

contention that language provides *Bilder* (pictures or models) of a real external world.<sup>2</sup>

Although, to be sure, there were isolated exceptions, such as the antischolastic rhetoricians of the Italian Renaissance, most notably Lorenzo Valla and Mario Nizolio, and the later, relatively isolated figures of Vico and Hamann, it was not really until our own century that mainstream Western philosophy took a decisive linguistic turn. Why this occurred, whether or not it was a product of the crisis in signification in later bourgeois culture, cannot concern us now. What is important to note instead is that the linguistic turn in philosophy affected many other disciplines and came in several different forms. It is now even threatening to penetrate the defenses of that most conservative of cultural enterprises, the study of history, through the opening provided by intellectual historians who have allowed what they examine to influence how they examine it.

Before speculating on the wisdom of following their example, one must determine which theory of language is being employed, for the reuse of the older descriptive model has taken several forms. Despite certain examples of cross-fertilization to be noted below, until very recently there has been a remarkable degree of insularity along national lines. In England, the linguistic turn was taken in the interwar era by Wittgenstein at Cambridge and J. L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle at Oxford.<sup>3</sup> Very schematically put and bracketing the differences among them, these philosophers understood language less as a neutral medium of expression or representation than as a complex human activity. Language was first of all speech, which was a central component of what Wittgenstein called a form of life. Accordingly, the philosopher's task was not to construct an ideal metalanguage neutralizing the concrete mediation of the speaker, but rather to examine and clarify ordinary language within specific social contexts. Understanding the meaning of a word as its specific use, the ordinary language philosopher directed his attention to the performative as well as descriptive function of language, at sentences as speech acts (promises, assertions, commands, questions, and so on) as well as propositions

<sup>2</sup>Wittgenstein's fidelity to this view of language in the actual writing of the *Tractatus* has, however, itself been called into question. See Dominick LaCapra, "Reading Exemplars: Wittgenstein's Vienna and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *Diacritics* 9 (Summer 1979), 65-82.

<sup>3</sup>Wittgenstein's later philosophy was preeminently expressed in his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (New York, 1955); Austin's major work is *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, 1962); Ryle's is *Concept of Mind* (London, 1949). For a general comparison of ordinary language philosophy and hermeneutics, see Gerard Radnitzky, *Contemporary Schools of Metaphysics*, 3d ed. (Chicago, 1973).

### CHAPTER THREE

## Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate

MARTIN JAY

When the intellectual historians of the next century come to write their accounts of our own, they will inevitably remark on the dramatic quickening of interest in virtually all disciplines in the question of language. Although anticipations of this change can be discerned in literature before 1900, an obvious example being the poetics of Mallarmé, the twentieth century dawned with the long-standing assumption still widely unshaken that language is an essentially transparent medium for the expression of ideas and emotions or the description of an external world. Private mental reflection was thus taken to be prior to public, intersubjective discourse. Generally accompanying the equally time-honored notion that truth is an adequate expression of objective reality, this concept of language can be traced at least as far back as Plato's denigration of Sophistic rhetoric and the poetical ambiguities of the Homeric epic.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps its most exaggerated manifestation in the Western philosophical tradition was Spinoza's attempt to negate linguistic mediation entirely by casting philosophy in the form of geometric proofs. In the early twentieth century, its greatest exemplar was Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* with its

<sup>1</sup>For a general history of philosophies of language, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, tr. Ralph Manheim, vol. I (New Haven, 1953), 117-176. Cassirer's survey is, to be sure, selective and ignores figures like Nietzsche who anticipated the twentieth-century linguistic turn. See also Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1975), and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979).

about the world. In Austin's terminology, such speech acts have three dimensions: a locutionary one, which conveys their propositional content; an illocutionary one, which conveys their force (the "I promise you that" or "I command you to"); and a perlocutionary one, which is actually what is done after the utterance is made. Because of their illocutionary force in particular, speech acts are to be understood essentially as communication between or among speakers, as intersubjective dialogues. In other words, language is an eminently social practice.

In France, linguistic philosophy has generally meant something very different than in England or Germany.<sup>4</sup> Here the turn came a generation later than in England. After the waning of existentialism, which at least in its Sartrean form paid little attention to language,<sup>5</sup> French culture discovered the revolution in linguistics begun by Ferdinand de Saussure before World War I and combined it with the ethnological speculations of Marcel Mauss to create the explosive movements that have become familiar to us as semiotics, structuralism, and post-structuralism. Abandoning the descriptive view of language, the proponents of these movements did not, however, embrace the English alternative of language as speech and intersubjective communication. Rather than focusing on meaning or intentionality, on the illocutionary dimension of utterances or speech acts, they explored what they saw as the deeper level of structural regularities that constitute language as an unintended and arbitrary system of diacritical signs, what in Saussure's now familiar terminology is the level of *langue* rather than *parole*. Interested less in the historical development of a linguistic system than in its synchronic relations, they tended to dismiss historical consciousness itself as a fictional construct no different from the other codes used in the present to order reality. The repetition of or transformations within a given set of relations interested them far more than change or process.

Although Saussure himself had seen speech as the basis of language, more recent post-structuralists, and here the obvious figure is

<sup>4</sup>The qualifier "generally" is necessary because there were and are French philosophers whose view of language is closer to German hermeneutics than to structuralism, i.e., Paul Ricoeur, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and George Gusdorf.

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of Sartre's relative neglect of language, see Dominick LaCapra, *A Preface to Sartre* (Ithaca, 1978), 26, and Joseph R. Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place* (New York, 1979), 268f. It should be noted that in the decade before his death in 1961 Merleau-Ponty discovered Saussure and began to reflect on his importance in *Le visible et l'invisible*, published posthumously in 1964. For a discussion, see Albert Rabil, Jr., *Merleau-Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World* (New York, 1967), 197-204.

Jacques Derrida, have emphasized the primacy or at least the equivalent status of writing. With its unspecified audience and absent author, writing suggests the autonomous nature of language as a system beyond human subjectivity. In the name of an impersonal play of intertextuality rather than intersubjectivity, they have systematically deconstructed all received notions of the subject, argued against reducing meaning to the intention of original authors, and inflated the role of the critic or philosopher into that of a godlike producer of new combinations of linguistic signs. Stressing the silences and absences in language, they have sought to unmask the ways language disingenuously hides from itself its inability to represent anything outside its own boundaries.

In the hands of the most historically concerned of the post-structuralists, Michel Foucault, intellectual history has been turned into an archaeology of past discourses whose diachronic transformation into each other is virtually ignored. Grounded in a view of language as more like an archive or library—impersonal, self-referential, and beyond subjective mastery—than an intersubjective dialogue, Foucault's alternative to traditional intellectual history eliminates concern over the issues of origin, cause, source, influence, and purpose. Instead, it concentrates on discontinuities and ruptures, remaining radically hostile to any teleological or causal view of the course of history. Although Foucault's position has evolved somewhat over the years, some would say in a direction closer to hermeneutics,<sup>6</sup> and while he has by no means been universally accepted by all post-structuralists, as his widely discussed polemic with Derrida demonstrates,<sup>7</sup> his anti-subjectivist concept of language can be taken to represent the general French attitude of the past two decades.

