, if not to eradicate it altogether.234

In distinguishing between the facts of the Real and the facts of Reality, we have come upon the fundamental problem of history, one that has more to do with language than the judgments, apprehensions and presentations spoken of by

234 For a fascinating example of the possible consequences of just this sort of incorporation of the Real into Reality, see Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song (Little, Brown and Co., 1979). Mailer creates a vivid mosaic of the role religious ideas, especially concerning reincarnation, played in the mind of Gary Gilmore, both at the time of the murders and during his subsequent resistance to any possible stay of execution. In addition, Mailer shows how the prominent influence of Mormonism, both individually and institutionally, in the state of Utah helped determine the successful fight to see that execution carried out.
Gilliam and Collingwood. I do not have in mind the reliability of witnesses because whether or not the reporter of an historical event is lying, or whether the reporter's perceptions or understanding are somehow impaired are contingencies which historiography has always taken into account and managed to compensate for. The division of facts into those of the Real and those of Reality has little to do with these considerations and instead resides in the fundamental character of signification. Signification does not take place in the Real; for that matter, even what we often refer to as the Real does not actually take place there. Meaning occurs within Reality so that when such meaning attempts to enfold the Real, it has actually divorced the Real from itself and made it into a signifier which can then be utilized or manipulated. The fact of death, therefore, has an unambiguous place within the Real, but this place also spills over into the significations of Reality so that death becomes more than the cessation of an individual life. It becomes the origin of many psychological configurations that have to do with fear, anxiety or grief; it becomes the object of certain ritual functions; a moment of historical demarcation; a stage within the food chain; the punishment for certain crimes; or, the portal to the next and (it is hoped) more blessed level of existence. As an aspect of the Real, death in and of itself has no meaning for us because
we have no direct experience of it as long as we are sentient beings. Instead, we experience the meaning of death generated by the semiotic systems that interpose themselves between us and the brute, unsignifiable fact of the Real.

The preeminence of these semiotic systems as mediators between the individual consciousness and the Real, and within the different aspects of that consciousness, brings up another point of definitional importance. If my argument is valid, then can a term such as "the real world" have any meaning at all? Is the apparent solidity of this "real world" only a facade behind which we find a miasma of Nietzschean willfulness, Lacanian symbolizations and Althusserian ideologies? Please do not think I equivocate if I answer each of these questions with yes and no, for we must understand that a term like "the real world" always and only garners its meaning out of the will to truth and the empiricism of desire. Every time we speak of the real world, we put forth an ethics of mimesis which designates certain standards for collapsing the distinctions between the Real and Reality so that they may be conceptualized as a single and unified whole. If we are careful to maintain these distinctions, however, we will not fall victim to the potential trap terms such as "the real world" lay for us.

Is the real world the Real or is it Reality? A neutral use of these categories, one that does not insist on a hierar-
chical relationship between them, reveals that the signifier "the real world" has a double referent, each quite distinct from the other yet each with an equally valid claim to its position. This duality shows the insufficiency of its usual definition as the accessibility of all facets of existence to a process of semiosis, which in turn generates a sort of equivalence between the signifier and its referent. This definition erects an ontological hierarchy in which our environment inherently generates meanings that the semiotic then merely incorporates into itself. If we do away with this hierarchy, however, we discover that we have two "real worlds," the Real and Reality, with each being as equally "real" as the other.

Its separation from the Real does not diminish Reality's validity, solidity or materiality. It only establishes these attributes on a different basis. Reality does not have a lesser existence than the brute physicality of the Real, nor for that matter does it have a greater one; Reality is simply that designation for the real world that takes into account the never-ending displacement of signifiers. That signifiers, symbols, imagination and fiction constitute Reality does not mean it is some ephemeral entity with no substance whatsoever. These attributes are themselves the literal substance of Reality, and herein lies the reason that I answered "yes and no" to the questions above.
The term "the real world," in its traditional meaning, is indeed a facade which masks the work of will, desire and signification, but the fact that it does so does not rob Reality of any of its "realness." Nor does it consign Reality to some place of solipsistic madness. Intersubjectivity, social unity and objectivity remain feasible, only they do so by means of a definitional transformation; for even though desire and signification do not deny Reality its "realness," they do take away its essentiality and transcendence.

If this conclusion seems to indicate a fundamental arbitrariness which underlies everything that usually passes for the "real," such arbitrariness is not one especially vulnerable to manipulation by individuals. Reality has a consistency and solidity largely immune to the desires of the individual, which makes possible the continued usefulness of concepts such as truth and objectivity. The provisionality of their meaning does not detract from their validity, it only shows their true function, that of establishing a basis for consensus. The real, according to Peirce (using the term to designate Reality), "is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially
involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge."235 The difference between the real and the unreal, he continues, is that the former consists of those things which the community will continue to affirm, and the latter that which it will always deny. Peirce's point is not that affirmation and denial are therefore synonymous with truth and falsehood, but just the inverse, that whatever has the status of truth and reality does so as a result of communal reasoning and affirmation. As a result, the heretofore paramount distinction of the true from the false moves away from the center of ethical considerations and is replaced by the distinction of what is accepted from what is denied. This replacement means that the status of the accepted, though not synonymous with truth, is synonymous with "we," and the status of the denied with "not-we." The designation of the community becomes the designation of truth, and that which lies outside the community, if not unquestionably false, at least deserves to be treated with profound suspicion.

When I use the word "community" in this context, I do not have in mind any specific tribal or national social structure although such structures do have a relevance to this issue. In the traditional Marxist definition of ide-
ology as false consciousness, the distinction of "we" and "not-we" helps to distinguish the true from the false, but it does so in ways usually disreputable and invalid. In Marxism before Althusser, ideology amounted to a willful disregard of the truth in favor of a falsehood that justified the exploitation of one social class or nation by another. In such instances, the distinctions between "we" and "not-we" were based on questions of expediency which may or may not have had anything to do with the truth, which itself existed as an independent and perfectly verifiable standard of analysis. After Althusser, ideology now functions as the necessary mediator between every individual and the society he or she lives in, whether socialist or not. As a result, "we" and "not-we" take on entirely different connotations, and rather than being merely the potential products of imagination and symbolization, they are unavoidably so but in a manner that has nothing to do with exploitation and oppression. Signifiers cease to be the tools or weapons of a particular class and become the psychological and epistemological building blocks which every society has no choice but to use.

As they pertain to the study of narrative, therefore, the categories "we" and "not-we" have nothing to do with geographical boundaries; instead, they designate the empirical and epistemological boundaries erected by the En-
lightenment's project of truth and rationality. In this context, "we" denotes a subjectivity which derives its knowledge (or at least most of its knowledge) from the physical makeup of its environment and extracts it by processes of measurement, calibration and tabulation. Signifiers are not the substance of knowledge but its conveyors, and any agreement about the characteristics of reality results from its undeniable essentiality. The Enlightenment's standards of truth and objectivity require that language's principle function be one of mimesis in order to act as the link between the subject and an objectified truth. The "not-we," therefore, must designate all that stands in opposition to such standards, including the false, the mythological, the imaginary and the fictive. Any narrative that fulfills the empirical criteria for truth automatically touches upon accepted notions of subjectivity, and thus acquires a status ethically superior to those that do not because, whatever its content, its method reaffirms who we are as knowing subjects and how, as such, we relate to our environment.

Suppose, for example, I write a book denying that the atomic raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ever took place, and that the stories about them are really the products of Japanese propaganda, communist subversive activities or whatever. If I grant my book the status of history, it will
justifiably be met with an outburst of rage and indignation, and with a barrage of other historical narratives to prove the falsity of my assertions. Military and government documents, medical records, photographs, newsreels, eye-witness accounts and the testimony of still-living survivors of the raids would all be brought to bear against my book in order to show its falsehood. If I write a novel, however, which makes the same claim (as someone has done), and I recount the story of a Normandy-style invasion of Japan based on plans drawn up by Allied commanders at the time, then my assertions would be met with greater or lesser indifference (as this novel was) and would remain of interest primarily to those who enjoy reading "what-if" stories. The difference in the reception of both books has less to do with their content, however, than with their method because the first postulates a subjectivity that encompasses the "we" whereas the second does not, at least not directly. To accept the truthfulness of the first book would be to strike at the basis of the community established by empirical epistemology. It would mean that an individual, simply by

236 If my example seems a little silly I can only defend myself by alluding to recent serious efforts, both in this country and in Europe, to deny that the Nazi death camps ever existed and that all evidence concerning them is the fabrication of a large scale conspiracy. Although it might be understandable why unregenerate or self-proclaimed Nazis would make such denials, they were not the ones doing so.
force of will, could alter not only the past but also the standards by which we define our relationship to the world. The "we" would become an amorphous designation that would allow the "not-we" to spill over its boundaries and usurp certain vital mimetic functions.

