The Reading of Theoretical Texts

A critique of criticism in the social sciences

Peter Ekegren

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Since the structuralist debates of the 1970s the field of textual analysis has largely remained the preserve of literary theorists. Social scientists, while accepting that observation is theory laden, have tended to take the meaning of texts as a given and to explain differences of interpretation either in terms of ignorance or bias. In this important contribution to methodological debate, Peter Ekegren uses developments within literary criticism, philosophy and critical theory to reclaim this study for the social sciences and to illuminate the ways in which different readings of a single text are created and defended.

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Epigraph

Expository discourse is therefore forced to conform to a conventional external structure—the image suggested by the sound seeks no more than an empty euphony, and the syntactic and intonational structure seeks no more than an empty case of manner, a smooth finish, or it might seek (in the other direction) an equally empty rhetorical complexity, something florid and overblown, an ornamented exterior, a reduction of semantic polysemy to empty single meanings. Expository prose may, of course, even adorn itself with poetic tropes, but in such a context they lose the kinds of meanings they have in poetry.

M.M.Bakhtin (1981b:380)

Joyce, in Ulysses, is often very reluctant to speed along the syntagmatic trail…Often it is as if he cannot bear to part with many of the paradigmatic possibilities that have occurred to him. He will stop and climb up the paradigmatic chain on all sorts of occasions…These lists do become syntagmatic in themselves, and they further relate to other lists and other parts of the whole narrative in a syntagmatic way.

Robert Scholes (1974:188)[1]

Preface

I hope my intention is clear

Jacques Derrida

If the meaning of the text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text

E.D.Hirsch, Jr.

There is nothing outside the text

Jacques Derrida

There are no texts

Harold Bloom

The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author

Roland Barthes[2]

The problem that I will deal with in this book is one that for a long time has been neglected in the social sciences. Although neglected, it belongs to a problem area that concerns almost every social scientist's everyday activity—that of the understanding of the texts he or she reads. In much social scientific practice, it is accepted that all *observation* is theory-laden. However, when social scientists confront their texts, it seems as if this observation or insight is forgotten or ignored. It is as if texts, in contradistinction to objects of knowledge 'out there', are thought to be *given* in a way that make the theory-ladenness of observation superfluous—as if, that is, the text as text belonged to a 'theory-free' realm that invalidates the claim that what we see we see through the spectacles that are our theories. This makes the presence of differences of interpretation of these texts a somewhat mysterious phenomenon, largely assigned to the reader's private motives or lack of knowledge.

I will deal with these problems and argue that there are *other* mechanisms at work in the reading of scientific texts[3] that more fruitfully will assist in our understanding of why multiple interpretations occur. More specifically, I will move into the problems of textual properties and of modes of reading or modes of critique of theoretical texts. Ultimately, I want to contribute to the understanding of *how different readings of a single text get their support*.

I will approach these mechanisms through a critique of some received notions. Thus, I shall look at how different schools of thought in the fields of literary theory and linguistics conceptualize *language* and, more specifically, what consequences the common dichotomization poetic/referential language has for our understanding of theoretical texts. This differentiation of language makes it possible to claim that there is a fundamental dissimilarity between literary and scientific texts, a difference so great that the modes of understanding the two kinds of texts qualitatively differ. Neither dichotomy—of language and of text— is, I will argue, tenable. Certain aspects of Saussure's linguistics offer, however, possibilities for an understanding of *any* kind of text. Most notable of these aspects is his theory of the sign as a *relational* entity, founded upon differences. I will thus follow some threads from Saussure into the Saussurean aftermath, one of which is the Derridean radicalization of difference into *différance*.

Also, I will cover one kind of *intentionalism,* i.e. a kind of understanding that claims that the meaning of a text is to be located in the author's intentions. Here, in the teleological mode of reading, the author's intentions are supposed to be closest to fulfilment in his last text, in the light of which his intentions and, in the same move, meanings in earlier texts are identified. I challenge this view, showing that flaws inhere which actually prevent the understanding of texts as *texts*.

I will then move on to the widespread notion that the discovery of the *unified meaning* that is supposed to be hidden in the text constitutes a *sine qua non* for a successful interpretation of texts. This notion, which runs through numerous modes of reading, is, I claim, based upon a fundamental disrespect for and violation of the text, taking instead as its starting point the readers idea of what the text *ought to be*. Through a process of 'purifying' the text, unity will be accomplished to the critic's delight but at the expense of the text itself.

Through the critique of these different themes or notions, notable for their fundamental denunciation of the text itself, I will argue that it is necessary instead to consider the text *in its own right,* with what flaws it may have, such as, for example, gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities, and in so doing laying bare its meaning-producing structures. Accepting the text's *incompleteness,* two things will be accomplished. It will be possible to see how the text is a necessary condition of existence for the production of multiple meanings, and it will also be possible to understand how different readers, belonging to different schools of thought, may seize upon alternate meanings in the text and thus produce divergent interpretations when reading the same text.

Overview of the text

In the literary theories that I look at below in order to get some clues as to why different readings of *theoretical* texts occur, a question these theories have not taken as of prime importance and to a large degree actually ignored, there are some crucial and pervasive *themes* that I will concentrate upon and follow through. Some of these themes pertain to *texts in general,* while others only relate to *certain kinds of texts,* scientific ones included.

I want to emphasize that I concentrate upon *themes;* thus, instead of primarily analysing different schools of thought and how these in different manners theorize, for example, author, text, and reader, I have chosen certain more or less encompassing themes or problem areas and will try to show how these themes, in different guises and disguises, are present in most theories that deal with the problems of understanding texts.

Two of the three themes I have chosen to pay attention to, that of *language* and its possible dichotomization on the one hand, and that of *unity* as the ultimate goal of interpretation on the other, both seem to be involved in an unfounded but prestigious elevation of *science* and *scientific language* inasmuch as they both partake in the upholding of science and scientific texts as *transparent*. Once the required skills are acquired, the transparency is there for all to see.

The third theme, the view that the author's intention(s) should be seen as the foundation of meaning, is in its characteristic nature permeated by the first two, inasmuch as a reliance upon the author's intention(s) seems to presuppose both that the author has control of his language and that he has control of the meaning he is trying to convey.

Now, in order to *show* the widespread occurrence of these themes in different modes of reading and in individual theorists, the exposition below will touch upon some important or dominant literary and linguistic theories, albeit in a way that cannot take into consideration all aspects of these theories or theorists.

This mode of presentation—*of showing*—has had certain consequences; to some it may make the text seem overloaded with quotations. But there are other reasons for this possible abundance of quotations, so let me briefly comment upon these before moving on.

One reason for this wealth is the rather simple fact that any text, including mine, works upon already existing raw material. This raw material, the already written, the already thought, is the basis upon which every new text is erected, through the workings upon which any text is produced. The already written thus plays no insignificant role in the production of a theoretical text—on the contrary, it must *by necessity,* I claim, *dominate it*. What may be 'new' in a text can then be seen as the *specific combination* or articulation of the already done, and although this may seem insignificant, it need not so be, as so many texts bear witness to.

Now, this already written, these already available elements, that in their specific combination constitute the text, may be differently *realized* in it. They may or may not be given their due respect. And it should be emphasized that however critical

one may be in certain respects, the sheer existence of what is criticized is a condition of existence for the critique. One way of showing this respect, of acknowledging the already written, of making it visible, is via quotations. I have deliberately chosen this way. In this way my 'sources' will stand out.[4]

But I have not chosen this way only because of what has already been written. There are still other reasons, of which one is the possibility to show that the already written *also* points in *other* directions than those I concentrate upon. This is, I mean, another way of paying respect. The last reason that I want to put forward is a rejection of the ego-strengthening and frantic pursuit for 'originality' that dominates too much of the writings in the academic world and which actually amounts to no more than a posturing of one's self in front of 'words of one's own' that are actually words and thoughts of others.

Now, to the general outline of the book.

Chapter One, the *General introduction,* is a presentation of the reasons that prompted me to write this book, i.e. a deep dissatisfaction with the state of the art of reading texts in the social sciences.

The chapter begins by pointing out that *language* and *textuality* gradually has won recognition among social scientists, and that this ought to have repercussions on how we understand the texts we read as social scientists.

Also, I point to the fact that how we read texts has—for example—a direct bearing upon the production, reproduction and progression of a discipline's history, development and identity. Different readings of, i.e., the 'sacred texts' will result in different histories, different identities, etc.