In Germany, on the other hand, a very different linguistic turn occurred. To understand its roots would require a discussion of German cultural history as far back at least as the Reformation, when Protestants needed to find a way to interpret scripture once the authority of the Catholic Church was no longer binding. The resulting practice of biblical exegesis became known as hermeneutics in the middle of the seventeenth century, following J. C. Dannhauer's use of the

<sup>6</sup>See David C. Hoy, "Taking History Seriously: Foucault, Gadamer, Habermas," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (Winter 1979); and the forthcoming book on Foucault by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow.

<sup>7</sup>Derrida began the quarrel with an attack on Foucault's *Folie et déraison* (Paris, 1961) in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris, 1967). For an excellent account of their differences, see Edward W. Said, "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978).

word in a book title.<sup>8</sup> Originally a Greek term, it referred to the god Hermes, the sayer or announcer of divine messages—often, to be sure, in oracular and ambiguous form. Hermeneutics retained its early emphasis on saying as it accumulated other meanings such as interpreting, translating, and explaining. Christianity had, of course, long emphasized the importance of the Word, Saint Paul having claimed that salvation comes through the ears. The sacramental character of speech continued to inform later hermeneutic theory as it widened beyond biblical exegesis. The *Sturm und Drang* philosopher Johann Georg Hamann, who shared with Vico a belief in the priority of poetry over prose, saw nature as the embodiment of a divine word that spoke to man.<sup>9</sup> Language and thought, he claimed against Kant and the Enlightenment, were one; abstractions violated the natural and sacramental character of the concrete word.

Although Kant and his successors in the idealist movement had little use for Hamann's irrational hermeneutics,<sup>10</sup> it was preserved and extended by the romantics, most notably the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. For Schleiermacher, all cultural creation and reception had to be understood as a process of continuous interpretation. His general hermeneutics went beyond the purely religious, legal, and philological uses to which it had previously been put. The understanding that marked everyday human interaction was hermeneutic in nature; all thought, Schleiermacher contended at an early stage in his career, was linguistic. Later he moved toward what might be called a more psychological version of hermeneutics in which the meaning to be recaptured was the original intention of a text's author, or even more fundamentally, his actual life experience. This latter assumption was also adopted later in the century by Wilhelm Dilthey in his attempt to ground the *Geisteswissenschaften* in a method of reexamining original intentionality. Under the impact of Husserl, Dilthey shifted away from a psychological version of hermeneutics in the last years of his life, but the concept of hermeneutics as the recovery of an

<sup>8</sup>J. C. Dannhauer, *Hermeneutica sacra sive methodus exponendarum sacrarum literarum* (1654). See the discussion in Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, 1969), 34.

<sup>9</sup>On Hamann's views of language, see James C. O'Flaherty, *Unity and Language: A Study in the Philosophy of Johann Georg Hamann* (Chapel Hill, 1952); and Harold Staehner, *Speak That I May See Thee* (New York, 1968).

<sup>10</sup>Although idealism was antihermeneutic, its proponents did not lack an interest in language. Hegel, in particular, was concerned with its importance. See Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague, 1973). It should also be noted that Wilhelm von Humboldt's very influential theory of language was in part indebted to Kant. See the discussion in Cassirer, 155f.

original authorial intention of life experience has continued to influence later thinkers such as Emilio Betti, E. D. Hirsch, and, to some extent, Quentin Skinner.<sup>11</sup>

In certain circles, hermeneutics also preserved its links with its religious origins. Twentieth-century theologians like Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Friedrich Ebner, and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy continued to share with Hamann a belief that divine revelation came through speech.<sup>12</sup> Committed to what the French post-structuralists would later damn as the "metaphysics of presence," they stressed the power of spoken language to unite subjects in a meaningful dialogue of common understanding, what Buber made famous as an "I-Thou" relationship. In Paul Ricoeur's well-known terms, they practiced hermeneutics as a recollection of primal meaning, a recognition of an original message, rather than as an exercise in suspicion to demystify illusion.<sup>13</sup> The latter, Ricoeur contended, was best exemplified by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, none of whom is normally seen as primarily within the hermeneutics tradition.

Within the more secularized variants of modern German hermeneutics, however, it is possible to see the effects of both tendencies, often in uneasy tension within the same thinker's work. In two recent traditions particularly, that of *Existenzphilosophie* and Critical Theory, both impulses have been operative. Although Martin Heidegger's central preoccupation was the restoration of Being, his later work after his celebrated "turn" emphasized the extent to which language is prior to human intentionality and subjectivity.<sup>14</sup> The demystifying potential in this latter argument has been recognized by no less a deconstructionist than Derrida, who has turned it with Nietzschean ruthlessness against the nostalgic yearnings for wholeness in Heidegger's quest for Being.<sup>15</sup> In Critical Theory, similar yearnings can be discerned in Wal-

<sup>11</sup>Emilio Betti, *Teoria generale della interpretazione*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1955); E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967); Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts," *New Literary History* 4 (Winter 1972), and "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," *New Literary History* 8 (Autumn 1975). For critiques of Betti and Hirsch from a Gadamerian standpoint, see Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, and David C. Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, 1978).

<sup>12</sup>For a discussion of their work, see Staehner, *Speak That I May See Thee*.  
<sup>13</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. Denis Savage (New Haven, 1970), 26f.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of Heidegger's philosophy of language, see Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, chapters 9 and 10; and the essays in Joseph J. Kockelmans, *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, 1972).

<sup>15</sup>Derrida's critique of Heidegger comes in his discussion of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche in "La question du style," in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1973). See the discussion in Gayatri C. Spivak's preface to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore,

ter Benjamin's speculations on a primal *Ursprache* and Jürgen Habermas's notion of an ideal speech situation, to which we will return shortly. But insofar as Critical Theory has been concerned with the unmasking of ideology, carried to its extreme in the antinomian moments of Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics, it must also be understood as practicing a hermeneutics of suspicion and demystification.

The tensions between the two impulses are in part responsible for the continued fecundity of the two traditions. Indeed, it might be said that the cutting edge of contemporary German hermeneutics is precisely where *Existenzphilosophie* and Critical Theory intersect, for it is here that the implications of the two types of hermeneutics have been most profoundly exposed. The central site of this intersection has been the ongoing debate between Habermas and the major disciple of Heideggerian hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Sparked in 1967 by Habermas's review of Gadamer's *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*, the debate has gone through several cycles and generated a flood of secondary comment.<sup>16</sup> It is of particular importance for historians because Habermas specifically extended the scope of hermeneutics beyond philosophy and cultural criticism to the study of society itself. Like Peter Winch, A. R. Louch, and Hanna Pitkin in the ordinary language tradition,<sup>17</sup> and a host of authors in the structuralist

and post-structuralist movement, he has speculated on the implications of a linguistic turn for social theory. Although the debate has not focused specifically on the issue of intellectual history, its implications are no less suggestive here than in other fields. Set against the hastily sketched backdrop of the other linguistic turns mentioned above and discussed elsewhere in this book, an examination of the confrontation between Habermas and Gadamer will help us to understand the opportunities and dangers latent in a basically linguistic approach to intellectual history.