History, in other words, provides the uncompromisable standard of the "we" and fiction (with all its connotations) provides that of the "not-we." In order to maintain an empirical definition of the subject as the understanding and knowledgable Other to the brute physicality of the world, which in itself contains an essential truth that exists independently of will and desire, these standards must remain absolutely distinct. When we read any narrative, therefore, any narrative of any type, we continually reaffirm this distinction by postulating a universal subject-for-the-narrative that stands in lieu of our particular individuality. By designating one narrative as history and another as fiction, we ally ourselves with a communal subjectivity that stands in opposition to an individual one. We designate the real world in so doing, but beyond that we affirm that the relationship of the real to language can be of one sort and one sort only. In a sense, therefore, every narrative re-creates the world but always in its former image. To imagine a narrative that does otherwise is to imagine both an epistemology and a subjectivity totally alien to our current conceptions.
The question I want to raise now, however, is whether the subjectivity I have just defined is not itself a fictional construct, and if so what the ramifications are for the distinction of history from fiction. We must rid the term "fiction" of its usual connotations of falseness or non-existence, and understand it as designating that which lies entirely within the field of signification and outside the scope of the Real. In other words, we cannot distinguish between fiction and Reality, for to do so would be once again to collapse Reality back into the Real. When I speak of the subject being a fictional construct, therefore, I do not mean that we somehow deliberately fabricate who we are, but that who we are is entirely a matter of signifiers and of semiotic relationships. Peirce, Lacan, Althusser and others have repeatedly made this point before, and I reiterate it now in order to establish a bridge connecting the status of the subject with the question of the relationship of fiction and history. If Reality engenders the subject, if fiction provides the ontological foundation of self, how do we avoid an irreversible fall into idealism? How do we retain our ability to speak with certainty about the world, both present and past? We do so by means of the ethics of mimesis which establishes a unified sense of "we" to stand in constant opposition to the isolated and fragmented "I." Although it does not actually do so, the ethics of mimesis
means to mark the limits of fiction and thus of signification by establishing a sense of communal identity which in turn also establishes a relationship between the subject and the unsignifiable Real in a manner that attempts to locate the one within the other.

For the sake of stability and continuity, however, it prefers to do this work unconsciously so as not to remind itself of its transitory and provisional nature. But in so doing, it also separates history from fiction in a manner that grants one the undeniably superior ethical status of the "we" while consigning the other to the morally dubious status of the individual subject. On this basis, history becomes "we" and fiction becomes "not-we" or "I." Even though the ethics of mimesis insists upon the essential totality of the individual subject, the closer it moves to that subject the less secure it feels so that it must simultaneously affirm and deny its importance. Affirm it in that as the amalgamated substance of history, individual subjectivity must, like the Real, be ultimately unsignifiable; but deny it in that, as the source of fiction, subjectivity must allow itself to dissipate into the collectivity of the "we" so as to forestall the possible consequences of this ability to fictionalize. Rather than exist as a fundamental component of the "we," the "I" must instead open itself up to co-optation and become the expression of a larger, extra-sub-
jective reality. In the ethics of mimesis, the "I" can never just be itself, it must also, and primarily, be the "we."

The question now arises as to who or what speaks for the self, or more correctly, who or what speaks as the self? The ethics of mimesis would have us believe that the "I" speaks for the self and thus for history, but as we have just seen this ethics cannot allow the "I" to do that without becoming dangerously vulnerable to the influx of fiction. And if the "we" speaks for, or as, the "I," who then speaks as the "we?" The proverbial vicious circle surrounds us when we realize that the subject exists at once everywhere and nowhere, unless we are willing (as we always are) to fictionalize it into a unified whole. Once we do so the vicious circle at least appears to break up and we again find ourselves back on solid ground, just as long as we realize its solidity is that of the signifier. Fiction, therefore, appears with the origin of the self, not as its adjunct but as its identity, whether collective or individu-

Understanding the place of fiction in subjectivity will also help to explain the inadequacies of other common sense objections to the separation of the Real from Reality. Granted the extensive influence of semiotic systems in the formulation of reality, so the objection goes, there still
exists the unambiguous fact that words mean what they mean both to the individual and to the community. If someone says "chair," we understand perfectly well the intended referent, and if someone says, "I sat in the chair," again the meaning and the action are clear. Even conceding the emptiness and arbitrariness of the signifier would not change the possibility of a one-to-one relationship between it and the referent. Again I must admit the force of this objection, and admit furthermore that even though the Real and the semiotic never overlap, the distance between them does at times seem narrower than at others. Despite this admission, however, I must also point out that the apparent simplicity of this example brings with it the same problems as did the phrase "the real world." For example, Barthes examines an exercise from a Latin grammar, quia ego nominor leo (because my name is lion). In trying to determine the meaning of these words, he finds they have a double signification: they make a direct statement about a lion, but their true meaning (as a grammatical example) is to illustrate the agreement of the predicate. To read "my name is lion" as an exercise in Latin, says Barthes, we must push aside a whole complex of signifiers about what a lion is, what it does, where it lives and what the concept of being a lion connotes for us; we must ignore "a history, a geography, a zoology, a Literature."237 The same is true for my
example, "I sat in the chair." On one level it signifies the simple repositioning of a human body, but it never means only that. As I have used the sentence, it means linguistic example; in other contexts it will mean fatigue, resignation, a preparation for listening or a preliminary to eating dinner. Signifiers, whatever their apparent simplicity, always move us away from any direct designation of the Real and into stories and emplotments about it; in other words, they keep us always away from the Real and firmly within Reality.

In response to the correlation of language and the Real that history insists upon, I would again return to the example of Sterne and Franklin and repeat my contention that even though the reference to real persons and events may distinguish a novel from an autobiography, it does not suffice to distinguish history from fiction. The referentiality of language, however extensive or circumscribed it may be, does not establish the possibility of history just because referentiality is a quality of such importance to both history and fiction that without it neither would be capable of any meaning whatsoever. Even if we maintain that history makes greater use of referentiality than does fiction (and I am not convinced that it does), we have only established the

difference them on the basis of degree and not of kind. As I have said, the category of fiction is such that it will permit the introduction of any amount of history and still not lose its distinctiveness, which makes it an odd and ambiguous category, to say the least, because it must simultaneously, and in its totality, be referential and non-referential alike. The New Criticism and its immediate successors especially exemplify this position by their insistence that whatever the referential degree of an individual work, as an example of literature (i.e. fiction) it remains, as Frye says, "an autonomous verbal structure," 238 entirely separate from the reality we call history. Käte Hamburger makes a similar distinction based on the grammatical preterite tense. The preterite, she writes, "as a sentence occurring in a historical work . . . informs us of something past, and that as a sentence occurring in a novel it depicts a 'present' situation. The grammatical past tense form loses its function of informing us about the past-ness of the facts reported." 239 For Hamburger, the past in a novel is never the past but only the present of narration because the novel has no direct connection with the Real as does history. When a novel refers to something occurring in the

238 The Anatomy of Criticism, p. 74.

past, therefore, it only seems to do so because it cannot really speak of the past but only of its present work of narration. The reason for this inability is what she calls the figure of the novel, meaning "the fictive person which annuls the past-tense meaning of the depictional verbs."240 There is no past in the novel because there is no real person who preformed the actions which the novel relates.