I point to one of the most common objects of knowledge of social scientific criticism, that of the theoretical system, and note that it may be approached from two main directions—from that of its consistency and from that of its history of production.

My claim is, however, that the text itself is not among those that social scientists have devoted but scant attention to. This deficiency might be seen as the ultimate motive behind what follows. However, a theoretical text may be read with different interests in mind, all presumably legitimate. Among these alternatives, I will focus upon the text as such.

The chapter ends with a brief 'excursus' on the discourse concepts.

The next chapter, *The social sciences and criticism,* is devoted to the (non)problem of reading theoretical texts in the social sciences. I argue that customary readings in the social sciences of this kind of text to a large extent are 'innocent'; innocent in that reading is an activity that is spontaneous, non-reflected upon. In other words, reading is taken for granted, is taken to be unproblematical. Now, this spontaneous practice has more often than not its starting point in the reader's own assumptions about what should be. That is, it is based upon the reader's theoretical, epistemological, etc. presumptions, not those of the text.

Such a practice, however, has effects that are highly disturbing. To illustrate some of these effects, I exemplify by some established readings of the classical political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Here, we can recognize highly

divergent 'interpretations' of Smith's and Ricardo's respective theories of value, where in each case the search is for the (allegedly) *true* theory of value held by Smith and Ricardo, respectively. This phenomenon—divergent interpretations—is not something uncommon in the field of the social sciences.

Now, one reason for this phenomenon is, I argue in agreement with Louis Althusser (1975:14), that *there are no innocent readings*—only *guilty* ones. This claim is in concert with insights emanating from the fields of philosophy of science and literary theory. Among many practitioners in the former field, Norwood Russell Hanson and, after him, Thomas Kuhn and Paul K.Feyerabend, as well as Althusser from within Marxism, all argue that there is no such thing as neutral observation—all observation is theory-laden. In the literary theoretical field, the sheer existence of numerous and divergent schools of explaining texts attest to the same 'fact', i.e. that each text is read from a certain vantage point. It is pointed out that being unaware of the vantage point from which the reading is executed does not annihilate the vantage point itself (or perhaps better: the vantage points themselves, since there is nothing to say that the reading is governed by a coherent strategy), it merely makes the ground more insecure to stand on.

The third chapter, *Language and criticism,* introduces the first of the themes mentioned above, i.e. that of *different kinds* or *functions of language*. There is a distinction made within *almost* all schools of thought in the field, i.e. that between *literary* and *referential* languages and texts (the terminology between theories differs, though). Literary language is held to be characterized by polysemy and polyvocality while referential language, and thus the scientific text, is allegedly unisemic and univocal. This notion is one of the main problems that I deal with and challenge. In this respect, I argue, there is *no* difference in kind.

The assumption of science's transparent language that runs through certain, non-Saussureran, modes of reading makes it possible to claim that the reading of scientific texts is qualitatively different from the reading of literary texts. In the latter case, it is held, reading is a troublesome venture caused by a language that is, among other things, ambiguous and poly- or non-referential. In the former case, in contrast, not only is language unisemic, its referentiality is also regarded as quite unproblematic. Not only, in other words, is the text transparent, so is also its relation to reality. I will argue below that this position is a truly misconceived one and that it springs from a naive view of scientific practice. *One* argument against this view is the existence of different, among themselves contradictory, schools of thought in the social sciences, the existence of which at least ought to make the notion of reference worthy of some further consideration.

Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism, literary theories inspired by Saussurean linguistics, and particularly by the *theory of the arbitrary sign,* share some properties with this notion of a dichotomous language, the crucial point of *difference,* however, being that in Saussure as in a mode of thought or any conceptual apparatus signs and concepts get their meaning in relation to the other signs or concepts in the system. The implication of this is, then, that the referentiality of language becomes problematic.

There are, however, some possibly disturbing effects in Saussure's theory that cannot be easily passed by. Very briefly, they have their roots in Saussure's view that language consists of discrete *differences* which, however, Jacques Derrida extends and remedies by his non-concept and principle of *différance,* a principle that threatens language's referential capacity altogether. This brings polysemy and polyvocality back on the agenda again, although in different guises. The justifications for these positions are questioned in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter I criticize an intentional mode of reading, *The teleological mode of reading*. Beginning by giving a short overview of some criticisms directed at intentionalism in general, I then proceed to the teleological mode as identified by Stephen Savage. It should be noted that this mode is but one possible road for intentionalists to take.

Common for critiques of some forms of intentionalism is that they seek external evidence for the meaning of a text, while non-intentionalists and certain intentionalists argue that texts contain their own meaning, whether this meaning is to be thought of as intended or not. The teleological mode of criticism belongs to the former kind.

Inherent in the teleological mode of reading is that texts—because its object of knowledge is not the single text, but a number of texts—are read in relation to an end product, the final text—this final text then in effect becoming the starting point for 'a history read backwards'. This makes it possible to ignore qualities of earlier than the last text, in so far as logical defects, etc. can be seen as being more and more perfected as time goes by and with all the answers in hand. Thus, specific texts' individual distinctivenesses are disregarded, either by regarding these texts as rough drafts or by playing down incoherences, etc. that are any way solved or silenced in the final text.

Related to this is the author function (Foucault); i.e. that the author functions as a principle of unity, conceptual and otherwise. Also involved may be a theological conception of the author as creator.

To illustrate the hazards of the teleological mode of reading, I have chosen a chapter from the British philosopher Michael Dummett's *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (1981a), where textual exegesis is the matter discussed, and I show that his reading of Frege as here suggested corresponds to the teleological mode as outlined in the preceding pages, starting from an end-product to which all other texts are measured and ignoring specific properties of texts earlier than the final product. The theme of unity in Frege's thought is made prominent, as is creation *ex nihilo*.

However, the end-product chosen by Dummett has a dual status in his reading strategy, since it is not only a yardstick against which to measure earlier texts, but it must also be read in its own right, without any external validating principle. This indicates, I argue, an inherent limitation in Dummett's reading strategy proposal.

Unity is prominent in Dummett's thought in yet another way. I detect it in his lacking comprehension of others' interpretations of Frege. This shortcoming can be explained by reference to Dummett's non-theorization of the role of language

in texts and in interpretation; i.e. for Dummett there is but one way of reading texts, and differences can be set within the conceptual scheme of this only way by 'careful discussion'.

Thus, for the understanding of individual texts with their contradictions, ambiguities, etc. a reading strategy such as Dummett's can be of no assistance, veiling the specific texts' own conceptual apparatuses, their own 'logic', their own imperfections. The quest for unity present in the author function prohibits through the teleological drive, it seems, a respect for individual texts.

In the penultimate chapter, *Interpretation and the harmonious whole,* my main purpose is to argue, first, that a *myth of unity* pervades many or most reading strategies and, second, that this myth is harmful to the understanding of texts. In criticizing it, I bring up 'the fallacy of interpretation' from Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production* (1978) and discuss it from two angles. First, interpretation as conceived by Macherey does not produce any new knowledge of the text since its aim is through a purifying process to recover its *hidden meaning,* i.e. to repeat the already said albeit in other words. Second, and this constitutes a main theme in the chapter, interpretation is founded upon the presupposition that the text entails *one* meaning, that it is a united and harmonious whole. I show that this theme is be found in literary theories, such as, for example, New Criticism, hermeneutics, structuralism, etc.

Now, to look for a single meaning in a text is not an innocent undertaking, I argue, but has as its necessary corollary negligence of other possible properties of the text: it *forbids* the reader to deal in appropriate ways with contradictions, ambiguities, etc. in texts (some of these effects has been shown in the preceding chapter). The text becomes 'purified' in the process of interpretation. Purification may be of different kinds, but a common trait is that in this violation or purification of the text, the process takes as its starting point the reader's assumptions of how the text *ought* to be, not what it is.

Still another reading strategy that tries to understand how and why different readings of texts are possible and which also accepts the text as unified is proposed by the Prague Structuralist Felix Vodicka, whose theory I proceed to analyse. Vodicka is influenced by Roman Ingarden, from whom he has borrowed the concept of *concretization* around which my discussion revolves, and I show that certain elements in Ingarden's conception of concretization may be fruitful, i.e. those of *places of indeterminacy* and *elements of potentiality,* while Vodicka's is not, upholding as he does the myth of unity. Ingarden, for sure, also operates with a conception of harmony, but only for *artistic* texts, *not* for scientific ones. Thus, indeterminacies and potentialities in a text help explain how and *why* different readings of a text not only are possible but also are *necessary:* texts *have* to be realized in the act of reading and understanding and will be realized in different ways, where each way is dependent upon the assumptions governing the reading. Following this, I draw the conclusion that from Ingarden's conception it is possible to proceed without risking the unity-seeking relativism that is inherent in Vodicka's view.