Habermas's interest in hermeneutics was itself stimulated by Gadamer's work, so it is not surprising that they share a number of fundamental assumptions. Both reject the traditional philosophical view of language as a disinterested description of the real world, agreeing instead that it is a practical, intersubjective activity. Both see language, as Gadamer put it, as the "self-estrangement of speech," rather than a derivative of writing.<sup>18</sup> And both are interested more in the level of *parole* (or what the Germans call *Rede*) than *langue* (or *Sprache*). In Habermas's words,

This abstraction of *langue* from the use of language in *speech* (*langue* versus *parole*), which is made in both the logical and structuralist analysis of language, is meaningful. Nonetheless, this methodological step is not sufficient reason for the view that the pragmatic dimension of language from which one abstracts is beyond formal analysis. . . . not only language but speech too—that is, the employment of sentences in utterances—is accessible to formal analysis.<sup>19</sup>

Although the precise nature of this formal analysis in Habermas's work is not equivalent to Gadamer's hermeneutics, both thinkers reject the view that linguistic philosophy should study only underlying structures as synchronic diacritical systems. By emphasizing the rhetorical and pragmatic dimension of language as communication, they introduce an inevitable historical moment into their theories, which sets them apart from their French counterparts.

Gadamer, however, was a student of Heidegger's in Marburg during Wittgenstein and Justice (Berkeley, 1972); for a critique of the work of Winch and Louch in particular, see Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia, 1978).

<sup>16</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 354–355.

<sup>17</sup>Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, tr. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1979), 6. Habermas's confidence in the formal analysis of language's pragmatic dimension seems to stem from the early work of Searle, who has more recently retreated from this position.

1976). It should be noted that Derrida's reading of Nietzsche is more radical than Ricoeur's in that he denies a desire for ultimate truth beneath Nietzsche's hermeneutics of suspicion. For Derrida, Nietzsche posits an infinite play of metaphoricality.

<sup>18</sup>Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt, 1970); tr. in *Understanding and Social Inquiry* ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (South Bend, Ind., 1977). Habermas's critique was aimed at Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1965); tr. as *Truth and Method*, by Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York, 1975); several further exchanges are collected, with other contributions, in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* (Frankfurt, 1971). An English translation of one of Gadamer's replies can be found in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, 1976); another, with a rebuttal by Habermas, appeared in *Continuum* 8 (1970). The third edition of *Wahrheit und Methode* (1975) contains yet another reply.

The debate has stimulated widespread discussion; see Albrecht Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society*, tr. John Cumming (New York, 1971); Karl-Otto Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie* (Frankfurt, 1973); Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Culture: Gadamer and Habermas in Dialogue," *Philosophy Today* 17 (Summer 1973); Dieter Misgeld, "Critical Theory: The Debate between Habermas and Gadamer," in *On Critical Theory*, ed. John O'Neill (New York, 1976); Anthony Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London, 1977); Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); Hoy, *The Critical Circle*; and Jack Mendelson, "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate," *New German Critique*, 18 (Fall 1979). See also the special issue of *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (February 1975) devoted to the hermeneutics-Critical Theory controversy, which contains an extensive bibliography of relevant works.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London, 1958); A. R. Louch, *Explanation and Human Action* (Berkeley, 1969); Hanna F. Pitkin,

ing the 1920s, and remains indebted to a number of his major premises. Many of these were anathema to Habermas's mentors in the Frankfurt School, and although he revised Critical Theory in several crucial ways,<sup>20</sup> Habermas inherited their distrust of Heidegger's project.<sup>21</sup> Gadamer's residual Heideggerianism has thus been at the heart of the debate. Following his teacher, Gadamer has extended the scope of hermeneutics beyond that of a method of the cultural sciences in Dilthey's sense. Endorsing Heidegger's celebrated contention that "language is the house of Being,"<sup>22</sup> Gadamer sees hermeneutics as fundamentally ontological. That is, all human reality is determined by its linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*). To understand any of it, therefore, is to engage in a process, an endless process, of interpretive reflection. Because human beings are thrown into a world already linguistically permeated, they do not invent language as a tool for their own purposes. It is not a technological instrument of manipulation. Rather, language is prior to humanity and speaks through it. Our finitude as human beings is encompassed by the infinity of language.

The second lesson Gadamer learned from Heidegger follows from this ontological premise. Because humans are always in the midst of a pre-given linguistic context, they can never achieve a transcendental vantage point outside it. There can be no presuppositionless knowledge, no point of absolute origin. Knowledge can be gained only experientially, through what Aristotle called *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. It cannot be achieved by adopting the method of the natural sciences in which a neutral observer confronts an objective world, which he passively records. Method (that is, scientific method) is not the way to truth. The "alienating distanciation"<sup>23</sup> of the sciences must be replaced by a participatory involvement in the dialectics of subject and subject and object. Only by acknowledging one's place in an already given interpretative context, the so-called hermeneutic circle in which parts illuminate wholes and vice versa, can one correctly approach truth.

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of Habermas's departures from classical Critical Theory, see Axel Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno," *Telos* 39 (Spring 1979).

<sup>21</sup>For Habermas's criticisms of Heidegger, see *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt, 1971). Gadamer, it should be noted, also differed with Heidegger on certain issues. For an illuminating discussion of some of them, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (September 1980).

<sup>22</sup>Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit: Mit einem Brief über den "Humanismus"* (Bern, 1947), 53.

<sup>23</sup>This term is Ricoeur's; see his "Ethics and Culture," 156.

The third implication Gadamer drew from Heidegger's philosophy is that the scientific method was grounded in the untenable subjectivism that had dominated Western metaphysics since Plato. This subjectivism, which reached its apogee with Descartes, assumed that the individual subject could gain knowledge of reality, either deductively or inductively, through a monological act of consciousness. Instead, Gadamer contends, understanding is inevitably an intersubjective process in which the participants carry out an endless dialogue, an infinite translation. Because each participant is thrown into this flux, he is never able to achieve knowledge totally by himself or without the cultural presuppositions that inform his thought.

Finally, Gadamer learned from Heidegger to repudiate the premise underlying hermeneutics from the later Schleiermacher to the early Dilthey, and revived in our own day by Betti, Hirsch, and Skinner, the premise that interpretation means recovering the intentionality of the original author of a cultural product. "The meaning of a text," he insists, "surpasses its author not occasionally, but always. Thus understanding is not a reproductive procedure, but rather always a productive one."<sup>24</sup> Because it is impossible to suspend one's own linguistic presuppositions and cancel out one's own historical context, it is equally impossible to enter into the mind of another human being, especially one from an earlier era. "The meaning of hermeneutical inquiry," Gadamer argues, "is to disclose the miracle of understanding texts or utterances and not the mysterious communication of souls. Understanding is participation in the common aim."<sup>25</sup> Dilthey's belief that total empathetic reexperiencing is possible in fact betrayed a subtle capitulation to the Cartesian subjectivism of the scientific method, because it showed that he felt the present situation of the historian could be bracketed and the distance between the past and present nullified.

That distance, Gadamer claims, is less a source of error than a ground of truthfulness. For truth can be achieved only through what Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons" between the original thinkers or texts and their historical interpreters. Defining horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point," he contends that individual horizons are always partial.<sup>26</sup> Like language itself, truth transcends the particular

<sup>24</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 264.