As I have already admitted, Hamburger is absolutely correct up to a certain point. Her analysis of the preterite, however, only helps to distinguish between individual works and not between fiction and history as categorical imperatives. My point is that fiction, before it is anything else, is referential and that any arguments as to its autonomy can only be made in the face of this referentiality. Similarly, the past to which a work of fiction may refer must be, again before it can be anything else, a real past that existed at least largely as depicted. For a work of fiction to have meaning, we must be able to recognize, for example, its portrayal of sixteenth-century Venice, Victorian London, colonial Africa or the ante-bellum United States. And if the work in question also makes reference to, say, the battle of Waterloo, Abraham Lincoln, the invention of the steam engine or the first expedition to the

240 Hamburger, pp. 88-89.
North Pole, then its claim to referentiality is that much enhanced. If it does not, however, and the only persons referred to are those such as Othello, Oliver Twist, Charles Marlow or Huckleberry Finn, the work has not therefore, severed its connections with history and become an autonomous verbal structure, whatever that is. It has instead become less history than history itself, but not altogether what we might call un-history. It resides in a nether world of referential and non-referential paradigms, which it alternatively uses to define its status.241

These are rather commonplace observations, however, because the role of history in fiction has never been the subject of much debate; and when it is, the issue usually revolves around the extent of the author's adaptation of sources. When we begin to examine the role of fiction in history, however, an entirely new set of problems arises because we can no longer rely on simple referentiality as a means for distinguishing the two. Under the auspices of the referential, fiction still has its place in historical nar-

241 For a somewhat different view, see Avrom Fleishman, The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971). Fleishman does not believe that a novel is historical simply because it refers to a specific historical or social reality: "Not all time is historical; not all social life relevant to historical understanding" (p. 15, n. 9). There may be specific works which confirm his conclusion, but any work of realism or naturalism must by definition be historical because of their specificity.
rative but only as an indication of empirical or moral collapse. The presence of any fictional elements in a historical work usually means that the author has either lied about or otherwise misrepresented the facts, thus making fiction the result of some morally suspicious motive or some failure of understanding. As the antithesis of objectivity and truth, fiction also stands as the negation of history, but the ethics of mimesis does more than define fiction as a negative principle, however. In an inversion of Collingwood's distinction of history and nature, it uses fiction as a categorical designation for the non-human, that is, for those instances when the subject for the narrative could potentially cease to be "we" and revert to "I." The ethics of mimesis requires subjectivity to have its basis in the "we," so that whatever challenges this basis also challenges its concomitant definition of the human.

The ethics of mimesis inverts Collingwood's inside/outside distinction of nature and history, however, by defining fiction as that which has no "outside," no materiality behind its thought or motivation, the lack of which excludes it from the "we" of the subject-for-the-narrative. Under this definitional scheme, the human shifts its identification away from thought toward materiality and regards everything that does not similarly follow suit as somehow inimical to its well-being. As the product of Enlightenment
thinking, this scheme ties the human, just as it ties truth and objectivity, to the referentiality of language and its ability to encompass the Real. As an entity which by definition disavows the referential, fiction stands by necessity in alliance with the non-human, i.e. with nature, as that which must be overcome and controlled in order to counter its destructive potential.

Human and non-human, therefore, become metaphysical designations for that which is and is not an aspect of referentiality. Because the ethics of mimesis must affirm referentiality at all costs, however, human and non-human also become shifting designations which cannot ultimately perform the tasks assigned to them. For example, a narrative which speaks about "the real world" in an attempt to represent and reiterate its essence, reaffirms the human as the "we" of the subject-for-the-narrative; one that does not, threatens to dissolve this "we" into innumerable individual subjects unless this threat can be negated by giving fiction the negative definition of that which is not history. In this case, as we have already seen, the "we" as subject-for-the-narrative is still confirmed by the incorporation of each into a single mimetic paradigm which constitutes the same subject for the narrative for both history and fiction. In addition, however, this identification of the human with history and materiality, and of the non-human
with fiction and individual desire, means that narratives are always already written in the world which we, as good Enlightenment subjects, have only to "read" them in order to understand the truth.

As an example of what I mean, consider Adrian Kuzminski's argument that the realist simply describes empirical evidence without having to interpret or explain anything.242 Leaving aside the question as to whether description can ever be so segregated, we can understand Kuzminski's position as one that holds to the direct and unambiguous accessibility of the Real by means of signification. "A realist text," he writes,

does not invite one to follow an argument or decipher a symbol—it demands no cognitive or schematic effort of that sort. Quite the contrary—a mark of the success of ordinary narrative accounts is precisely the lack of cognitive or schematic effort. A good narrative requires no puzzling out, no intellectual strain; instead, one follows it almost effortlessly, one is pulled along—often quite rapidly—by the text itself, as when one is pulled along by a good novel.243

242 "Defending Historical Realism," History and Theory, 18(1979), 316-349.

243 Kuzminski, 333.
This last point is illuminating because it shows the difficulties the ethics of mimesis can fall into. A realist text, by which he means a historical narrative, distinguishes itself from a novel by not requiring the decipherment of symbols or of schematic structures. Yet despite these differences, the strength of the realist text lies in its similarity to the novel: a good piece of realism should read like fiction. Kuzminski admits that an event and a description of an event are two separate entities and that a representation is actually an illusion of reality. Nevertheless, he believes that narratives can be divided into successful and unsuccessful illusions and that the former constitutes what he calls (per Habermas) "a true fiction," by which he means an illusion which tells the truth. By this time it should be clear that Kuzminski's definitions of truth, realism and illusion are so amorphous as to have no clear meaning at all. Is an illusion still an illusion if it is true? In the same instance, is fiction still fiction? Though unshaken in his belief in the correspondence between language and the Real, such confusions finally overwhelm his argument, which he can defend only by stating "we can represent independently existing things quite well without being able to say how we do

244 Kuzminski, 337.
so."245 In his wish to prove the non-theoretical essence of experience, Kuzminski forgets that any assumed lack of theory does not negate the work of signification, work which always undermines the ethics of mimesis and its claim on the Real.

A more forceful defense of the same position comes from David Carr who believes that the structure of narrative inheres in the events described, thus making life more than an unstructured series of isolated events.246 In response to the claim that organization is an attribute of art or other so-called creative activities but that chaos is an attribute of life, Carr replies that narrative "is a constitutive part of action, and not just an embellishment, commentary, or other incidental accompaniment," and that even though he believes narrative does create meaning rather than simply reflect or imitate some existing state, it does so "in the course of life itself--not merely after the fact, at the hands of authors, in the pages of books."247 Carr runs into difficulties, however, when he tries to explain what he means by "the course of life itself," for as it turns out narrative does not for him exist within nature or the

245 Kuzminski, 342.


247 Carr, 125 and 126.
materiality of existence but within social relations or "human reality." Carr sees the concept of narrative as social from its inception so that both individually and collectively we never experience events passively but through the mediation of our retentions and protentions. We evaluate what is happening on the basis of past experience and we make judgments about the future on the basis of current events. The narrative function is therefore practical, says Carr, more than cognitive or aesthetic because it aids in the preservation of the individual and in so doing makes possible concerted action by the community.

The idea of the community is the linchpin of Carr's evaluation of narrative, for a community only exists "where a narrative account exists of a 'we' which persists through its experiences and actions."248 This "we," in turn, provides the basis upon which the individual establishes his or her own subjectivity. "What strikes me about social life is the extent to which an individual takes part in experiences and engages in actions whose proper subject is not the individual himself or herself but that of the group."249 While all these points may be true enough, they do little to sustain Carr's argument because he consistently begs the ques-

248 Carr, 130.
249 Carr, 127.
tions he sets out to answer. If a community exists through a narrative account of a "we," and if an individual experiences most of his or her subjectivity on the basis of that "we," then does the individual exist through a narrative account? Carr says yes, but also claims that this narrative origin does not make either "I" or "we" fictions and that they remain "as real as anything we know." But this sense of what is real and what is not is precisely the point. What does it mean to be real? The implication underlying Carr's entire argument is that the real is not a signifier, and yet narrative, as a construct of signifiers, has an undeniable place in the real. Carr is not entirely wrong in his contention that even though narratival in origin, "we" and "I" are still quite real; he has simply confused the issue by not distinguishing between the real as Real and the real as Reality. As the interplay of signifiers which constitutes Reality, Carr's real does have coherence and validity, but as that whose essential being transcends such signification, it does not. "We" and "I" are real in Reality but not in the Real.

Furthermore, we must also ask just what is this "we" which narrative makes possible? Carr's ideas and attitudes have much in common with Habermas's thought on community

250 Carr, 131.
consensus in which "we" implies the large-scale organization of a society or nation. A single narrative would then have the potential for incorporating ever larger numbers of individuals into itself so as to endow them with a social unity. It seems, however, that Lyotard makes more sense on this point, for in fact none of us belongs to a unified and totalizing "we" but to a constellation of various, and perhaps even antagonistic, "we-s." An individual may be the citizen of a nation but also a member of a minority community which suffers oppression because of national laws or policies. This individual may furthermore be part of a minority within, and in turn oppressed by, this minority.

In such a case, narrative would serve both to coalesce and to disrupt the sense of community because the appearance of narrative unity would actually mask the broad-ranging narrative disunity which constitutes it. Carr correctly identifies the power of narrative to constitute both individuals and communities, but this power also often turns against itself. No narrative can preclude the possibility of another.