Indeterminacies, potentialities, gaps, ambiguities, etc. that exist in a text are then the object of discussion in the final chapter, *Holes in wholes in wholes,* where I will outline a way of understanding the mechanisms of texts that helps avoid pitfalls such as those that have been confronted throughout the previous pages. This is done with the help of well-known notions such as *intertextuality, discursive space,* as well as of my own *paradigmatic leap.*

I argue that the theoretical text can be seen as an articulation of meaning-producing systems, an intertextuality, where meanings are multiply-produced, from polysemous words to polyvocal intertextual relations, from the contextualization of sentences and arguments, from spots of indeterminacy, from contradictions, etc. These systems intersect and fuse in the text, contributing to its fundamental instability. This makes possible what I call—inspired by Saussurean terminology —paradigmatic leaps.

The text is seen as a syntagmatic sequence that is related to a discursive space. I advance the idea that this space may be divided into two subfields, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, respectively. Theoretical systems as meaning-producing mechanisms may in an analogous fashion be so depicted. I suggest that those semantic interrelationships, those texts, statements and concepts in this space that are at odds with or openly contradict the text, belong to its paradigmatic subfield. The paradigmatic subfield can then be seen as constituted by other syntagmatic sequences or of other, opposing theoretical systems.

Holes and indeterminacies, etc., that exist in a text will have to be realized by the reader. This 'concretization' may be done with not fully contextualized terms, spots of indeterminacy or contradictions as starting point, and as any of these makes the text aim in more directions than one, it opens up for a paradigmatic leap; i.e. a leap from one syntagma, from one school of thought, through the text's paradigmatic subfield into another syntagma, another school of thought. These are the text's subversive implications conjoining the reader—this is what I mean by the paradigmatic leap.

Wherever the text makes it possible, through its multiplicity of meanings, the reader will spontaneously tend to make a paradigmatic leap, leaving one syntagmatic sequence for his own theoretical linearity, and read the text, strengthened by this leap, in the light of his own theory. If this tendency is related to an urge to search for the text's unity, to a reading practice that 'purifies' the text, then it should come as no surprise that different modes of reading produce highly different knowledges of the text.

To understand the text/reader relationship in this way is, I claim, to take the text seriously as a hierarchized order of multiple voices and meanings, where the position of a dominant theoretical system is constantly challenged, unperceived by the writer, by subversive elements that demand their own fulfilment, and which demand readers to respond in different but determined fashions.

A final apology: no text can say all it wants to say. Yet according to Michael McCanles 'argumentative discourse is born out of the urge to negate discourse', i.e. 'all discourse aspires to the analytic proposition', i.e. 'to "use up" all discursive

space', to 'swallow up the whole of reality in a single, vast tautology'. This urge is necessarily doomed to failure, as McCanles shows, pointing in his show to Derrida, but nevertheless inescapable (McCanles, 1978:195–201). Thus, this urge may be *one* of the conditions of existence for the number and length of the footnotes below that may tend to aggravate some readers?

Notes

1   The epigraphs are taken from Michail Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel,* p. 380 and Robert Scholes's *Structuralism in Literature,* p 188.

2   The epigraphs, from top to bottom, are taken from Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* p. 39; Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation,* p. 5; Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* p. 158; Bloom's *A Map of Misreading,* p. 3; and Barthes's *Image, Music, Text,* p. 148.

3   It should be noted that for reasons of style, I will use 'scientific' and 'theoretical' interchangeably when writing on *texts.* The actual stress in my present concerns is upon the reading of *theoretical* texts, as in contrast with texts dealing with 'empirical data' only, as research reports and the like. The principles of reading should, though, be the same whatever the case would be. I should add, to avoid any possible misunderstanding, that I am here speaking about social scientific texts, not natural scientific ones. Whether this distinction is at all relevant in this connection I cannot say and will not examine in this context. And even if the distinction at a first glance seems irrelevant to me, I am not prepared to state without further ado that this really is the case.

   For the same reason, I will use the shorter 'science', 'scientific', etc. instead of a more clumsy 'social science', 'social scientific', etc. Whenever the more general notion of science is meant, this should be clear from the context. It should furthermore be noticed that I take 'science' to be a *socially* determined phenomenon.

4   I would like to point out that 'sources' (of 'ideas', etc.) shall not and cannot be conflated with 'origins' (of 'ideas', etc.).

1 General introduction

Language and textuality

In recent years, the problem of *textuality* and the importance of *language* has won recognition among certain social scientists. Textuality, then, pertaining to our possibility of gaining access to what is and what has been going on in the social realm.[1] This is done in two different modes.

The first of these modes is all-encompassing, claiming for the social world a textuality equivalent to that of texts.[2] The other mode limits itself to a recognition of the textual nature of *our knowledge* of the social world. It is this second mode that I will deal with below.[3]

The heightened awareness of the textuality of *knowledge* can be noticed in almost all of the disciplines in the social or human sciences—in anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Dan Sperber), in sociology (Jeffrey Alexander, Barry Hindess, Paul Q.Hirst, and Stephen Savage), in economics (Donald McCloskey), in history (Hayden White), in the history of ideas (Michel Foucault, Dominick LaCapra, Quentin Skinner), not to mention, of course, philosophy (Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty).

The significance of language in the social sciences and humanities can be detected in three interconnected domains: (a) in the *production* of knowledge as, for example, Hayden White maintains when he discusses the part played by Kenneth Burke's *master tropes* in *thinking* history (White, 1985a); (b) in the *presentation* of knowledge products as is shown by John S.Nelson, Allan Megill, Donald McCloskey and others when bringing to attention *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Nelson *et al.,* 1987); (c) in the *reading* of already produced knowledges of whatever form as when Louis Althusser (1975) reads *Capital,* Stephen Savage (1983) reads Talcott Parsons or in Keith Tribe (1981b). In short, language intervenes, in one way or another, in the manner of how we think reality, how we present our knowledges, how we perceive these knowledges, and how we utilise our disciplines' *pasts* and *presents*. Language is thus, it can be maintained, of utmost importance for the comprehension of any discipline's history and present state. With a few noteworthy exceptions, however, the situation in the social sciences is that the discussion on the relation between language, text, and the understanding of its texts is most conspicuous by its absence.

As to the understanding of the workings of language and text, there seems to be mainly two fields to turn to, literary theory and philosophy and, of course, the borderland where the two meet. As in other fields of knowledge production, variation abounds. There is Ordinary Language Philosophy, there is Ideal Language Philosophy, there is Speech Act Philosophy, etc. Also, there is Saussurean linguistics. And there are Russian Formalism, Prague Structuralism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics, different reader-response theories, etc. in the literary critical field. Theories flourish. All of these are in one way or another involved in this new but limited[4] awareness of textuality and language that is taking place within the social sciences, whether by their intervention or by them being called upon.

To say that the importance of language has been recently recognized is *not* to say, however, that there exists consensus about what language is or what its effects —in texts, for example—are. Neither is it to say that this recognition has become common property, let alone been fully understood. What follows should be seen as an effort to improve upon this state of affairs.

In doing this, it is necessary to fill a gap. I will do this by appropriating into the field of the social sciences a body of knowledge produced elsewhere; i.e. I will connect literary theory with social scientific texts, a task I deem necessary but that has hitherto to a large extent been neglected. To move one domain of discussion into another is always hazardous but to leave the discussion and knowledge production of language, texts, and reading to linguists, literary theorists, and philosophers and let *them* discuss the peculiarities or not of the social sciences' theoretical texts would only amount to the perpetuation of an 'innocence' that actually is *all but* innocent. It would not only amount to the view that an understanding of social scientific texts is possible without an analysis of how this understanding is made possible, of what its foundations are. It would also amount to the view that there is no need to further the self-understanding of the social sciences. Or, which is even worse, that we, as social scientists, perfectly well can do without any of this. I think that such an 'arrogance of the innocent' should be avoided as much as possible. In other words, I think the risk is well worth taking.