<sup>25</sup>Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in *Interpretative Social Science: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley, 1979), 147.

<sup>26</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269.

horizon of any one participant in the hermeneutic process. It is rather a mediation of past and present, an "application" of the text to the contemporary situation, never an allegedly objective view of the past "in itself." History is thus neither a Rankian recovery of the past "as it actually was," nor a Crocean reduction of the past to contemporary consciousness, but instead an integration of the two.

Here parenthetically, one might note an important parallel, not always acknowledged,<sup>27</sup> between Gadamer and the antipsychologistic structuralists and post-structuralists who also fulminate against the reduction of meaning to intention. In fact, one recent observer has argued that Derrida, whose debt to the later Heidegger I have already mentioned, complements rather than contradicts Gadamer because of their common denial of objective knowledge, disdain for authorial presence, rejection of totalized experiences, and Nietzschean love for interpretive play.<sup>28</sup> The essential differences, of course, are that Gadamer has not gone as far as the post-structuralists in decentering the subject or replacing intersubjectivity by intertextuality. Nor has he argued, as has Foucault, for radical discontinuities in history, preferring instead to emphasize the possibility of fusing past and present. The characteristic violent gesture of *décapage* or rupture, which Edward Said has identified as common to many structuralists and post-structuralists,<sup>29</sup> is totally absent from Gadamer's approach. Although he clearly rejects the traditional philosophical view of language as transparent, he avoids the other extreme of assuming its perfect opacity. Language, as Heidegger stressed, is the site of disclosure, of "unhiddenness." While meaning may exist where it is not intended, it also may appear where it is. Even the texts of the past should be treated as potential partners in a process of dialogic communication, not merely as dead things to be decoded. Hermeneutics, in short, need not be reduced to a process of infinite demystification; meaning, if not simply recovered, can be produced.

Gadamer's hermeneutics is even more obviously comparable to the ordinary language philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. Both share a view of language as a practice or a game whose rules and procedures can be learned only experientially. But whereas Wittgenstein isolates his language games from each other as distinct forms of life, Gad-

<sup>27</sup>See, for example, the mistaken equation of Gadamer and Dilthey by Sande Cohen, "Structuralism and the Writing of Intellectual History," *History and Theory* 17 (1978), 176-177.

<sup>28</sup>Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 77-84.

<sup>29</sup>Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore, 1975), 324.

amer, more universalistic in his approach, argues for the potential translatability of one game into another. Similarly, he contends that hermeneutic interaction begins only between already mastered primary languages, while Wittgenstein focuses instead on the acquisition of language through a process of socialization into a form of life. For Gadamer, discourse is more like a dialogue or translation than a process of socialization; it is the fusion of already given horizons, rather than the achievement of an initial horizon *ex nihilo*.

But perhaps most important for our purposes, Gadamer, unlike Wittgenstein, contends that preconceptions, which he provocatively calls prejudices, play an inevitable role in the process of understanding. Indeed, he claims that it is only through our prejudices that our horizons are open to the past. Because Gadamer stresses the impossibility of presuppositionless knowledge, history plays a role in his hermeneutics that it never plays in English ordinary language philosophy. "Understanding," he argues, "is essentially, an effective-historical relation."<sup>30</sup> By "effective-historical" (*Wirkungsgeschichtliche*), Gadamer means that each text has accumulated a history of effects or interpretations that are a constituent part of its meaning for us. It is thus impossible to cancel out the intervening mediations, suspend our own historicity, and recuperate the initial meaning of a cultural phenomenon. The "correctness" of an interpretation is thus not a function of its fidelity to an imagined pure reading of a text; truth, as we have seen, is a historical fusion of horizons.

Moreover, Gadamer contends, an awareness of the effective-historical dimension of understanding helps to denaturalize our own given perspectives:

Only by virtue of the phenomenon and clarified concept of "temporal distance" can the specifically *critical* task of hermeneutics be resolved, that is, of knowing how to distinguish between blind prejudices and those which illuminate, between false prejudices and true prejudices.

We must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding and in this way realize the possibility that "other aims" emerge in their own right from tradition—which is nothing other than realizing the possibility that we can understand something in its *otherness*.<sup>31</sup>

Because of this avowed critical aim, Gadamer's position can be seen to have some resemblance to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, for

<sup>30</sup>Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 266.

<sup>31</sup>Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 156.

he distrusts both the text and the interpreter. At the same time, however, he is clearly concerned as much with the achievement of new truths as with the destruction of illusion, and is thus never as radically suspicious as Derrida.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not Gadamer provides a viable criterion by which to test true and false prejudices is a question to which we will return shortly.

Because Gadamer links truth and historicity so strongly, and argues for the dialectical overcoming of the gaps between language games, it is tempting to see an affinity to Hegel in his thought.<sup>33</sup> But in several crucial ways he remains closer to Heidegger. Although his view of the critic and philosopher is less passive than Heidegger's, he shares with his teacher an aversion to Hegel's metasubjectivism, preferring instead a concept of linguisticality that is prior to the distinction between subject and object. More important, he denies the Hegelian idea of an absolute, rational *logos* underlying the historical process as a whole. Stressing the finitude of human experience, he rejects the omniscient claims of Hegel's *Wissenschaft*. In fact, in Hegel's terms, Gadamer's untotalized infinity of perpetual translation would be called a "bad infinity" because of its resistance to closure. In opposition to Hegel, Gadamer elevates the power of authority and tradition to a place in knowledge denied them ever since the Enlightenment, except by romantics and conservatives. For Gadamer, tradition furnishes the flow of ideas and assumptions within which we must stand; even reason, he argues, is encompassed by tradition, rather than superior to it.

It was precisely on this issue that Habermas's quarrel with Gadamer was first joined in 1967. Although by no means a simple neo-Hegelian, Habermas was and remains anxious to retain Hegel's emphasis on rationality and his belief that history as a whole is potentially coherent. In fact, as Rudiger Bübner has argued, Habermas was even closer to Hegel than were Adorno and Horkheimer because of his desire to construct the synthetic speculative system that negative dialectics had denied was possible.<sup>34</sup> Although a major component of

<sup>32</sup>For an interpretation suggesting Gadamer's allegiance only to the hermeneutics of recollected meaning, see David Halliburton, "The Hermeneutics of Belief and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Diacritics* 6 (Winter 1976), 9.

<sup>33</sup>Gadamer has, in fact, written extensively on Hegel. See his *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutic Studies*, tr. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, 1976). For a brief discussion of his affinities to Hegel, see Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 215-216.