On the question of fiction and history, Carr makes the distinction between first-order and second-order narratives. Again, some confusion surrounds the argument but first-order narratives have the practical function of constituting the individual or community, whereas second-order narratives are
cognitive or aesthetic and thus include both history and fiction. The two categories do not exclude one another because history and fiction may apparently take part in either, but first-order narratives would seem to be those unexamined assumptions by which a community defines itself in the manner of Barthes's definition of mythology, and second-order narratives those created from a detached, objective and critical stance. Second-order narratives thus have the ability to change, expand upon and even improve a narrative of the first-order "by enlarging its view of its possibilities." "While histories do this for communities," Carr continues, "fictions can do it for individuals." Once again we discover at the base of this question about the continuity of narrative and the real world, the ethics of mimesis that puts history on the side of the community, with its emphasis on unity, stability and coherence, and puts fiction on the side of the individual and implies, if not its opposition, than at least its lack of commitment to these same ideals. Carr believes history and fiction can be truthful and creative in what he calls the best sense but he does not consider the possibility that they can be so in the same sense. The essays of Carr and Kuzminski provide good examples of how the ethics of mimesis seeks to defend refer-

251 Carr, 131.
entiality against the empiricism of desire but can only do so through an uncritical differentiation of the community and the individual, and through the assumption that signification has an unshakable foothold with the Real. By insisting on the differences between fiction and history, they gloss over their many similarities in order to preserve the cohesiveness of a social order that demands the absolute equivalence of signifier and signified.

This equivalence brings us back to our earlier discussion of history and fiction as a synonymous designation of other polarities such as human and nonhuman, community and nature. If, as I said earlier, the ethics of mimesis tries to affirm the difference between history and fiction by inverting Collingwood's identification of the first with "inside" and the second with "outside," then history becomes an expression, in a certain sense, of the natural world and fiction becomes that of thought and motivation, precisely the opposite of Collingwood's intention. Paul Ricoeur notes that man fulfills his role as a creature by breaking away from the repetition of nature and making history, with history being one of the ways men "repeat" their belonging to the same humanity and thus distinguish themselves from the natural world of their environment.252 We have, there-

fore, the repetition of nature and the repetition of history, but do we have in addition a repetition of fiction? If we believe with Frye that fictions are autonomous verbal structures, then we do not have such a repetition because fiction has no referential value. If we accept the identification of fiction with thought, motivations, desires and cognition (Collingwood's "inside"), however, we see it has the same composition as history and that its concurrent referentiality undercuts its autonomous standing. As a result, fiction both is and is not referential, and history both is and is not that which sets the human off from nature.

If the line of reasoning seems hard to follow at this point, I must disavow a certain responsibility for the confusion, because the ethics of mimesis becomes hopelessly muddled when it tries to maintain its distinction of history and fiction on the basis of the community and the individual. History allies itself with the community in order to organize and stabilize existence by bringing the brute materiality of the world under the control of thought; at the same time it opposes fiction by trying to bring thought under the control of this same materiality. If history is to deny its identification with fiction it must also deny the priority of thought over the material world; if it is to maintain its status as history, however, it must affirm this
priority. By proclaiming its allegiance to the idea of community, and to the human reality community makes possible, history appropriates for itself that which designates the human. Fiction may also designate the human, but only insofar as it designates history by means of the constitution of the universal subject-for-the-narrative. By its exclusion from history, however, fiction becomes in its essence a part of the non-human or natural because of its potential to undermine the community and dissolve it into its constituent subjectivities. Yet again, fiction also cannot belong to nature or the non-human because it is the human activity par excellance, involving creativity, organization, coherence, teleology, signification and, without a doubt, referentiality. Hayden White writes that symbolization belongs to nature or culture but marks the point of transition by which nature becomes culture.253 He might just as well have added that it marks the point where culture becomes nature, for in the ethics of mimesis the two come to serve the same purpose. History stands as the hallmark of empirical certainty against the mute anarchy of nature, or it stands as the natural order of things against the potential threat of individual willfulness and

desire. In either case, history stands for control, certitude and order so that it may resist any perceived threat to those values.

**History and Power**

Even though the ethics of mimesis serves us so poorly, however, we have as yet found no way to dispense with it. So powerful is its insistence on the equivalence of history and referentiality, that the mere suggestion of the inherent fictiveness of the historical threatens to undo epistemology itself. According to this ethics, either history must be the foundation of the community or else there is no community at all, just an accumulation of individual subjectivities with nothing to bind them together. But once we come to understand this ethical predisposition of mimetics, we also come to an understanding of history and how we can distinguish it from fiction. We must leave aside such tautological descriptions as history being what happened and fiction what did not because referentiality can never be an adequate standard by which to measure the capabilities of each. Neither should we continue to identify one with truth and the other with falsehood, for truth and falsehood are too much a

part of the semiotic field to ever gain a transcendency by which we may evaluate our narratives. Instead we must understand history as being that which can dispel any claims to validity by its contradiction. As a necessary component of the community, as the very possibility of order and certainty, history is not truth or referentiality—history is power. I do not make this claim in order to disparage either history or power but simply to show that where there is no power there is no history, and where there is no history, there is no power. White notes that within the perspective of political struggle, the crucial problem "is not whose story is the best or truest, but who has the power to make his story stick as the one that others will choose to live by or in," 255 and not only in politics, but in every other arena of epistemological contention.

Power is not the same as force, and as Foucault's work shows us, there are many more ways to impose a certain regimen of order than with the barrel of a gun. We misunderstand power, Foucault writes, if we think of it as simply some repressive force, for if it were that alone no one could be made to obey it. The strength of power does not lie in its threat but in its productivity; it gains acceptance because "it traverses and produces things, it induces

pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.\textsuperscript{256} In addition, power exists pervasively throughout a social structure and not just in the locality of specific programs of application. For this reason, the ruling classes do not wield power as their own tool or weapon, but are themselves subject to it as participants in specific epistemological and political discourses. Nonetheless, says Foucault, power always exerts itself in a particular direction, by which he means there is always a subject and an object of power.\textsuperscript{257} And herein lies the rub, of course, for whatever exists as the object of power exists through the effects of denial, exclusion and limitation. The imposition of order means the setting of untransgressible limits, which is what historical discourse attempts so as to assume the mantle of referentiality as proof of its accessibility to the Real, and thus defend itself against contradiction. Power is not the same as force but discourse is always the same as power, and a historical discourse will always be able to overcome its contradiction by labeling it as fiction.

The fact that such labeling occurs does not in itself constitute a denunciation of history, for as a manifestation of power, history's particular type of productivity makes

\textsuperscript{256} Power/Knowledge, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{257} Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, p. 213.
obvious the reasons for its acceptance and for its unchallenged place in the ethics of mimesis. A denunciation of history is not my purpose; rather, I wish there to be a history with nothing to hide. Barthes writes, "There is an evil, a social and ideological disorder, ingrained in sign systems which do not frankly proclaim themselves as sign systems. Instead of recognizing that culture is an unmotivated system of meanings, bourgeois society always presents its signs as justified by nature or reason."258 If we substitute history for culture, Barthes's insight loses none of its validity. The role of history today has developed out of this nature/reason dynamics under the aegis of the Enlightenment, in much the same way as have modernism and postmodernism. Empiricism alternatively sees nature and reason as either antithetical or symbiotic so that one either negates the possibility of the other or else further enhances the other's validity. Either nature is unreason, or reason is the paradigm of nature. Similarly, history alternatively realigns itself in regard to nature, so that it either opposes nature's anarchy or assumes its irrefutability. In either case, it does not openly proclaim itself as a sign system, nor does it have to confront the possibi-

lity that it, too, is an unmotivated system of meanings. For history to be power does not at all undercut its validity as a mode of cognition; but for it to be unadmitted and unexamined power does so indeed.

How then do we identify the power of history? How as a discourse does it maintain its sovereignty and its ineluctable ties to the Real? It may of course do so by force as part of an imperialist or totalitarian program for order, but such a manifestation of power always follows upon a previous discursive matrix, as Foucault tells us, which exercises a type of power quite distinct from that of armed violence. Barthes's work on modern myth also analyzes this particular exercise of power and how it functions within bourgeois strategies of self-explanation and justification. For Barthes, myth is not what we believe but how we believe; myth is not the message but the manner of its utterance. If we were to trace the development of his career, however, we would see how this unravelling of bourgeois verisimilitude led Barthes to an increasing skepticism about the mimetic project as a whole, and to an increasing conviction that whatever language may do, it does not make possible a direct and unmitigated experience of the Real. If language and writing could achieve this possibility, says Barthes, then literature would be vanquished because it would no longer be necessary. For language to acquire the supposed moral neu-
trality of the Real would mean that "the problematics of mankind is uncovered and presented without elaboration" because truth would cease to be the object of interpretation and become the pure designation of mathematical certainty.