What follows was occasioned by two 'events', the one being the effect of semiology's and literary theory's 'imperialistic' tendencies through which 'textual reality' made its presence felt, the other being actualized by the apparently simple question 'How come some people do not seem to be able to read and understand their foes?'. Quite soon, the question was extended to include 'and not even their friends?'. The elaboration of this theme came to involve a movement from one object of knowledge to another and eventually to a third.

The immediate reason why this question was raised was an observation I made —and I am sure I am not the first one to have made it—when trying to make sense of a debate within the field of economic anthropology, that between 'formalism' and 'substantivism'. The opponents in this discussion just did not understand each other—or so it seemed, at least. They *read* each other's texts but did not even seem to see their opponent's arguments.[5]

Why? Of course, it might be claimed that in the academic world it sometimes does not pay to understand your antagonist. Your own point may get lost and your interests may be threatened in the race on the 'scientific field'.[6] But it was also obvious that some participants did not seem to understand even what the 'precursors' of their own choice said or seemed to me to say. The understanding of the 'sources' seemed to be flawed—with some disconcerting effects, to put it mildly. How come? After all, you cannot *seriously* claim that some readers are more stupid than others.[7]

Now, outside of anthropology, outside of the field of the social sciences altogether, the American literary critic Harold Bloom wrote of the 'anxiety of influence' and the necessity of misreadings.[8] This did not seem to make much sense in the case I was interested in. Rather the contrary, inasmuch as what was happening was a striving for *disciplinarian legitimacy:* people sought to *ground* their arguments by referring to the thoughts of ancestors, of 'founding fathers', and the like.

A clear example of this is perhaps the appropriation of the 'classics' in the social sciences. Take, for example, the case of Adam Smith and David Ricardo and the classical theory of value, where proponents from different schools of economic thought all try to show—and in a certain sense also succeed—that Smith's and Ricardo's theory (-ies) of value is (are) in accordance with their own, notwithstanding the fact that among themselves they proclaim incompatible value theories.[9] Or take Marx and the many Marxisms. Or take Weber…

Critiques

My claim is that there are *reasons* for different interpretations or readings of scientific texts—I am reluctant to call them 'misreadings' for reasons that will become clear below—and this points simultaneously in two opposite but intimately and inescapably connected directions, of which I will chiefly follow one. Therefore, may I be excused if I here say a few words about the direction not primarily followed but that all the same might be regarded as one kind of justification for the present text.

Larry Laudan (1978) meets objections against the enterprise of intellectual history, voiced by historians, with the following words:

> These objections, in so far as they imply that general history can dispense with the history of ideas, must fall wide of the mark…For history itself is a theoretical discipline with rival ideologies, alternative methodologies, and competing traditions; sensible choice between those traditions hinges…on an awareness of the intellectual history of those ideologies. Hence… *intellectual history,* far from being at the periphery of the concerns of the general historian, is directly at the core of any historical research, and is *presupposed by every other form of history*—at least to the extent that the general historian's problems and methodologies do themselves have an intellectual history of which the historian must be aware if he is to write sound history.
>
> (Laudan, 1978:194f)

The general truth of this when thought in relation to the social sciences should be too obvious to be argued: in anthropology, in sociology, in psychology, etc., there exist 'rival ideologies', 'alternative methodologies', 'competing traditions' in abundance.[10]

The significance of this is that much social scientific practice is not only built upon previous practitioners, previous practices, previous *texts* but also that there is a strong tendency repeatedly to return to the ancestries. These texts, then, taken together, significantly contribute to the self-definitions of the social sciences and/or disciplines. In other words, the social sciences are disciplined by traditions, and each discipline has its classical texts and heroes, too many to name. The theories of these heroic texts constitute an important part of our identity (cf. Alexander, 1982b:1ff).

Now, it seems reasonable to claim that social science constitutes a patchwork of disciplines with overlapping schools of thought and that these disciplines and these schools of thought each have their own—by no means exclusive—supply of more or less sacred texts, which affect the practitioners of the disciplines and the schools of thought in question. It seems furthermore reasonable to assume that these texts, just as texts in the life of culture in general, 'have become assimilated …and have come to influence people's beliefs and values *by being understood in a certain way*' (Juhl, 1986:3, italics mine), and that this assimilation is an ongoing process. Texts are understood *in a way* that either—in whole or in part—includes them into or excludes them from disciplines or schools of thought.

Thus, the *way* texts are read, 'interpreted', is of great importance for the production, reproduction and extension of a discipline's history, development and identity. In other words, the way a text is read, the mode of reading that is put to work, makes possible the 'legitimate' appropriation of texts of common property into various competing schools of thought. To paraphrase Dominick LaCapra, common texts function differentially in different ideas.[11]

But what if these identities are based upon 'misunderstandings' or constitute chaotic maps as effects of lop-sided, spontaneous and non-reflected modes of reading? Would not the result be, as P.D.Juhl observes, that if these texts 'were understood very differently, our cultural tradition itself would be likely to be or become very different from what it is' (Juhl, 1986:3), i.e. understanding these texts in another sense will contribute to our understanding the social sciences and their disciplines in another sense and therefore shatter the disciplines' identities and redraw the maps? A general conclusion that might be drawn is, then, that different modes of reading produce different histories and, consequently, different identities.

Thus, just as we acknowledge the existence of different ways of thinking social reality, i.e. just as we acknowledge the fact that in the social sciences there exist various modes or schools of thought such as functionalism, phenomenology, Marxism, structuralism, etc., so we must acknowledge the fact that there are different ways of thinking *textual* reality.

Also, I would like to argue that as little as the fact that people experience social reality differently is an argument *per se* against an 'objective' reality existing

independently of the 'observers', as little is the fact that a text makes readers respond in different fashions an argument for criticism to become a reader-response theory, denying the text an objective existence.[12] And just as we accept a demand for consistency and access to a conceptual apparatus in producing knowledge of the social world, so we have to accept that these demands apply to the understanding of textual reality as well. What follows may be seen as an attempt to contribute to the conditions for such a redrawing of the maps.

Much of anthropological, sociological, in short social science practice consists of *critiques*.[13] Increasing theoretical rigour presupposes critical practice just as showing inadequacies in received notions does. However, the critical enterprise is not one. Rather, it comprises several moments, each with its own object of knowledge. Initially we may discern as one object of knowledge the *theoretical system,* conceived either in the more limited sense of a regional theory or in the all-encompassing sense of a school or mode of thought, where, as Stephen Gaukroger writes, a

> *theory* is anything which is, or can be, articulated in the form of a statement or set of statements which purport to offer, or which can be taken as offering, an explanation of something. A *theoretical discourse* is any unified set of articulated theories
>
> (Gaukroger, 1978:3, 15ff)

each with its own 'domain of investigation' (cf. also Savage, 1983:58).[14]

Very schematically, and following the general outline of Barry Hindess's, Paul Q.Hirst's and Stephen Savage's proposals,[15] a critique of a theoretical system as realized in a specific text should, in order to give the system as such full justice, focus upon the systems concepts and the logical relations that obtain between these concepts. Furthermore, a theory 'in work' does not only consist of concepts but of propositions or statements pertaining to its object of knowledge as well: a theory purports to offer 'an explanation of *something*'. Thus, since the conceptual system is *'the logical or conceptual conditions of existence'* (Hindess, 1977:215) of the propositions or statements made in the name of the theory, the relation between these statements and their conditions of existence is another moment in the analysis. In short, what is investigated is the theoretical system's coherence and consistency (Savage, 1983:59).

If a theoretical system is conceived in this way, three things immediately follow. First, a strict distinction must be made between on the one hand the *production* process of theoretical systems and, on the other, their *logical* quality (see, for example, Hindess, 1977:190, Savage, 1983:57f and Gaukroger, 1978:7). Second, as Hindess makes clear, since logical relations cannot have *real effectivity* (Hindess, 1977:224), there can be *no presupposition of consistency in the system,* for 'how could there be a real effectivity and, at the same time contradictions' in a text (Hindess, 1977:219). Third, and related to the second, to locate and understand the theoretical system in the verbal mass of the text makes necessary taking the liberty to *leave out* bits and pieces that don't 'belong'. This extractive process lives on an exclusion that is partly determined by

the invisible field of the critical mode (cf. Althusser, 1975:26), partly by the text within which the theoretical system is realized. This makes it possible to argue, as I will do below, that several, among themselves contradictory, theoretical systems may be identified, thus ending up in a dispute about *what* theoretical system actually is contained within the pages of the text. This is a problem area within the social sciences to which, to my knowledge, but scant attention has been paid hitherto. Instead, the main concern has been to identify and criticize the *one, dominant,* theoretical system realized in a text (cf., for example, Hindess, 1977:215 and Savage, 1983:61).