<sup>34</sup>Rudiger Bübner, "Theory and Practice in the Light of the Hermeneutic-Criticist Controversy," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (February 1975). Bübner contends that Adorno's negative dialectics should properly be called reflection rather than theory, because the latter implies system.

the eclectic system that he has constructed is indebted to Gadamer's hermeneutics, Habermas was compelled to challenge the ontological reading of hermeneutics Gadamer had derived from Heidegger. While agreeing that it had a practical dimension ignored by Dilthey, he nonetheless returned to the more modest Diltheyan notion of hermeneutics as a method of the cultural sciences. In somewhat traditional terms, he has argued that natural scientific knowledge is based on a nonhermeneutical, instrumental use of language, which is appropriate to the subjective domination of a natural object. More important, Habermas claims that in understanding society as well, hermeneutics can take us only so far. "This metainstitution of language as tradition," he writes, "is evidently dependent in turn on social processes that are not exhausted in normative relationships. Language is *also* a medium of domination and social power."<sup>35</sup> By grounding reflection entirely in the context-dependent understanding of the participants in the linguistic tradition, Gadamer had provided no way to go beyond their everyday consciousness. By stressing the prejudgmental nature of all understanding, he has proscribed calling into question the legitimacy of the conclusions reached by hermeneutical discourse. In other words, Gadamer lacks the means to uncover or criticize the socially determined distortions in communication which may produce an irrational or illegitimate consensus. What in the Marxist lexicon is commonly known as ideology critique is thus impossible on Gadamer's premises, because he fails to distinguish between authority and reason. Lacking a standard of criticism, he is too tolerant of and too receptive to the voices of the past. The emancipatory impulse of the Enlightenment, the generalizable interest in liberation from illegitimate structures of authority, is thus lost to Gadamer's theory, whose implications are inherently conservative.

It is perhaps indicative of Gadamer's impact on Habermas that in trying to overcome the weaknesses of a pure hermeneutics, Habermas resorts in large measure to a linguistic theory of his own.<sup>36</sup> But it is a theory tied less to the explication of the past than to the possibilities of the future. In ways that are too complicated to spell out now in any

<sup>35</sup>Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, 287. In stressing the extralinguistic existence of power, Habermas is making a criticism of Gadamer similar to that of Derrida made implicitly by Foucault.

<sup>36</sup>In *The Critical Circle*, Hoy goes so far as to argue that "Habermas's own later shift toward a linguistic theory of communication as the basis for a *universal* hermeneutics vindicates Gadamer's reply" (124). What should, however, be added is that Habermas does not rely on his universal pragmatics alone to ground his emancipatory interest, but integrates it with several other theoretical schemes which are nonhermeneutically defended.

detail, Habermas argues for what he calls a "universal pragmatics" based on the implicit norm of perfect communication contained, to be sure counterfactually, in every intersubjective utterance.<sup>37</sup> Drawing on the Austinian distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary dimensions of speech acts, further developed in the work of John Searle,<sup>38</sup> Habermas contends that even without the idealist fiction of an a priori transcendental subject,<sup>39</sup> it is possible to isolate a normative telos in speech. In pragmatic terms, this telos is the rational testing of truth claims in an ongoing process of critical clarification. "In the final analysis," he contends, "the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice versa, because speech-act-typical commitments are connected with cognitively testable validity claims—that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a rational basis."<sup>40</sup>

Translated into social terms, this rational validity testing can take place only between or among equal subjects in nonhierarchical relationships. But because such social arrangements have rarely prevailed,

<sup>37</sup>Habermas, "What Is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. For good accounts of Habermas's intentions, see McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 272f., and Albrecht Wellmer, "Communications and Emancipation: Reflections on the Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory," in *On Critical Theory*, ed. O'Neill.

<sup>38</sup>Searle, *Speech Acts*, (Cambridge, 1969).

<sup>39</sup>In earlier versions of Habermas's position, the transcendental nature of the anthropological interests he posited (an instrumental interest in the mastery of nature, a hermeneutic interest in linguistic consensus, and an emancipatory interest in liberation from illegitimate authority) was such that a number of critics argued that he had returned to Kant. In the introduction to a later edition of *Theory and Practice*, tr. John Viertel (Boston, 1973), he modified this position somewhat: "As long as these interests of knowledge are identified and analyzed by way of a reflection on the logic of inquiry that structures the natural and the human sciences, they can claim a transcendental status; however, as soon as they are understood in terms of an anthropology of knowledge, as results of natural history, they have an 'empirical' status." And in "What Is Universal Pragmatics?" he specifically distanced himself from Apel's "transcendental hermeneutics" for two reasons: "The idea underlying transcendental philosophy is—to oversimplify—that we constitute experiences in objectivating reality from invariant points of view. . . . However, I do not find any correspondent to this idea under which the analysis of general presuppositions of communication might be carried out. Experiences are, if we follow the basic Kantian idea, constituted utterances are at most generated. . . . Moreover, adopting the expression *transcendental* could conceal the break with apriorism that has been made in the meantime" (p. 24). Despite these disclaimers, some Gadamerian critics continue to talk of Habermas's "transcendental narcissism." (See Hoy, "Taking History Seriously" 94.) Although this epithet, which is actually from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, seems to me unwarranted, it is nonetheless true that Habermas's attempt to find a quasi- or nontranscendental vantage point is not without its problems. As McCarthy puts it, "the spectre of ultimate foundations still haunts the theory of cognitive interests; Habermas is not unaware of the problem but seems to feel that it can be remedied (if at all) only to the extent that the future progress of science leads to a unified theory of nature and society" (*The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 403).

<sup>40</sup>Habermas, "What Is Universal Pragmatics?," 63.

the linguistic telos of undistorted communication has not hitherto been generally realized in history. Gadamer's purely linguistic focus cannot account for this situation for two reasons: first, because it lacks a criterion of rational discourse based on nonhierarchical relations, and second, because it cannot provide a causal analysis of social relations, which emerge as much from the dialectic of instrumental reason, or labor, as from that of symbolically mediated interaction.<sup>41</sup> Thus, despite his anti-idealist intentions, Gadamer falls back into an idealized model of always possible perfect communicability. He has no sense of the need for an institutionally secured public sphere in which discourse can take place undistorted by inequalities of power.<sup>42</sup> As a result, he implicitly considers ideology to be caused merely by linguistic misunderstanding rather than by the interaction of linguistic, power, and economic factors.

In order to engage in an effective ideology critique, Habermas contends, it is necessary to employ both hermeneutic reflection and the type of scientific methodology used to examine natural phenomena. As Georg Lukács pointed out in *History and Class Consciousness*, society under-capitalism is experienced as if it were a "second nature." Although on the deepest level this is an illusion because society is historically mutable, it is an illusion that can not simply be dispelled by seeing through it, for it is rooted in social institutions and relations. In Habermas's early work, especially *Knowledge and Human Interests*, psychoanalytic therapy was offered as a model for the kind of combined hermeneutic and explanatory method necessary to emancipate men from the thrall of illegitimate authority. The hermeneutic dimension of therapy is crucial in relieving the patient's neurotic symptoms, which are essentially forms of distorted communication within the psyche; nonetheless, the therapist has to draw upon a theoretical framework that transcends his interaction with the patient. Although the ultimate justification for that theory is the patient's emancipation from his discursive blockages, the theory itself is grounded in a nonhermeneutic explanatory epistemology.

While he does not completely abandon the psychoanalytic model in his more recent work, Habermas has turned more to the develop-

<sup>41</sup>Habermas's distinction between these two dialectics was developed in one of his earliest works, *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'* (Frankfurt, 1968), as a corrective to the collapse of symbolically mediated interaction into the dialectic of labor in Marx.