Barthes understood that neither language nor any sense of the Real had such neutrality, but he also understood that this lack did not result from the subjective manipulation of either. The power of language is not something brought to bear upon it from the outside in order to subordinate it to certain political structures, rather it adheres within language itself and is often misapprehended as its referential capability. This power is what led Barthes to identify language as fascist, not because it wishes to prevent us from saying certain things, but because it compels us to do so within carefully designated parameters. To speak a language is to accept its rules and limitations; to transgress the same is to sacrifice sense and intelligibility. Such necessity goes beyond mere grammar and syntax and applies to the designation of discursive genres so as to separate that which talks about the real world and that which does not. Objectivity and referentiality, therefore,


remain solely within the discourses of science and history, from which fiction may borrow but never own. For Barthes, however, designations such as objectivity remain no more than one imaginative system among many others which serve to affect the alienation of language, by which he means the mystification of language into a transcendent essentiality immune to the vicissitudes of signification. That language cannot do so means, of course, that history and science cannot either, but Barthes did not remain content with this point and pushed his critique to the ultimate referent, the self.

Speaking of his autobiography as a book whose substance is "totally fictive," he advises us to consider it "as if spoken by a character in a novel." Why? Because the self as that which resists decomposition does not exist except as what he calls "the imaginary contemporary" of his own present, "contemporary of its languages, its utopias, its systems (i.e., of its fictions), in short, of its mythology or of its philosophy but not of its history, of which I inhabit only the shimmering reflection: the phantasmagoria." In other words, do not look within the

261 See The Grain of the Voice, p. 52.
262 Roland Barthes, pp. 119-120
263 Roland Barthes, p. 59.
Real, he says, for anything we might identify as Roland Barthes; look instead for the ever-present hope for the self, and for the objectively known real world within the fluctuating conjunction of these various semiotic systems. If biography and autobiography are the verisimilitude of the self, then they are discourses without an object, or rather discourses with a multitude of splintered and diverse objects, which narrative solidifies into a coherent, comprehensible and fictional whole. Todorov identifies verisimilitude as a mask for those laws of the text which readers interpret as a relation with reality, and Barthes realizes that such laws are what enable the self to appear as more than a phantasmagoria in any life story. As with myth, the self exists as an utterance and not as an object, constituted at the moment of narration rather than existing prior to the strategies of language.

If this disintegration of the self seems to lead to the final and irrevocable negation of history then let me state that the contrary is in fact the case and that the power of history, rather than being undercut by analyses such as Barthes's, continues unabated even if undisguised. Barthes thought that he was witnessing the death of historical narration because "the sign of History is henceforth not so

264 The Poetics of Prose, p. 83.
much the real as the intelligible, meaning that the
Reality which sign systems constitute has become the only
"real" which we can identify as such. Barthes essentially
agrees with de Certeau that historical discourse is the only
possible myth remaining for a society which has rejected
myths, but this conclusion only makes apparent the disas-
sociation with the Real that has always been the repressed
hallmark of such discourse. De Certeau rightly claims that
"narrated history moves away from the real," but it does
so only because it never had any other direction in which to
go. In moving away from the Real, however, it does not move
toward falsehood or solipsism but in a direction which
Hayden White identifies as ethical.

White's identification of the historical with the ethi-
cal comes from the role he believes choice plays in the work
of the historian. Choice has always served as a basis for
distinguishing fiction from history because the novelist or
playwright can exercise an almost limitless freedom in
choosing alternative constructions of plot, whereas the his-

265 "The Discourse of History," The Rustle of Language,
140.

266 See Heterologies, p. 220.

267 The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven F.
Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984),
p. 79.
torian ideally should have little or no choice in the construction of historical narratives. I say "ideally" because although historical analysis has always recognized that an event can have different, and even contradictory, emplotments, it has considered this ambiguity to be the result of a lack of knowledge rather than from some inherent flaw within historical study itself. This view maintains that even though our knowledge of a specific historical event may be partial and fragmentary, given enough evidence and documentation we could conceivably come to a complete and objective understanding of that event. The more documentation that exists, the less choice the historian supposedly has in the construction and emplotment of narratives. The historian thus has an obligation to the Real, especially as it pertains to the immutability of the past.

White rejects this hypothesis, however, and believes that whatever the historian's responsibilities may be, we cannot define them in a way that is not "value-laden and normative, prescriptive and judgmental, rather than obvious, self-evident, or objectively determinable."268 The historian, says White, does not, indeed cannot, turn a disinterested gaze upon the Real in order to record what exists

268 Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 188.
there; instead, the historian imbues a narrative with what appears to be reality by placing events in "an order of moral existence"269 through which they gain meaning.

White's views on this point closely resemble Collingwood's concept of the web of imaginative construction, which he renames "the web of commitment"270 in order to identify the epistemological, aesthetic and moral choices the historian makes in the construction of any historical narrative.

White's point is that the Real never has a story to tell but that Reality always does. Historical events (keeping in mind the problematics of even designating such events) are themselves value-neutral but become morally charged by the type of narrative the historian eventually places them in, be that tragic, comic, romantic or ironic. According to White, the chronicle and not the narrative has the responsibility of identifying historical events. Once identified, however, the historian then must choose the narrative plotstructure in which to incorporate them, a choice upon which historical analysis thrives. Historical narrative has the responsibility of establishing possible sets of relationships between events whose meaning depends upon this choice of plot structure, relationships never immanent in


270 The Tropics of Discourse, p. 71.
the events themselves but existing only "in the mind of the historian reflecting on them." 271 To write historical narrative, then, entails what White calls a translation of fact into fiction because this lack of immanence requires the contents of history to be just as much invented as they are found. As a result of this inventive process, every historical representation has moral implications which make it ideologically valuable, for whatever plot-structure the historian chooses carries with it specific and unavoidable moral imperatives, which assert themselves despite all claims to objectivity. 272

Even more than Barthes, White understands the degree to which the sign of history has indeed shifted from the real to the intelligible. This shift raises important questions about the power of history, however, because if the choice of employment means that history is a largely created type of knowledge, what then do we say to the threat of totalitarianism? If history produces knowledge as much as discovers it, how do we attain the moral and epistemological advantage to resist some sort of Orwellian rewriting of the past which supports the most vicious and repressive of po-


272 See "The Historical Text," 278; and Tropics of Discourse, p. 69.
itical programs? Such questions go to the heart of any analysis of the mimetic capabilities of narrative, and though the answers favor resistance to such totalitarianism, they do not do so from any position of ideological innocence. By way of illustration, White points to the clash between Zionist and Palestinian nationalism. Current Israeli policies in the Gaza and West Bank derive their validity from a conception of history that requires the Nazi death camps to remain a living memory rather than simply an historical fact. When dominated by powers such as those which encouraged or permitted the policies of extermination, history is meaningless to the Jewish people; but for the Zionists, it regains its coherence when national policy is carried out under the impetus of always resisting the return of such policies. Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, says White, may as a result of this ideology be totalitarian, and even fascist, "But who is to say that this ideology is a product of a distorted conception of history in general and of the history of Jews in the Diaspora specifically? It is, in fact, fully comprehensible as a morally responsible response to the meaningfulness of a certain history."