This observation brings me to the introduction of another object of knowledge, distinct from but related to the one just discussed. It is obvious that there are, in most if not all cases, inconsistencies in theoretical systems as realized in texts, with more or less damaging effects. In order to distinguish or conceptualize the difference in systemic damage, Hindess introduces the notion of *hierarchy of concepts,* which makes it possible to determine the significance of 'the inconsistencies that may be established within a discourse…the formation of certain concepts of a discourse depend on, or "presuppose", certain other concepts' (Hindess, 1977: 225). Thus, for example,

> If incoherence can be demonstrated at the highest level in the substantive concepts of a discourse, then we must conclude that the discourse is fundamentally incoherent and that the substantive positions which it develops have no coherent theoretical foundation.
>
> (Hindess, 1977:227)

Now, a theoretical system may not only, and this is hinted at by Hindess, be looked upon and analysed in terms of a system of concepts and the logical relations that exist between these concepts. It also has its own *history of production*. This history is not necessarily confined to the internal elaboration of its 'own' conceptual apparatus but, it is likely to be assumed, involves also the appropriation of knowledge and concepts produced within the orbits of other conceptual apparatuses. This process of appropriation would seem to have a general interest in so far as it is part and parcel of everyday social science practice. It occurs, to a higher or lesser degree and more or less obviously, in any transmittance of ideas.

This appropriation of knowledges, i.e. of concepts from other knowledge-producing spheres, is not free of problems, in that it may be disastrous for the workings of the theoretical system since concepts being 'incorporated' may disturb a functioning set of concepts. It should be noted that this functioning is not a necessary assumption—even if incorporated into a malfunctioning system, new 'disturbances' can only aggravate the malfunction. Thus, where once there *may* have existed consistency, now incoherence and inconsistency appears. The erstwhile system has, so to speak, become contaminated with a set of presuppositions, concepts, etc. that are not compatible with those of its own. Furthermore, this effect may permeate all the levels of the conceptual hierarchy, from the epistemological and methodological levels to the theoretical.[16]

Accordingly, if one is not content in showing that inconsistencies, etc. exist in a theoretical system—by no means an undertaking as simple as it may sound here—but also wants to understand *how* at least *some* of these inconsistencies, etc. may have arisen, I suggest that an analysis of the process of appropriation of concepts would be one possible way to proceed. To avoid any possible misunderstandings, it should be emphasized that this analysis *presupposes* as an integral and indispensable part of its undertaking the mode of critique outlined above.

But it would not be enough to show incoherences, inconsistencies, etc., it would also demand an understanding of how and from where these imperfections emanate. It would be possible, then, to claim that they might be seen as traces of corresponding incoherences, inconsistencies, ambiguities, etc. that have been transmitted from one field of knowledge into another in a process of uncritical appropriation. Thus, the *relation* between the appropriating field of knowledge and the appropriated, not *only* as it is understood by the former but also in its own right, is essential.

This example makes it possible to draw attention to yet another problem, the problem of the 'raw material' in the process of appropriation, i.e. that of *the text itself,* which is, thus, still another object of knowledge. The present text is concerned with problems arising in the process of reading theoretical texts. In this venture, the additional elements that are presented as involved in the practice of criticism in the social sciences will, hopefully, further our understanding of the knowledge-production process.

In contradistinction to a theory or mode of thought, which in a sense can be seen as 'virtual' realities, a theoretical text is or purports to be a realization, in full or in part, of any of these.[17] A text is also, as Stephen Savage notices, a

> purely arbitrary unity in which any number of discrete propositions may occur—it may reflect the author's conception of knowledge-in-general, his 'world view', his 'philosophy', or whatever, in addition to his substantive concepts.
>
> (Savage, 1983:58)

Having said this, I will make explicit a certain assumption on my part regarding the text. I grant the text a certain autonomy in its relation both to its writer and its reader: neither author nor reader has full control over it. Thus, I assume—taking Bhaskar's 'question of what the world must be like for science to be possible' seriously (Bhaskar, 1975:29) —that the text exists as a*n entity in its own right;* independent of any 'consciousnesses' or 'observers'. However, this independence should not be taken to mean that its existence is autonomous in the sense that it is unrelated to other existences, such as authors, readers or other texts.[18]

This assumption of the text as an independent reality is, I take it, a necessary condition if we want to argue that there exist different readings of, for example, my text as I present it here. No one is surprised when readings of, for example, Marx and Popper produce different results.

As has already been observed, a theory's or mode of thought's consistency cannot be taken for granted. This is even more true of the text, as Savage's observation indicates, i.e., the text is, in all probability, *not* unified, it does *not* constitute an integrated whole. From this it follows that it may be possible to extract from the text not only one 'statement or set of statements which purport to offer an explanation of something', but a plurality of such sets that between themselves are contradictory. Robert Scholes summarizes the implications of this view of the text when he writes of the text that it is 'open, incomplete and insufficient' (Scholes, 1982:15). In this sense of an inscribed plurality, a text is more concrete than both theory and mode of thought.

A theoretical text may, as all texts, be read with different interests in mind, all presumably equally legitimate (and the following enumeration is in no way intended to be exhaustive).

- It may be understood as a *social phenomenon,* where its sociality may become apparent in (at least) two ways: first, its *impact* in and on society at large on the one hand and its impact in and on the scientific community on the other; second, as a social *product,* produced in a particular society at a particular time, in which both cases a 'sociological reading', linking the text with its social 'effects' or linking the societal 'effects' to the text, is called upon (cf., for example, Therborn, 1976).
- It may be understood as a *biographical testimony* as in, for example, *The Collected Works of…* or *The Diaries and Letters of…,* in which case an attempt to connect the text with its author's life will be made.
- It may be understood as a *historical monument,* as a 'classic', of one kind or another, in which case elements from the text may be drawn upon to show a continuity between the 'classic' and the discipline of today. One example of such a strategy would be Habermas's readings of classics for his history of 'communicative rationality' which, strictly speaking 'is not a history of ideas but a history of theory with a systemic intent' (Habermas, 1984:138ff).
- It may be understood as an *ideological carrier* as when, for example, the economic anthropologist George Dalton on the grounds that A.G.Frank is ideological and emotional refuses to answer Frank's arguments against Dalton's conception of economic anthropology (Dalton, 1970:70; see also Dalton, 1971:237–41);
- It may be understood as presenting or *representing a theory* belonging to a mode of thought in the sense exemplified by Hindess and Gaukroger above.
- Finally, it may be understood *as such,* i.e. as a carrier of meaning or as containing 'structures that produce meaning' (Culler, 1987a:21).[19]

Having already indicated that my main problem is to understand *through what mechanisms different readings of a single text get their support,* it follows that my principal preoccupation will be with the last of these options.

These matters may seem quite remote from ordinary social scientific practice —indeed, they may seem to be remote enough to be handed over to literary theorists,

semiologists, philosophers or the like. However, an important part of the social sciences consists in reading theoretical texts, from the beginning of education never, hopefully, to stop. Furthermore, important parts of these texts make up the understanding of the different social sciences and do this by *having been understood in certain ways*. Therefore, it seems that part of the social scientific endeavour should consist in *bringing out into the open,* articulating, making conscious, the procedure(s) used in this activity of reading that have hitherto, to too large an extent, been hidden in what seems to be spontaneity.

Another, related, reason for dealing with the problems of scientific or theoretical texts is given by the literary theorist Barbara Johnson in an interview conducted by Imre Salusinszky. She is here talking about literature and philosophy, but it seems to me that what she says is easily transposable to the social sciences as well; in the quotation that follows I have changed her 'literature' and 'literary' into 'science' and 'scientific' and indicated this by italicisation:

> It is because we turn to *science* and philosophy with a desire for truth and referentiality that an analysis of the text's rhetoric's subversion of grammar makes sense…if it is indeed the case that people approach *science* with the desire to learn something about the world, and if it is indeed the case that the *scientific* medium is not transparent, then a study of its non-transparency is crucial in order to deal with the desire one has to know something about the world.
>
> (Johnson in Salusinszky, 1987:165f)

The theme indicated by Barbara Johnson will be followed through with some persistence throughout the pages that follow.