<sup>42</sup>Habermas's first complete book, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied, 1962), dealt with the concept of the public sphere and its historical implementation. His later work on language clearly follows from this early interest in public discourse. See the discussion in Jean Cohen, "Why More Political Theory?" *Telos* 40 (Summer 1979).

mental theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, the systems theory of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, and the theory of historical evolution in Marx, all to be sure with revisions, to provide the extrahermeneutic criteria by which social and linguistic distortion can be measured. Whether or not these theories are themselves valid or can be integrated in a fruitful way is, of course, highly problematic. What must, however, be understood is Habermas's continuing effort to find a critical vantage point outside the hermeneutic circle by which to avoid the conservative implications of Gadamer's position. If we are to be paroled—no pun intended—from what Nietzsche called the "prison-house of language,"<sup>43</sup> it is to such efforts that we must turn.

For Gadamer, however, Habermas's attempts to get outside the hermeneutic circle have been in vain. In several replies to his challenge, Gadamer asserted once again the ontological quality of linguisticity. "There is no societal reality," he contended, "with all its concrete forces that does not bring itself to representation in a consciousness that is linguistically articulated. Reality does not happen 'behind the back' of language."<sup>44</sup> In other words, the dialectics of instrumental reason, labor, and social institutions cannot be examined without the inevitable mediation of language. There is no way to find an Archimedean point outside the hermeneutic circle.

Moreover, Gadamer contended, Habermas too hastily equates openness to the authority of the past with blind, dogmatic submission to tradition. For authority, which is not automatically wrong, may be willingly accepted through increased insight into its validity. In fact, he argued, "authority can rule only because it is freely recognized or accepted. The obedience that belongs to true authority is neither blind nor slavish."<sup>45</sup> Nor is it possible to hold all of our opinions up to the test of rationality at once; there is inevitably a measure of rhetorical persuasion involved in any of our beliefs. To think that reason can be opposed to tradition in every case is to posit an "anarchistic utopia" or a Robespierrean dictatorship of the *soi-disant* rational.

Finally, Habermas's specific attempt to find an extrahermeneutic vantage point in Freudian theory is misleading. The psychoanalytic encounter is between two individuals who share an a priori interest in the resolution of the neurotic symptoms of one of them. The analyst is

thus able, at least in theory, to bracket his own interests and work toward the common goal. Social interaction, in contrast, is among many different individuals or groups whose concrete, material interests may objectively clash. Possibly no amount of rational validity testing will lead to a perfect consensus. There is thus no necessary link between the ideal speech situation and the resolution of power-related material conflicts.

Recent defenders of Gadamer have added that his variety of hermeneutics is by no means as lacking in a critical dimension as Habermas has charged. Hermeneutics aims at the exposure of preunderstandings and prejudices in order to denaturalize the given perspectives of nonreflective participants in the linguistic process. In David Hoy's words:

Criticism implies distance, and the distance introduced by the generality of philosophical reflection makes possible the negative move essential to criticism. But criticism must also be able to return constructively, and here greater methodological self-awareness makes actual interpretations more self-consistent and hence more legitimate. Finally, hermeneutics also contributes a basis for arbitration between different interpretations by demanding that the extent to which the interpretation has clarified its own assumptions and scope—and has remained consistent with those assumptions and within that scope—be made a further test for the interpretation.<sup>46</sup>

All of these criteria—self-consistency, clarification of assumptions, methodological self-awareness—are, however, internal to the interpretation itself and have little to say about the fit between the interpretation and its object, let alone the criterion of rationality. Even if one admits that the object of interpretation is a construct created by the fusion of horizons, there is still the problem of how one decides which fusion is superior. One possible answer, which is implied by Gadamer's undefended assumption of the universality of hermeneutic discourse, is that the more encompassing the interpretation, the better it is. But contained in this view is the harmonistic belief that horizons can be fused into bigger and better wholes, a notion that calls to mind

<sup>43</sup>Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 130. It should also be noted that Gadamer strongly rejects the accusation that his position is relativistic in its refusal to seek absolutes outside of the hermeneutic circle. Following Heidegger, he sees hermeneutic reflection as allowing truth to be disclosed, contending that "the anticipation of perfect coherence presupposes not only that the text is an adequate expression of a thought, but also that it really transmits to us the truth" ("The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 154). But how perfect coherence and the disclosure of truth are to be verified Gadamer does not convincingly say.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in, and used as the inspiration for the title of, Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, 1972).

<sup>45</sup>Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 35.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

Karl Mannheim's belief in a "relationist" totalization of conflicting views by the free-floating intelligentsia.<sup>47</sup> As the Frankfurt School showed in its frequent critiques of Mannheim, there may well be unharmonizable dissonances between different positions which resist fusion, at least until social conditions themselves are noncontradictory.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the reproach Gadamer made against Habermas's reliance on psychoanalysis as a model of social and linguistic totalization can be turned against his own optimistic assumption of fused horizons.

That Habermas's own notion of an undistorted speech situation may in general be open to this same charge is undeniable, but at least it is cast counterfactually as a future possibility, a kind of regulative ideal, rather than a present and past reality. Other questions about Habermas's own solutions may, of course, be easily raised, and they have been, especially by those beholden to other linguistic traditions. Aside from the objections made by contemporary defenders of a positivist view of language, such as Hans Albert, followers of French trends have introduced a number of troubling criticisms. Lacanians such as Samuel Weber, himself a former advocate of Critical Theory, have questioned the possibility of a fully rational discourse among subjects whose inherent capacity for reason can by no means be simply assumed.<sup>49</sup> Criticizing Habermas's reliance on an ego psychological reading of Freud, they have argued that the unconscious, understood in Lacanian terms as a perpetually decentering engine of desire, cannot allow the type of undistorted communicative discourse Habermas posits as the telos of language. The ideal speech situation is thus another form of that logocentric desire for perfect presence which dominated Western metaphysics for millennia. Derrideans like Dominick LaCapra have added that, lacking a concept of supplementarity, Habermas posits rigidly categorical distinctions that reproduce, against his

<sup>47</sup>For a comparison of Gadamer and Mannheim, see A. P. Simonds, *Karl Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge* (Oxford, 1978), 92-96. Hoy, however, warns against too harmonistic an interpretation of Gadamer's position: "The term 'fusion' (*Verschmelzung*) is indeed misunderstood if it is believed, as some accounts of Gadamer seem to indicate, that the fusion is a *reconciliation* of the horizons, a flattening out of the perspectival differences. Although Gadamer does claim that a *single* horizon results . . . it must be remembered that a horizon is in flux and that the hermeneutic consciousness maintains a *tension* between the historical consciousness (of the past) and the strictly present horizon (*Gegenwartshorizont*)."

<sup>48</sup>For a discussion of their criticisms, see Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge," *Telos* 20 (Summer 1974).