Furthermore, the Israeli response to this meaningfulness "is fully consonant with the aspiration to human freedom and dignity." One explanation for the relative weakness of the Palestinian response to such policies (aside from, of
course, massive infusions of American armaments into Israel) is the still present need to mount an equally effective ideology "complete with an interpretation of their history capable of endowing it with a meaning that it has hitherto lacked."273

In light of this example, should we then conclude that history derives its validation from political and ideological imperatives rather than from an objective and disinterested desire to tell the story of the past? As uncomfortable as it is to answer "yes" to this question, White does so by explaining that "while it is possible to produce a kind of knowledge that is not explicitly linked to any specific political program, all knowledge produced in the human and social sciences lends itself to use by some ideology better than it does to some others."274 He goes further, however, to raise the issue, as did Barthes and Julia Kristeva before him, as to whether narrative itself may be an ideological instrument, along with such concepts as objectivity, realism and social responsibility. Subordinate

273 Hayden White, "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation," Critical Inquiry, 9(1982), 135-136. The supposed lack of meaning in Palestinian history is open to considerable debate, as the work of Edward Said attests. White's point is well taken, however, in that this history has not brought about the same political cohesiveness among the Palestinians as Zionist history as done among the Jews.

or emergent groups are not helped by the freedom to merely write another version of history within the ideological structure that rules over them. Reproducing the strategies of a dominant ideology does not facilitate resistance to it. Effective opposition "can only be carried forward on the basis of a conception of the historical record as being not a window through which the past 'as it really was' can be apprehended but rather a wall that must be broken through if the 'terror of history' is to be directly confronted, and the fear it induces dispelled." Quoting Santayana's dictum about those who do not study the past being condemned to repeat it, White reminds us that it is not so much the study of the past that is important as how we study it, and to what end and purpose we then apply it.\footnote{"The Politics of Historical Interpretation," 137. White continues, "Nothing is better suited to lead to a repetition of the past than a study of it that is either reverential or convincingly objective in the way that conventional historical studies tend to be."}
The Psychoanalysis of the Real

The question we must now ask is what constitutes the purpose, and therefore the power, of history? If White and Barthes have correctly analyzed historical discourse then it may seem that a more appropriate question would be what constitutes the purposes of history in that different narratives will have different goals and purposes dependent upon the plot-structure the historian chooses. Indeed they will, but this diversity should not obscure the fact that history itself does have an overriding purpose regardless of the specific political or ideological ends to which it is put. White offers a very interesting suggestion as to the purpose of history as a genre, one which he considers tangential to his argument as a whole, but which I believe lays open the foundation of the ethics of mimesis.

White regards the historian's task as to refamiliarize us with that which has become strange through its remoteness in the past. The original strangeness of the historical material dissipates not because of the accumulation of facts and data but because such facts are shown to belong to a comprehensible process, or plot-structure, accepted by the epistemological make-up of a given culture. This process of refamiliarization, says White, is quite similar to that
which happens in psycho-therapy. Events in a patient's past become unfamiliar and threatening when endowed with a meaning he or she deems unacceptable but which continue to influence the patient's daily interactions and perceptions. The events of the past usually remain clear, but their meaning serves to forestall any effective response to them. The therapist's job is not to rediscover lost events in a person's childhood, but to get that person to re-employ those events in such a way that their meaning changes and they lose their traumatic effects. In this case, says White, the patient replaces one plot structure, in which these events have a dominant role, with one in which they are subordinate and thus less influential. In a similar manner, the historian's task is also therapeutic, for by refamiliarizing the past they not only provide more information about it, they also show "how [its] developments conformed to one or another of the story types that we conventionally invoke to make sense of our own life stories." 276

White defines history as "the discourse of the real," in contrast to a discourse of the imaginary, by which the real becomes desirable, rather than the imaginary or desirable becoming real, through the imposition of the formal coherency of a narrative plot-structure. 277 The question we

276 "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," 286.

must ask White, however, especially in regards to his own analysis of the ethical responsibility every historian faces in the choice of plot-structures, is how do these two discourses differ? What is the difference between making the real desirable and making the desirable and imaginary real? In his analogous comparison of history and psycho-therapy, White relies on Lacanian formulations but he also, like Carr and others, muddies the whole issue by not making the necessary distinction between the Real and Reality. By simply talking about "the real" as though its materiality somehow makes it less problematic than any semiotic field, White fails to account for the forcefulness of the process of semiosis and the extent to which history exercises its power. The sense one gets in reading White is that a historian, or perhaps a people such as the Jews or Palestinians, might just as well have chosen one plot-structure as another, and that once a choice is made, the possibility of another choice always presents itself. Part of the greatness of White's work on historiography is his technical correctness on this point; a choice can always be made and a past choice replaced by a present one. What deserves more attention in White's analysis, however, is the power of history to forestall these choices and to even seemingly negate the possibility of choice itself. The change of a plot-structure is never simply a change within a story; it
also involves the dislocations, disruptions, upheavals and perhaps bloodshed that always accompany the rearticulation of the subject's relationship with the Real. Part of the job of history is to prevent such trauma, which it quite effectively does by a conflation of Reality and the Real that makes the one seem just as immutable as the other.

As we say, however, one man's trauma is another man's cure, and on this point White's argument shows its pervasive applicability. A conservatism always marks this conflation of the Real and Reality, and for subjected peoples, the trauma of history lies in not being able to break them apart. White opens the door on the possibility of such a break but he leaves it only slightly ajar. What we need to do is further explore his psycho-therapeutic, or psycho-analytic, paradigm in order to understand how the historian's ability to offer a "cure" is just as problematic as that of the psychoanalyst. The question, of course, is what constitutes a cure? Or when does disfunction transform itself into normality? Lacan's debate with the ego-psychologists revolves around this very point. According to Lacan, the great mistake of ego-psychology lies in its empirical and scientific aspirations through which it regarded the ego as a unified though pliable whole which could be modified and adapted to the cultural demands of normality. The problems with this approach are two-fold: 1) the ego for
Lacan is not a unified whole but a composite of the sliding indentifications of the moi, the stabilizing strategies of the je and the connection of the Other (A) with the Symbolic register; and 2) the reality envisioned by ego-psychology is again the ubiquitous conflation of the Real and Reality, which ignores the role of signification in psychic and cognitive processes. The fictive characteristics and function which Lacan attributes to the ego thus become suppressed and discredited.

White's analogy of history and psycho-therapy, therefore, requires further clarification in order to understand whether the "cure" he speaks of is that of ego-psychology's perceived need to reconcile oneself to "the real world" or of Lacan's emphasis on understanding the work of transference in the constitution of the self. White's sympathies are with Lacan, of course, for behind his critique of historiography lies the unstated hope that we will someday cease to place history in the Real and keep it within Reality where it belongs. As with Lacan's analysis of phallocentrism, White understands that it would serve no good purpose, say, to have the Palestinians adapt a historical plot-structure which would abet in their conquering the Israelis, and in turn making them into a subject people. The endless succession of one plot-structure by another, the endless conflation of the Real with Reality, would simply be
a continuation of "the nightmare of history." What White would have us do is understand the provisionality of "the real world" and its dependence upon fiction to authenticate its "real-ness."

We must remember, however, that the usual disavowal of the fictive by history is also a disavowal of the individual because the ethics of mimesis demands that the subject-for-the-narrative be always "we" and never "I." The choice of plot-structure within a historical narrative may change the constitution of any "we" category, but it will not effect the oppositional standing of the I/we designations. White's psycho-therapeutic/psychoanalytic model for the work of history is therefore rather sadly apropos, for until we learn to conceive of history in a manner that mitigates the current extent of its power, it will continue to exercise the same authoritarian tendencies so often displayed by psychoanalysis. Félix Guattari criticizes psychoanalysis for its claim to be an objective science which exists above and beyond the political fray. "There are no limits to the ambition of psychoanalytic control," he writes; "if it had its way, nothing would escape it" because it claims as its domain everything from the debilitation of madness to the tiniest motions and errors of everyday life.278 What needs

to be directly confronted in White's paradigm is that the same can be said of history, in which case the cure effected by the historian will probably be just another variation on the disease. White, I believe, is aware of this problem, and though he has not addressed it directly, his work carries with it an increasing sense of disgruntlement with history's claims to totalization.

Ideally the historian could bring about a cure such as the psychotherapist strives for, but it would have to be through a different sort of history and a different sort of psychotherapy than those currently in practice.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have suggested one alternative, schizoaanalysis; and whatever the shortcomings or excesses of their approach, they have focused on the central concern in the constitution of the subject-for-the-narrative: the control and/or suppression of desire. "No society can tolerate the position of real desire," they write, "without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised." The threat of desire, however, does not arise because it wants revolution, it arises because "it is revolution in its own right, as though involuntary, by wanting what it wants." 279

The dynamics of political and social interaction may change

279 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 116.
from one year or one location to another, but the one con-
stant that remains throughout the diversity of these dynam-
ics is the need of the group to suppress or control the
desire of the individual. No one denies, not even Deleuze
and Guattari, the obvious benefits that can accrue from this
suppression; their point is that however extensive these
benefits may be, we must never forget that when we speak of
social stability and cohesion we are actually speaking about
a program of control that always has human subjectivity as
its object. Because the exercise of power is almost always
an embarrassment, it must not be spoken of directly or else
only in terms that obfuscate its inevitable consequence of
victimization.