To answer—however partially—the question 'why do multiple readings exist?' (Ricoeur, 1991b:491) presupposes the analysis of two interconnected problem areas, texts and readers, which—generalized—may be said to constitute the preconditions of all knowledge acquisition and production. In other words, there is the text with its specific properties that, I claim, contribute to *make possible* different, even contradictory, understandings *through* the different conceptual apparatuses of its readers.

Thus, in order to approach an answer to the question raised, we have not only to account for the properties of the text itself but also for the properties of the various modes of reading that, with their different ways of approaching the text, result in divergent understandings of it.

But modes of reading are not only strategies of *reading,* they are also more or less organized views of the properties of their own object of knowledge, i.e. of the properties of the text.

So, it seems quite reasonable to turn to those fields which have taken upon themselves to address the questions of texts and readers, i.e. the fields of literary theory, linguistics and philosophy, in order to gain knowledge not only of already existing modes of critique or reading and learn to what extent these may be helpful in an undertaking of theorizing

the reading of theoretical texts, but also of the different conceptions of the text that characterizes them. After all, there are those, in other disciplines, with other specialties, whose business it is to know…In other words, the text itself with its specific properties will not be approached directly but will instead be closed in upon—seemingly in a round-about way— through the analysis and critique of various modes of reading.

In contradistinction to the critique of theory or mode of thought as outlined above, the understanding of texts involves a few additional elements. Thus, any theory confronting texts will have three different dimensions to consider: (a) the *author* of the text; (b) the *text* itself; (c) the *reader* of the text. Whichever of these dimensions one chooses to concentrate one's efforts upon will result in different readings and thus understandings of the text and, conversely, whichever theory from within which one works gives different emphasis to these dimensions.

Schematically, a concentration upon the *author* will tend to radically reduce the role of the reader but not so much that of the text since it will be the relation between author and text that is of interest. The inherent properties of the text (its concepts, internal consistency, etc.) will, however, as a tendency be of reduced weight in favour of the author's experiences, intentions (however 'intention' is understood), etc. An emphasis on the *text,* whether as a meaning-producing structure or a bearer of meaning, will tend to reduce the importance of both author and reader, focused as it will be on the text's internal qualities as, for example, concept formation, consistency, etc. Finally, to lay stress upon the role of the *reader* will tend to make the author superfluous but not the text.

Excursus: 'discourse'

It is necessary to make a terminological clarification. The term *discourse* will appear from time to time in the pages that follow. This term is a tricky one. As Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain observe, 'within the human sciences this term is becoming embarrassingly overloaded and more likely to induce confusion than any clarity it might originally have been set to produce' (Cousins and Hussain, 1984:77).[20]

Part of the problem seems to stem from the fact that the term is and has been used in different disciplines that have different traditions within which the usage of the term has developed. In the present context it would take us too far afield to review and/or criticize these different usages. Something, though, will have to be said as to my own use of the term which, as will be seen is quite loose and commonsensish, close to its Late Latin meaning ('conversation'). Before doing so, however, I will illustrate *some* of these other usages with some typical quotations to give an idea of the diversity of concepts the term represents. These different meanings of the term should then be kept in mind as the present text proceeds.

Thus, in linguistics and literary theory—two fields of knowledge that will be prominent below—the term is used in ways that radically differ from the way it is often used in anthropology, sociology and related disciplines.

According to Roland Barthes, the formal description of discourse is 'units longer than the sentence' (Barthes, 1970b:145; see also David Crystal, 1971:201f). For

Julia Kristeva, and she borrows from Emile Benveniste, the term means something wholly different:

> Discourse implies first the participation of the subject in his language through his *speech, as an individual*…. The term 'discourse'…designates any enunciation that integrates in its structure the locutor and the listener, with the desire of the former to influence the latter.
>
> (Kristeva, 1989:11; cf. Benveniste, 1971b:208f)

This is close to how Colin MacCabe uses the term: discourse is 'a term to refer to any system of lexical combination which has as effect a distinct subject position' (MacCabe, 1978:13). Finally, the literary theoretician Michael McCanles elaborates along 'logical' lines:

> Discourse—the extension into discursive space of syntactical strings linked together by various kinds of entailments…'Discursive space' is this synchronically conceived field of meaning from which each text selects those statements that can be formed into logically coherent wholes.
>
> (McCanles, 1978:191f)

Let me contrast these conceptions (and there are others) with one that, with modifications, seems to be the prevalent one in most social sciences. I choose the definition offered by Barry Hindess and Paul Q.Hirst:

> Theoretical discourse we shall define as the construction of problems for analysis and solutions to them by means of concepts. Concepts are deployed in ordered successions to produce these effects…Theories only exist as *discourses*—as concepts in definite orders of succession producing definite effects (posing, criticising, solving problems) —as a result of that order.
>
> (Hindess and Hirst, 1977:7)

As can be seen, the use of 'discourse' in a text like the present, drawing its material not only from social science but also from, for example, linguistics and literary theory, is not unproblematical. Regrettably, the term is a vicious predator, and I do not seem to be able to escape it. Thus, a few words on how it will be used below—and, of course, I do not count quotations, citations or the like.

So: when I use 'discourse', I have in mind a field of or a meeting place for *conversation, argumentation and inspiration,* with effects as, for example, *dispersion and concentration* (cf. also Foucault, 1982:37f) that is built upon *terms in common property.* In this way, a discourse— it might be argued—may be a terrain for almost anything (cf. also, for example, White, 1985h:3f). This is so. But each *specific* field or meeting place puts up its own specific limits and borderlines through the limits and possibilities given by the discursive 'object'.

Just as it is possible to speak of a discourse of, for example, scientific truths, so it is possible to speak of the discourse of economics or the discourse of value.

This is as it should be: the terms in common ('scientific truth', 'economics', 'value') open up the space within which conversation, argumentation and inspiration takes place. Thus, there is no discursive mechanism *in general* involved here—just a more or less open field.

From this it follows that 'discourse' as I use the term should not be conflated or seen as competing with concepts like, for example, 'school of thought', 'paradigm', 'problematique', 'research programme', 'science', 'discipline', etc.

Discourse, conceived in this way is, then, that field which opens up possibilities of communication between disciplines, between schools of thought, etc. It is the field where perhaps even hyper-incommensurabilists may find a place to talk about the incommensurabilities that are (claimed to be). If we accept this meaning of 'discourse', we may also stress that the medium through which these conversations, argumentations and inspirations flow are *terms* having no specific—or rather, having a multi-varied, polysemic—content. This should be seen in contrast to *concepts* which, being rigidly defined lend themselves to barring conversation across the borderlines of different schools of thought, problematiques, etc.; *within* these borders the reverse order is at hand, though.

To exemplify: the discourse of the economic is the field around the intuitively understood terms 'economics', 'economy', etc., that makes it possible to argue over and above the boundaries of specific schools of thought as classical political economy, Marxism, neo-classical economics, etc., a field that also includes disciplines or subdisciplines such as economic anthropology, economic sociology, economic history and development economics/economics of imperialism to name but a few.

This, then, could perhaps be of some help in understanding the fact of dispersion, transformation and transgression of terms, insights, etc. from one theoretical system into another, as is the case, for instance, with 'value': from the classical conception(s) into Marxism and neo-classical economics, respectively.

Notes

1   This is not to argue that the importance of language had not been understood before. In— above all —anthropology the issue has been addressed particularly since the writings of Sapir and Whorf, who pointed to the fundamental relation between language, world and world view. Lévi-Strauss's linguistically inspired structuralism, as well as hermeneutics are other cases in point. However, the relation between (the properties of) language and the texts we as social scientists read has to a large extent been ignored.

2   Cf., for example, the titles of Richard H.Brown (1987) and Paul Ricoeur (1971).

3   It should perhaps be noted that while the first position encompasses the second, the opposite does not hold. It is possible, in other words, to claim that our knowledge of the social world is textual but all the same to argue that this world as such is not.

4   'Limited' to a too-narrow circle, that is.

5   I intend to publish my discussion on this debate separately.

6   Cf., for example, Bourdieu (1990:140–9).

7   The preceding three paragraphs may also be regarded as an effort to answer the justified call of Fredric Jameson when he writes that 'The starting point for any genuinely profitable discussion of interpretation…must not be the nature of interpretation, but *the need for it* in the first place' (Jameson, 1988a:5, italics mine).