<sup>49</sup>Samuel Weber, *Rückkehr zu Freud, Jacques Lacans Ent-stellung der Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt, 1978). For a discussion of this and other Lacanian critiques of Habermas, see Rainer Nägele, "The Provocation of Jacques Lacan: Attempt at a Theoretical Topography apropos a Book about Lacan," *New German Critique* 16 (Winter 1979).

intentions, a hierarchical structure of domination.<sup>50</sup> Defending the inevitability of ambiguity in terms Gadamer would approve, LaCapra suggests that "from the perspective of ordinary and literary language, the ideal speech situation might in one sense appear to be a technocratic fantasy."<sup>51</sup> Even those who generally support Habermas have acknowledged certain unresolved questions in his critique of Gadamer. As Thomas McCarthy concludes in his admirable summary of Habermas's work, "the shadow of the hermeneutic circle (in its Gadamerian, neo-Wittgensteinian, Kuhnian form) has by no means been finally dispelled."<sup>52</sup> And Jack Mendelson, who is also a partisan of Habermas in the debate with Gadamer, follows Paul Ricoeur in arguing for at least a partial return to the earlier Frankfurt School's notion of an immanent critique in which the truth claims of a society's ideology are compared with its practice. This return is necessary, he contends, to avoid the overly abstract and ahistorical nature of the perfect speech situation:

While in a sense the ideal of rational consensus may be immanent in language *per se* and not simply an external standard, in most societies it is bound to remain unarticulated in the actual culture. It becomes politically relevant as an ideal to be consciously striven for only in societies which have begun to approach it on the level of their own cultural traditions.<sup>53</sup>

Habermas's explication of his universal pragmatics is still very much in progress, so it is possible that he may yet meet some or all of these objections. In any event, it would be difficult to render a final judgment on the viability of his critique of Gadamer in the scope of this paper, even assuming I were fully equipped to do so. Instead, I would like to conclude with some observations about the relevance of the debate for the practice of intellectual history, in particular the issue of whether or not it should take a linguistic turn.

Most obviously, the Habermas-Gadamer debate reinforces the lesson learned from the ordinary language and structuralist critiques of the traditional notion of language as a transparent medium of expression and description. If language inevitably mediates meaning, indeed if it plays a constituent role in the creation of meaning, intellectual

<sup>50</sup>LaCapra, "Habermas and the Grounding of Critical Theory," *History and Theory* 16 (1977).

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>52</sup>McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 353.

<sup>53</sup>Mendelson, "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate," 73.

historians will have to pay some attention to the linguistic dimension of the texts they examine. How suggestive such an approach may be has already been shown by the pioneering efforts of Hayden White in *Metahistory* and *Tropics of Discourse*.<sup>54</sup> Although the boundaries between literary criticism and intellectual history need not be entirely dissolved, we have much to learn from our more theoretically self-conscious colleagues in that discipline.

The Habermas-Gadamer debate also draws our attention, however, to the fact that the intellectual historian who does want to incorporate linguistic insights into his work need not rely on only one paradigm of language to do so. Linguistic turns, as we have seen, may take very different directions. It may, in fact, be possible to integrate some of them, as Habermas's indebtedness to Austin and Searle and the common Heideggerian roots of Gadamer and Derrida suggest, but a fusion of the horizons of each is clearly no easy task. Choices, therefore, will have to be made. Because the tradition of hermeneutics has been most keenly interested in the question of history and has included historicity in its very definition of language, one can at least argue that it will be the most fruitful to follow. At the same time as it resists the naturalization of historical consciousness produced by a naively objectivist view of the past, it also avoids reducing history to an arbitrarily constructed fiction of the present.

Moreover, by jettisoning the earlier hermeneutic goal of perfect empathetic understanding of an authorial mind, Gadamerian hermeneutics frees us from the illusion that texts are merely congealed intentionalities waiting to be reexperienced at a later date. But at the same time, by resisting the radical antihumanism of structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, it reminds us that subjectivity, however that concept may be defined, can in fact be objectified, if in an inevitably mediated and imperfect way. Even if our intercourse with the past is through documents in the present, there is a dialogic component in that intercourse that cannot be put aside. Although it may well be that there is no perfectly centered subject lurking behind these texts, a subject which itself needs no further interpretation, it is nonetheless equally questionable to flatten out the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity to the point where no differences remain. Gadamerian hermeneutics, while avoiding what the New Critics W. K. Wimsatt

<sup>54</sup>Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), and *Tropics of Discourse; Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978). See also the suggestive use of Saussure's notion of syntagmatic relations in George Armstrong Kelly, *Hegel's Retreat from Eleusis* (Princeton, 1978).

and Monroe Beardsley called the "intentional fallacy," also resists what might be termed the "anti-intentional fallacy" of the structuralists and post-structuralists.

Another critical insight in Gadamer's account of interpretation arises from what he calls the effective-historical dimension of all understanding. The historical fate of a work should be included in the meaning of the work for us. What Gadamer's student Hans Robert Jauss calls a "reception aesthetics" suggests that the reproduction as well as production of a text must be taken into account in its interpretation.<sup>55</sup> The history of a text's effects may well be more a chronicle of successive misunderstandings than perfect reproductions, that "map of misreadings" suggested by Harold Bloom,<sup>56</sup> but the potential for the specific distortions that do occur can be understood as latent in the original text. Thus, while it may be questionable to saddle Marx with responsibility for the Gulag Archipelago or blame Nietzsche for Auschwitz, it is nonetheless true that their writings could be misread as justifications for these horrors in a way that, say, those of John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Tocqueville could not.

One final implication of Gadamer's hermeneutics that merits comment concerns the notion of a fusion of horizons. Putting aside its problematic harmonistic implications, what this fusion suggests is, first, that historians themselves must be aware of their own historicity and, second, that they are themselves irrevocably changed by their reflective involvement with the past. Although it would be wrong to characterize this involvement simply as a form of surrender,<sup>57</sup> it is nonetheless more ambiguous in this regard than either the outmoded positivist objectification of the past or the more recent structuralist version of the historian as a detached decoder of the synchronic relations of the past preserved in the present.<sup>58</sup> Gadamer's defense of prejudice may well have conservative implications, but it reminds us that we delude ourselves if we think our present vantage point is somehow

<sup>55</sup>Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt, 1970); for a discussion of Jauss's debt to Gadamer, see Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 150f.

<sup>56</sup>Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York, 1973), 152. For a comparison of Bloom and Gadamer, see Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 159f.

<sup>57</sup>Gadamer argues for a kind of surrender when he claims that "understanding involves a moment of 'loss of self' that is relevant to theological hermeneutics and should be investigated in terms of the structure of the game" (*Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 51).

<sup>58</sup>Lévi-Strauss once acknowledged that structure could be grasped only from the outside, whereas process and change can never be understood in this way ("La notion de structure en ethnologie" in *Sens et usages du terme structure* [The Hague, 1962], 44-45). It is thus highly questionable to assume the role of a detached anthropologist in examining the history of one's own tradition. See the discussion in Said, *Beginnings*, 335.

outside of history. Participation as well as distanciation is necessary to our understanding of the past. It is impossible, as some of the French post-structuralists seem to imply, to criticize the Western tradition from a position external to it.