One of the basic themes of Anti-Oedipus is how the
production of desire is a necessary by-product of the human
condition. Individuals produce desire within themselves as
do societies as a whole. What happens, however, is that
society demands that individual desire production be con-
ected with its own larger productive process so that socie-
ty, and not the individual, produces the private desire of
the subject. This large-scale production of desire that
overwhelms and subordinates the individual is what Deleuze
and Guattari call "territorialization," by which they mean
the localization of desire in specific areas of expression
and its exclusion from others. Whether on a tribal or na-
tional level, territorialization always functions to channel desire into acceptable and unacceptable modes of expression. Under capitalism, the specific focus of their critique, we see an especially insidious form of territorialization because, though wrapped in the rhetoric and trappings of individual freedom, it actually imposes a condition of abject servitude. Capitalism, like the Enlightenment, presents itself as that which breaks apart the old territorialities and frees the individual for expressions of desire which former moral and political regimes would never allow. And so it does, to an extent at least; but then under the rubric of deterritorialization, it institutes its own territorialities which are all the more repressive for being unrecognizable as such. "Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract qualities. Everything returns and recurs: States, nations, families."280

The connection between capitalism and the family is especially important because through the mediation of psychoanalysis, capitalism can attack desire at its source, the individual, and compromise it even before the opportunity

280 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 34.
for expression. This attack, say Deleuze and Guattari, occurs under the banner of the Oedipus complex, which stipulates that all desire finds its origin in an incestuous and patricidal familial dynamics. Thus desire itself becomes tainted with shame and co-opted by guilt even before the individual is old enough to choose his or her means of expressing it; and whatever means the individual eventually chooses will bear the mark of original sin evident within all desire. Psychoanalysis in general, and the Oedipus complex in particular, provide the agency by which capitalism can relocate the old external territorialities of physical control and prohibition within the individual psyche and, therefore, channel the flow of desire at its source, rather than try to suppress its expression after the fact. "Oedipus is always colonization pursued by other means, it is the interior colony, and we shall see that even here at home, where we Europeans are concerned, it is our intimate colonial education."281 While the European dominions were carving up Africa and Asia for colonial exploitation, capitalism made a colony within each and every one of the colonizers, surreptitiously exerting its control even while proclaiming its support for deterritorialized desire.

A psychoanalysis based on the Oedipus complex, say

281 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 170.
Deleuze and Guattari, is one based on paranoia, on the fear of castration or on the anxiety of having already been so. In order to break the interior colonization by capitalism we need to shift our understanding of the human psyche away from a model based on paranoia to one based on schizophrenia. While this shift admittedly sounds like a movement from the frying pan into the fire, we should understand that just as Oedipal psychoanalysis does not valorize paranoia as a clinical condition even though it necessitates its existence, neither do Deleuze and Guattari claim that we should all become certified schizophrenics in order to reopen the flow of desire. Anti-Oedipus uses a model of schizophrenia developed from the work of R. D. Laing, who saw it not at as sign of madness but as a special strategy which an individual invents in order to alleviate an intolerable and unlivable situation. For Laing, schizophrenia is actually a defense mechanism which enables the individual to cope with an environment he or she would otherwise be unable to confront. In this strategy of defense, however, Laing notes that areas of experience open up

282 See also Guattari, Molecular Revolution, p. 86: "The object of psychoanalysis is, in brief, what I would call collective paranoia--in other words, bringing into operation everything that militates against any liberation of schizo desire in the social situation."

to the individual that would not have otherwise been
discovered, thus giving desire a path of expression
heretofore unrealized. Such experiences are what make
schizophrenia the healing process it actually is, and what
make schizophrenics those who have adopted a different
strategy of existence than the rest of us. Laing is not
saying that schizophrenics do not need our help in order to
move beyond this defense mechanism, he simply means that
their condition should not be the excuse for further victim-
ization by medical and psychoanalytic institutions.

When Deleuze and Guattari put forth their theory of
schizoanalysis, therefore, they do so in the spirit of Laing
in order to disrupt the reterritorializations of capitalism.
Oedipal psychology totalizes desire by giving it a single
impetus which colors all its expressions, no matter how
diverse. Schizoanalysis would break down this totalization
by allowing desire to be truly deterritorialized in order to
find means of expression without the hindrance of taboos.
Such a breakdown involves much more than the overthrow of
prohibitions, however, because schizoanalysis recognizes
that desire is not innately sexual and that sexuality is
only one aspect of desire. Desire, in fact, like the signi-
fier, remains empty until it finds a specific content of
expression. "The desiring-machines," meaning that which
produces desire, whether on the individual or societal
level, "represent nothing, signify nothing, mean nothing, and are exactly what one makes of them, what is made with them, what they make themselves." Desire is nothing other than itself, which is why its revolutionary potential is so significant. If desire has no necessary content, then the larger desiring-machines such as those capitalism erects in order to control desire production within the individual, have no necessary justification or reason for existence. The investment of desire in specific channels for monitoring and control stands revealed as a societal fiction by which the "I" and its desires becomes indentified and indentical with the desires of the "we." The power of territorialization is such that every investment of desire is a collective one, "every fantasy a group fantasy and in this sense a portion of reality." As the limit of desire, reality has its basis in fiction and fantasy. The suppression of desire does not find its justifications in the Real but in the significations of Reality.

Oedipal psychoanalysis essentializes the ego and thus severely constrains the possibilities of desire. By equating desire and sexuality, it condemns us to an endless repetition of the original incestuous and patricidal dyna-

284 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 288.
285 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 280.
mics. As a result, definitions of the ego, the normal, the abnormal and the real all assume the characteristics of natural immutability. In contrast, schizoanalysis assumes the task of "tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions." The liberation of humanity from political and social oppression requires the repudiation of the master narratives of desire, which would define the healthy ego and the real world in one way and one way only. The deterritorialization of desire necessitates a realignment of subjectivity and the Real to such a radical extent that capitalism and its program of internal colonization could not survive. Would any social structure be able to survive? Deleuze and Guattari are ambivalent on this point but they do make clear their belief that "one can never go far enough in the direction of deterritorialization." One begins to feel, therefore, that the ultimate goal of schizoanalysis is a sort of idyllic state of anarchy in which desire has lost all of its fearful attributes. In this sense, the work of Deleuze and Guattari may well suffer the same fate as its spiritual opposite, the fantasies of utopian control envisioned by H. G. Wells. Yet even if

286 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 362.

287 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 321.

288 If we are to read Anti-Oedipus as a work of utopian literature, then the contrast with Wells shows the profound changes that have occurred in that literary tradition since
they are guilty of a certain political naïveté (and I am not so sure they are), Deleuze and Guattari do us a service quite similar to that of Foucault and Lacan: they remind us of the positive and negative implications of our rhetoric of freedom, and how, in the domain of political practicality,

the work of Orwell, Huxley and Zamyatin. Wells stands in the mainstream of that tradition, extending back through More to Plato, where humane and liberal sensibilities see the path to social peace and harmony leading in the direction of greater controls of the flow of desire. For example, in The Shape of Things to Come (New York: The Macmillian Co., 1933), when the Air Dictatorship begins the task of building the World State after a catastrophic world war, the character De Windt points to "the Sokols, Nazis, Fascists, Communist Party members, Kuomintang members of his time, as the first primitive intimations of the greater organization that was coming" (p. 255). For all his fascination with authoritarianism and distrust of the flow of desire, however, Wells recognized the repressiveness of contemporary sexual mores and many of his novels reflect his advocacy of "free-love." The conclusion of In the Days of the Comet (London: The Macmillian Co., 1906) caused something of a scandal when first published because the hero, now living in a utopian world state made possible by the neurological changes effected by the comet's gaseous tail, marries one woman yet continues to have sex and children by another who is herself married to another man, and all with the knowledge and approval of those involved. In another work, however, A Modern Utopia (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967; orig. pub. 1905), Wells makes clear that his vision of sexual liberation extends primarily to men in that he feels state's duty is to insure the marital chastity of women in order to control population growth; any similar restrictions on a husband would be superfluous, however, because his unfaithfulness would do no more to the wife than "wound her pride and cause her violent perturbations of jealousy" (p. 195). What Deleuze and Guattari might well point out is that such hypocritical inconsistencies are the inevitable consequence in any society where a granting of relative sexual license is paid for by extensive augmentation of the controls on desire in general.
that rhetoric can collapse into a rhetoric of power without our even realizing it. Such a collapse goes hand in hand with the mythology of democracy that modern states, no matter what their political systems, find indispensable. This myth makes necessary such national titles as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the People's Democratic Republic of North Korea, even when the present governments of these countries in no way resemble republicanism. Similarly, the United States takes pride in being a democracy, but the fear of mob rule built into its constitution insures the localization of power in as few hands as possible. The work of Deleuze and Guattari makes clear that even though the rhetoric and mythology of freedom necessarily implies a breaking down of controls on desire, this possibility faces continual deferral because of the threat it poses to existing institutions of power.