8   See Bloom (1975, 1980).

9   More on this theme will follow below; cf. also Tribe (1981b:121–52) and Alexander (1982b: 119).

10 That *economics* should be an exception is claimed by Edward Shils (1981:139). However, Bruce Caldwell (1982) shows convincingly that economics is in the same situation as the other social sciences. Cf. also Marc Blaug (1980) and Lawrence Boland (1982).

11 Cf. LaCapra (1987:51); see also Alexander (1982b:432).

12 This does not imply, however, that these varied experiences could not constitute a field of research in its own right similar to, for example, reception theory in psychology.

13 Dick Howard (1988) makes a distinction between 'critique', and 'criticism', where the latter is defined as 'one-sided or unjust, engaged and motivated', 'external to its object', whereas the former is considered 'to be neutral, objective, espousing the lines of the object it presents'. 'Critique' is furthermore 'immanent, developing the *self*-critique of its object, making explicit what could not be expressed directly' (Howard, 1988:xvi). Apart from certain objections that can be made on theoretical grounds and upon some of which I will touch below, I feel, however, that in the present context to follow his distinction would only add confusion and cumbrousness to matters. To give just one example: to which of these practices would the adjective 'critical' pertain?

14 'Theoretical discourse' as used by, for example, Gaukroger corresponds to my 'mode of thought' or 'school of thought'. For reasons presented in the *Excursus* below, I refrain from the use of the term 'discourse' in his sense.

15 See, for example, Hindess (1977), Hirst (1975) and Savage (1983).

16 It ought to be clear that conceived in this way, appropriation of knowledge does not entail a view of knowledge production and growth as necessarily cumulative.

17 An analogous thought, concerning *language* and *discourse* (understood as linguistic phenomena larger than the sentence), is expressed by Paul Ricoeur: 'Whereas systems of signs are merely virtual, language as discourse is actual' (Ricoeur, 1991a:67).

18 I am fully aware of the fact that there are other positions taken and yet others possible to take and that these positions each have their own specific way of answering the question 'what is it to understand a text?'. However, it is not my wish in *this* text to become involved in a philosophical dispute of the text's ontological status (but cf. Roy Bhaskar, 1975, 1979). That demands a text of its own which is neither here nor now. I think that in the present context these assumptions are sufficient in relation to the task I have set myself in the present text.

19 I would like to stress that these different 'understandings' of the text should not be regarded as excluding one another. So, for example, may there be theorized a strong connection between the first and the last themes. Hans Robert Jauss (1982a) is a case in point.

20 After their text was written, there will undoubtedly have been added a few more meanings to the term (cf., for example, Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:105–14).

2 The social sciences and criticism

This chapter will start by arguing in some detail that criticism and *a fortiori* reading are highly neglected areas in the social sciences. Due to a naiveté or 'innocence' in the understanding of what is involved in criticism, in what a text is and in what language is, criticism in the social sciences is normative—texts are criticized not for what they say, but for not saying what they ought to say. To a large extent, this is, it will be argued, due to a lack of reflection on critical practice, the end result which is spontaneous, 'innocent' readings, where reading is considered unproblematical and the text given.

In an intermission, some readings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo will be used as illustrations of how unreflected reading practices will result in highly divergent interpretations of Smith and Ricardo, each mode of reading claiming that it has found out what Smith and Ricardo *really* meant.

This intermission will also function as a bridge to the chapter's third and last part, where it will be maintained that there are no innocent readings, only guilty ones. The chapter ends by arguing that reading is as 'theory-laden' as all other social scientific observation, and that this theory-ladenness of reading is one component in the reading of theoretical texts that helps explain how different interpretations of a text are possible.

Innocent readings

Thus, *the problem:* 'what is it to read?' (Althusser, 1975:15); i.e. that of modes of reading, of principles of modes of critique, of 'analysing thought structures as structured unities of concepts' (Glucksmann, 1974:9; cf. also Savage, 1983:1ff), a not uncommon way to pose the issue at hand. There are exceptions to this way of seeing the problem, though: in an essay by the Chicago economist George Stigler, the question is quite differently posed: 'which passage in a man's writing do you *accept* when several passages are inconsistent?' (Stigler, 1982a:68, italics mine).

And the *reason:* since, as the French philosopher and co-author of the first edition of *Lire le Capital,* Pierre Macherey, notes: 'the act of reading requires a certain number of implicit or explicit presuppositions' (Macherey, 1978:71); to strive for knowledge of literary works, says Macherey, you need a logic: 'Obviously, this

logic could not be based exclusively on the study of literary works; it would have to derive from all those other forms of knowledge which also pose the question of the organisation of the multiple' (Macherey, 1978:42; I will return to the 'multiple' below).

Discouraging as it is, until recently not too many social scientists seem[1] to have directed attention to the problems of reading scientific texts, or for that matter texts of whatever kind. Not even historians seem to fare well if historians like Hayden White and Karel Williams are to be believed:

> The irony is that a profession which fetishises primary sources and its ability to handle them critically, has given almost no attention to its practice of reading these sources. For historians, the problem of reading is not a problem.
> (Williams, 1972:475; cf. also Greimas, 1987c:209f).

And it should be remembered that to the degree that history is accessible to us, to a large extent it is so in textual form (see, for example, Jameson, 1982:82).[2] Similarly, White notes that although or, rather, 'precisely because' interpretation is 'an irreducible and inexpungeable element' in the historian's craft, the problem that various types of interpretation poses has been neglected (White, 1985b:51f). This neglect has been, so White claims, in the purported interest of salvaging history's scientific quality, by an effort to make it something more than 'a *mere* interpretation, on the assumption that what is interpretation is not knowledge but only opinion and the belief that what is not objective in a scientific sense is not worth knowing' (White, 1985b:54). And this becomes all the more remarkable if we accept, for example, that 'although history has no meaning, we can *give it* a meaning' (Popper, 1966:278, italics mine); i.e. *history is (the result of) interpretation*.

Discouraging and disappointing, because even if no—or almost no—effort is made to theorize the problem, even if the method of criticism in the social sciences is un(der)developed (and thereby making it necessary to look elsewhere for some formulated guide-lines), *critical activity as such* is in no way foreign to the social sciences—on the contrary, one can almost argue that social scientific practice and critique are one.

Furthermore, much of social scientific activity is textual too, so much in fact that it is almost possible to argue that social science=texts. Not only to the extent that discourse lives in and through language and texts ('theoretical' treatises, 'empirical' research reports, and the like), but also to the extent that social scientific practice uses texts ('theoretical' treatises, 'empirical' research reports, and the like) as an important part of its raw material. And it should not be forgotten that numbers, figures, etc. are language-dependent as well as language-created, as any survey analyst or questionnaire constructor can tell (cf., for example, Suárez, 1981).

Thus, it is not possible to argue that *texts* or *language* are strange elements in the practice of the social sciences. But what if language cannot be *trusted*? What if our readings are misled by faulty theories of interpretation? What if it is *not* (nor can be) the case, as some claim, that the relation between language and what

is 'out there' is one of direct referentiality,[3] thereby—by this claim—denying the possibility that language *distorts*? But *if* language distorts or at least has the power to, then the theoretical systems with the help of which the scientific work is done must also be regarded as mediating agencies in our relation to the 'out there'.

Now, in the social sciences—but not only here, of course (cf., for example, Fish, 1980a:11) —criticism has tended to be based upon the *critic's* own theoretical or epistemological assumptions. The normative element in this kind of reading should be obvious, since in this kind of reading texts, the texts are interpreted 'not from criteria they themselves accept, but from what they do not claim to be or do, inasmuch as an acceptance of other criteria and objectives would imply that they lost their own identity' (Coniavitis, 1984:37, translation mine; cf. also Macherey, 1983:151 and Savage, 1981:13ff). In other words, they are criticized not for what they *are,* but for what they are *not;* i.e. there are no innocent readings (cf. Althusser, 1975:14).