Turning to Habermas's critique of Gadamer, there are two major lessons to be learned. First, Gadamer's Heideggerian ontologization of language need not be accepted without reservation.<sup>59</sup> As Ricoeur puts it in support of Habermas, "language is only the locus for the articulation of an experience which supports it. . . everything consequently, does not arrive *in* language, but only comes *to* language."<sup>60</sup> Because certain social forms can be read as if they were languages, there is no reason to suppose their linguisticity exhausts their being. However one may wish to chastise Habermas for failing to see the supplementary ambiguities of his categorical distinctions, it is equally unwise to collapse the dialectic of labor completely into the dialectic of symbolically mediated interaction. Indeed, to understand and expose the distortions in the latter, one must have a grasp of the contradictions in the former. Intellectual historians must, therefore, continue to probe the interaction between texts and contexts through a combination of hermeneutic understanding and causal explanation. Even if the contexts themselves can be read as texts, as Ricoeur has suggestively argued,<sup>61</sup> here too a combination of *Verstehen* and *Erklärung* is necessary to make sense of the dynamics of their interaction with the texts themselves. Only by so doing will we be able to combine an effective hermeneutics of suspicion with one of recollected meaning, which seems to me the most fruitful way to enrich our intercourse with the past.

The second lesson suggested by Habermas's challenge to Gadamer concerns the critical implications of a method combining hermeneutic and nonhermeneutic insights. Habermas, as we have seen, faults Gadamer for his uncritical tolerance of tradition and prejudice as standards of judgment. Although Gadamer and his supporters have responded that hermeneutics does in fact contain critical standards by which to separate true from false prejudices, these have been relatively empty, imprecise, and self-referential. And as David Hoy has admitted, the central assumption of the universality of hermeneutic

<sup>59</sup>The same objection might be made against some of the post-structuralists—such as Derrida, who, in Hayden White's words, "is the minotaur imprisoned in structuralism's hypostatized labyrinth of language" (*Tropics of Discourse*, 280).

<sup>60</sup>Ricoeur, "Ethics and Culture," 162.

<sup>61</sup>Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text; Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Interpretative Social Science*, ed. Rabinow and Sullivan.

discourse, which separates Gadamer from Wittgenstein, is itself incapable of being grounded hermeneutically.<sup>62</sup> What, moreover, is the hermeneutic justification for that "anticipation of perfect coherence" which Gadamer insists is "always at work in achieving understanding"?<sup>63</sup> Habermas has confronted this problem with great candor and struggled to find more rational criteria linking language and society, without, however, falling back into a discredited transcendentalism. He has remained true to the classical Frankfurt School insight that critique and rationality are intimately linked. Whether or not he has fully succeeded in demonstrating the nature of that link, of course, is still very much in dispute.

But what does seem to me indisputable is the need to pursue such a search. There are, to be sure, some commentators who would equate rational criteria with the establishment of hierarchy, which in turn becomes an excuse for domination. Gadamer himself darkly warns against the Robespierrean danger in Habermas's fetish of reason.<sup>64</sup> To avoid this implication, it has sometimes seemed necessary to go to the opposite extreme of embracing what Edward Said has called the "nihilistic radicality" of Derrida's infinite play of dissemination and supplementarity.<sup>65</sup> It is, however, an illusion to think that in so doing, hierarchy is somehow avoided. For as Hayden White has acutely noted in his discussion of the "absurdist moment" in recent criticism, the result of so total a rejection of reason, totalization, and coherence is to privilege nature over culture, and in fact nature in its most demonic forms.<sup>66</sup> Habermas, to be sure, may have underestimated the costs of his own choice, as critics of his ego psychological model of the psyche have contended. The older Frankfurt School theme of the domination of nature has, in fact, been relatively muted in his revision of Critical Theory.<sup>67</sup> But he has certainly remained faithful to his mentors' concern for the dangers of an irrationalist celebration of the natural.

Intellectual history is, of course, filled with unattractive examples of rationally judgmental readings of the past—Lukács' notorious *Die*

<sup>62</sup>Hoy, "Taking History Seriously," 94.

<sup>63</sup>Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 153.

<sup>64</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 3d ed., 534.

<sup>65</sup>Said, *Beginnings*, 343. LaCapra argues that "Derrida's approach does not sterilize utopian hope" (*A Preface to Sarrre*, 224), but it is difficult to see how his nihilism avoids just this sterilization.

<sup>66</sup>White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 269.

<sup>67</sup>For an acute discussion of Habermas's attitude toward nature, see Joel Whitebook, "The Problem of Nature in Habermas," *Telos* 40 (Summer 1979).

*Zerstörung der Vernunft* comes to mind as a particularly insensitive case—and one would certainly not want a revival of Enlightenment historiography at its most naive. But in turning too eagerly to linguistic philosophy in any of its various guises and making it the sole or that primary source of our method, we risk losing the critical edge that rationalism, defended by Habermasian or other means, can provide. To avoid that risk, we must, to be sure, distinguish among various types of rationality—substantive, formal, objective, subjective, instrumental, technological, practical, and so on—in order to rebut the identification of reason with only one of its variants. Too often, in fact, such a reduction occurs, with the result that reason is rejected out of hand.

This sequence has perhaps been followed by certain contemporary linguistically inclined philosophers, Gadamer generally equating reason with the monological "subjectivism" of the scientific method and Derrida associating it with the logocentric desire for perfect presence underlying Western metaphysics. Because they are able to expose the vulnerabilities of these variants of reason, they move, perhaps too quickly, to a denigration of reason *per se*. Habermas's defense of reason as an intersubjectively generated quasi-regulative ideal entailed in discourse itself shows that these reductions of reason by no means exhaust its meaning. Indeed, the extraordinarily rich and fecund tradition of rationalism, in all its forms, is part of that "effective-historical consciousness" which constitutes the horizons of contemporary men and women. Intellectual historians ignore at their peril its power to give our intercourse with the past a valuable critical dimension.

To defend a rational moment in our method is not, however, to deny the importance of the recent turn in philosophy to linguistic issues. Just as the alternative between seeing language as either perfectly transparent or totally opaque is too rigidly posed, so too the opposition between a linguistically informed intellectual history and one indebted to traditional (or in Habermas's case, nontraditional) concepts of rationality is unnecessarily extreme. Whether the two horizons can be perfectly fused or must remain forever in a supplementary interaction is impossible to say. But without some dialogic play between them, our reading of the past will remain either anachronistic, in the sense of being indifferent to the liveliest philosophical currents of our day, or, what is worse, incapable of providing a critical perspective on the past and present in the name of a more attractive future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Triangular Anxieties: The Present State of European Intellectual History

HANS KELLNER

When I contemplate the present age with the eyes of some remote age, I can find nothing more remarkable in present-day humanity than its distinctive virtue and disease which goes by the name of "the historical sense."

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

## I

The historian looks backward; eventually he also believes backwards.

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

When historians ponder the future, even the future of their own trade, the time is, at least in some small and very literal sense, out of joint; the future, that great generator of insecurity, must be defused, turned into a special variety of the past, a new sourcebook in the "lessons of history." Since the question "Where are we going?" almost invariably covers the question "Where are we?"—itself a surrogate for the question "Where have we just been?"—our logic or direction of inquiry will doubtless bear out the truth of Nietzsche's sarcasm about believing backwards.

The origin of inquiry into the future of anything is found in an apprehensive desire to grasp something that seems to be unraveling or slipping away; and concern for the future of academic disciplines is