The dynamics of power and desire, however, should not lead us to the mistaken conclusion that one is essentially repressive and the other liberating (a conclusion Anti-Oedipus implicitly endorses). By definition, power does mark the limits of possibility, but as we heard Foucault say, it also creates possibilities as much as it denies them. Desire, on the other hand, never simply flows, it takes a specific direction and a particular manifestation that can, and usually does, bring it into conflict with
other desires. Deleuze and Guattari realize this fact, and the purpose of their work is to illustrate the need to structure society in a manner that minimizes the need for power relations in the face of the demands of desire. What they continually obscure, however, is that power and desire, like fiction and history, are not separate and contradictory, but mutually dependent. Just as there cannot be fiction without history or modernism without postmodernism, neither can desire and power exist without manifesting the traits of the other. The need for power arises out of the effort to fulfill desire, and desire often cannot find fulfillment except through a power relationship. The solution to the problems of exploitation and oppression, therefore, does not lie in the eradication of power coupled with the uninhibited expression of desire, but in a thorough understanding of the dynamics that make the one inseparable from the other.

For our purposes in the present study, we need to realize that the inseparability of power and desire occurs within the same dynamics as that of history and fiction. The attribution of power to history comes from the latter's association with the identity of the group as opposed to fiction's with that of the individual. History has power not because it takes as its object the representation of the Real, but because its true object is the regulation and
proscription of the fictive, which, through the designation of the universally applicable subject-for-the-narrative, entails the subordination of the individual to the group. This subordination may or may not be evil, but subordination it remains, and for all the benefits we derive from it (stability, coherence and continuity), we nonetheless pay a potentially heavy price. The extent of that price, however, depends upon the degree of our understanding of the dynamics of history and fiction, and of what history does when it exercises its power against the fictive.

History and fiction, therefore, can never be separated, at least not on the basis of distinguishing that which happened from that which did not, or that which is real from that which is imagined. The ethics of mimesis is such that we have never had a problem including history within fiction, and indeed have often considered fiction to be enhanced by such an inclusion. A work with little or no historical referentiality usually finds its way into the literary sub-genres of fantasy and science fiction. The ethics of mimesis has yet to find a way of dealing with the inclusion of fiction in history without resorting to charges of falsehood or ideological distortion. With Nietzsche as a point of critical origin, White, Althusser and Barthes have shown how the historical field is constituted by imaginary, rhetorical and literary strategies of narrative and cogni-
tion, whereas Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari have shown that even the self, as a moment of historical presence, uses similar strategies to achieve its needed sense of solidity and coherence. The division of history from fiction, therefore, cannot rely on the separation of that which represents the Real from that which does not; for in its attempts at such representation, history does not deal with the Real, itself but with semiotic configurations, significations and symbolizations of it. As the signified referent, history is always the absence which our significations seek to fill.

The function of history, therefore, and at the same time its power, is not the representation of the Real, at least not as traditionally defined, because the Real as such is not its object. Rather, the function of history is the psychoanalysis of the Real in that history does not attempt to give us the thing itself, but a narrative configuration which will endow it with an acceptable meaning. White's psycho-therapeutic analogy leads to this same conclusion, but he hesitated to draw it, perhaps out of trepidation of entering where Deleuze and Guattari did not fear to tread. "There is only desire, environments, fields, forms of herd instinct," they write,289 and thus carry White's analysis to

289 Deleuze and Guattari, p. 287.
its necessary conclusion. The function of history is not only to direct but to explain and justify the directional flows of desire at any particular time, a function it carries out, as White explains, through narrative plot-structures; but as he also points out, such plot-structures have no incontestable validity, but remain, by definition, provisional and perspectival. They remain, that is, products of desire rather than of disinterested observation. In history, we do not look for the thing itself but for explanatory structures which channel the flow of desire in a way we find comprehensible.

The need to comprehend, however, extends beyond White's theory of refamiliarization, by which the historian relieves the trauma of the past. As used by White, history functions as the psychoanalysis of the Real in much the same way as psychoanalysis functions as the history of the individual, as a means of gaining new perspectives, reorganizing memory and changing the emphasis, if not the whole structure, of one's emplotment of the self, or in the case of history, of the group or nation. Like psychoanalysis, history is not the designation of the past but a means of designating it, a method of configuring the Real so as to do away with the ambiguities of representation. Meredith Anne Skura defines psychoanalysis as a process consisting of two strategies, "first, it insists on paying attention to everything, and
second, it mistrusts the seemingly obvious implications of what it then observes,"290 and the same can be said of history that understands its place in the ethics of mimesis. A history with this understanding pays attention to everything, just as it always has, and includes everything in its purview; but it will also hold its methodology up to suspicious scrutiny and never allow itself the comfort of obvious implications. In one sense, of course, history has always exercised this self-scrutiny, but it has done so only on the level of content and not on that of signification. A history aware of the ethics of mimesis will be one, as I said earlier, with nothing to hide because it will make clear that the psychoanalysis of the Real is a process of refamiliarization only because it is first of all a process of transference, that is, a means by which we articulate our relationship with the Real through the mediation of the dynamics of desire. Our existence as subjects depends, as Lacan says, upon the transference of meaning from the world onto the self, and the existence of history depends on just the opposite directional flow.

When White adopts Lacan’s theories to the study of historiography, therefore, he must go beyond simply talking about the discourse of the real versus the discourse of the

imaginary. He must also take into account Lacan's theories of the formation of the self and the degree to which the self is a fluctuating system of transferences. The moi, as we saw, consists of the continual appropriation of self-images from others during the mirror stage which the je eventually stabilizes. Similarly, the Other (A) consists of the symbolic discourse of the Other which plays a significant role in the structuration of the ego. For Lacan, then, the self consists largely of attributes and symbolizations transferred from others into the psychic economy whose dynamics constitute the self. In this regard, the self becomes an imaginary, symbolic and fictional entity rather than an evident and unqualifiable aspect of the Real. To speak of the self in Lacanian terms is to speak not only of the desire for others, but of the desire of others by which the individual comes into being.

So even before choosing a plot-structure, or, in other words, before transferring desire unto the Real, the historian has already been chosen by another's structure and by the transference of another's desire. We have the situation, therefore, in which the individual, observing consciousness which uses, according to White, imaginative and fictional strategies to configure the Real is itself the object and the result of such strategies. The existence of history thus depends upon a bi-directional system of trans-
ference, one flowing toward the individual and structuring
subjectivity and one flowing toward the Real so as to struc-
ture history. We have the situation where desire begets
fiction, which begets more desire and more fiction, and
somewhere in the midst of all this interaction we are sup-
posed to be able to find the Real. Even if the Real is
inaccessible, however, it does not follow that "the real
world" and history must be so as well. If we understand
history as a process of signification rather than as a
mimetic representation of the Real, then we can undercut the
ethics of mimesis without suffering any of the long-feared
apocalyptic consequences. If we understand with Deleuze and
Guattari that there exists only desire and its environments,
then we can understand the long-suppressed but pervasive
role of fiction in all conceptions of Reality.

Fiction has always been defined as that which has no
necessary connection with "real life" and, therefore, has
little or no consequences for the individual or the state.
The dependence of knowledge and understanding upon the
semiotic field, however, shows us that nothing within that
field has any such connection, either, and that the empti-
ness of the signifier occurs whatever its supposed relation-
ship with the Real. This disjunction from the Real means
that desire and imagination structure our world in a manner
far more radical than the reorganization of empirical data.
Empiricism itself is simply one more aspect of the dynamics of desire, which refuses to acknowledge its origins. Once it does so, however, it will not find that the foundations of the world have been pulled away, nor will it have learned the terrifying identity of that rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem. Instead it will find the fictiveness which has always been a constituent aspect of its objectivity and representation. And in so doing, it will not only find the power it has always wittingly or unwittingly exercised, but also the Reality in which it has always found its home.
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