Once we question the primacy of epistemology, once its legislative function is brought into the open and challenged, once we deny one level of scientific practice to have a function to which is assigned the right to cast judgment on other levels, once we question epistemology as guarantor granting certain practices legitimacy and withholding it from others, once this is done, we have to question the activities of this kind criticism as well.[4] Implied in this questioning is also a questioning of philosophy's rights over the sciences; and as the American critic Reed Way Dasenbrock observes,

> if philosophy is not the master discipline, then philosophers, like literary theorists, are simply people reading and interpreting texts and the philosophy-literature distinction is…factitious.
>
> (Dasenbrock, 1989:9)

An early insight into this problem is to be found in Spinoza (1951):

> I determined to examine the Bible afresh in a careful, impartial, and unfettered spirit, making no assumptions concerning it, and attributing to it no doctrines, *which I do not find clearly therein set down.*
>> (Spinoza, 1951:8, italics mine; see also p. 100. Cf. Todorov, 1988:5ff)[5]

Likewise, Hegel had to come to terms with this issue, and it seems appropriate to bring to the fore some of the more pertinent observations he makes:

> To see what the content is *not* is merely a negative process; it is a dead halt, which does not of itself go beyond itself…it has to get hold of something else from somewhere or other in order to have once more a content. It is reflection upon and into the empty ego, the vanity of its own knowledge…. If the refutation is complete and thorough, it is derived and developed from the nature of the principle itself [that it refuses], and not accomplished by bringing in from elsewhere

other counter assurances and chance fancies…. Consequently, we do not require to bring standards with us, not to apply *our* fancies and thoughts in the inquiry; and just by our leaving these aside we are enabled to treat and discuss the subject as it actually is…as it is in its complete reality

(Hegel, 1971:117, 85, 141)

because, as Hegel observes elsewhere:

the refutation must not come from outside, that is, it must not proceed from assumptions lying outside the system in question and inconsistent with it. The system need only refuse to recognize those assumptions; the *defect* is a defect only for him who starts from the requirements and demands based on those assumptions.

(Hegel, 1969:580f)

One might perhaps regard this kind of negative criticism as an instance of arrogance on the part of the interpreter in a situation of non-efficient communication, to use the linguist, the Russian Formalist Roman Jakobson's formulation, where the code of the message does not coincide with that of the addressee (the interpreter), and where the latter, ignorant or not caring, instead assumes that the two codes are or *should* be one (cf., for example, Jakobson, 1987c:66ff, 1987g:97; see also Eco, 1987:5f).

   Now, in passing and in consolation, it should be mentioned that this kind of criticism is a phenomenon not only to be found in social science critical practice. Even in literary circles, a certain kind of critical thinking works in like manner, as Jakobson notices:

Do not believe the critic who rakes a poet over the coals in the name of the True and the Natural. All he has in fact done is to reject one poetic school, that is, one set of devices deforming material in the name of another poetic school, another set of deformational devices

(Jakobson, 1987d:370)

and thirty years later, Barthes: 'it is always concerned with relating the work under consideration to something *other,* to something *elsewhere*' (Barthes, 1974:68). Now, easily disclosed shortcomings in texts read in this way are as easily closed since, as Hegel points out, a

genuine refutation must penetrate the opponent's stronghold and meet him on his own ground; no advantage is gained by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him *where he is not.*

(Hegel, 1969:581, italics mine)

This is also the reason why, for example, Hans Robert Jauss's *Rezeptionsästhetik* must be considered irrelevant in the present context. For Jauss, the reception of

a literary work forms the basis for his theorizing of literary history. But this reception is founded exactly upon readers' 'horizons of expectations', which in the end leads him to conclude that a 'process of the continuous establishing and altering of horizons also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of texts that forms the genre' (Jauss, 1982a:23). Now, such a trajectory, if transposed to scientific texts, is precisely to give a legitimacy to the reading of these texts not for what they *are,* but for what they *are not.* This is not to claim, however, that Jauss's project is of no interest were the question to write a history of how texts have been received and (mis)used by different scientific communities in different times (as a 'history of ideas'), but it will not tell us what the text's properties in themselves are. The problems are of different orders.[6]

Moreover, these traditional interpretative readings are often, as we shall see ample evidence of below, accomplished under the guise of an attempt to establish an author's *original or true meaning,* almost as if this task in its apparent simplicity is self-explanatory and without any need for further thought; as if there is no need to see to it that 'criticism professionalizes interpretation, so to speak, bringing out into the open what is simply unconscious practice' (Todorov, 1988:1; to a large extent this unconsciousness is no doubt due to the Academy's sterile and infantile compartmentalization). And if this 'bringing-into-the-open' is not somehow accomplished, not taken seriously, we run the risk of having, to paraphrase the American critic Geoffrey Hartman, instead of an order of discourses, discourses of order (Hartman, 1985:32).

The effects of these kinds of critical practice, and perhaps their *raison d'être,* conform quite nicely with French philosopher Vincent Descombe's characterization of *legitimist thought,* a mode of thought that seems to fit equally well the readings of, for example, Adam Smith and David Ricardo as I will show below:

> Within the context of legitimist thinking, any research into the past is hermeneutic, in the proper sense of the word. The relics of the past contain the ancestral world upon which all my expectations are pinned. Who am I? If I am indeed the heir I claim to be, everything I have is mine by right. But if my shameful origins leave me nameless and stateless, there is no place for me…The moment we accept that origins are the source of all greatness and majesty, any inquiry into the origin of ideas ceases to be the result of curiosity directed at the past and becomes a lawsuit…
>
> (Descombes, 1986:142; see also Alexander, 1982b:3f)

Or, from another angle, it conforms as well to the 'will to power' that Nietzsche sees as the inexorable mechanism behind the unavoidable 'fluidity of meaning', behind the 'continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations' that results:

> whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some

power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master,* and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated.

<div align="right">(Nietzsche, 1969:77)</div>

Recently, however, and primarily in the wake of Althusser's *symptomatic reading* and Foucault's *archaeology,* the problems of reading have begun to be attended to by certain social scientists, writing from different points of view and with different aims in sight, thereby breaking traditional disciplinary barriers.[7]

Now, while in the social sciences the practice of reading to a large degree seems to be *spontaneous,* which is not the same as 'with no presuppositions' but rather with uncontrolled and thus uncontrollable ones, 'doing their work in the darkness, the light of consciousness never falling on them', as the British philosopher and historian R.G.Collingwood (1979:43) writes, this is not the case in literary science and philosophy (or should one perhaps guard oneself and say '*should* not be the case'?).

Since old times, literary criticism and philosophy, or more accurately some schools of literary theory and *some* schools of philosophical thought, have had mutual relations on different levels to the advantage of both (see, for example, Dasenbrock, 1989, *passim,* and Hartman, 1987:ix), on the methodological as well as the theoretico-practical levels, so that philosophers read literary criticism and 'literature', and that

> the very objects of criticism stray outside the realm of what have ordinarily been taken to be the proper topics of literary criticism. So-called literary critics today may be seen discussing Hegel, Saussure, John Austin, Wittgenstein, or Freud as readily as Homer, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Wordsworth, or Faulkner…criticism no longer means, if it ever simply did, *sui generis* literary criticism.
>
> <div align="right">(LaCapra, 1985:97)</div>

Today, then—but not only today, of course; think of Kant and Hegel, for example—in a number of cases the two disciplines are not distinguishable from one another, the meeting place being quite often linguistics or semiology, a second 'linguistic turn' as it were,[8] a second turn that perhaps may be considered the first turn turned upside down,[9] to use a favourite expression of Marx.

Out of different interests of knowledge—the one primarily concerned with problems of philosophy, the other with literary texts—both turns turn away from *ordinary language* (also called, for example, 'everyday', 'practical' or 'referential' language; the terms used concerning this phenomenon/these phenomena vary widely),[10] but in different directions, for different reasons and with different consequences. In both turns, there is a strong conviction that ordinary language cannot do its job, and therefore has to be supplemented or even replaced with another, better suited language.

In the first turn, the direction is towards *ideal language* which is supposed to give science and—primarily—philosophy a long wanting rigour and unambiguity,

a referentiality, in the stead of ordinary language's inexact, misleading and deceptive qualities. A purificationist undertaking and ideal, if you will.

In the second turn (represented by Russian Formalism, Prague Structuralism[11] and other literary theoretical schools), it seems to me that 'ordinary' language is to a large extent endowed with exactly those qualities that the first turn claimed it fell short of, i.e. stringency and referentiality. The opposite pole here is *poetic language* which, in turn, is characterized by the ambiguity, deceitfulness, etc. that Ideal Language Philosophers claim is a quality of ordinary language.

And as we, in regard to the first turn, can witness a debate between Ideal Language philosophers and Ordinary Language philosophers (defending, so to speak, ordinary language), we can, regarding the second turn, witness a debate between on the one hand those making a distinction between practical and poetic language and, on the other, those that claim that there is nothing but poetic language: all language is ambiguous, deceitful, polysemic, polyvocal, free floating.

Thus, we have (to exaggerate) on the one extreme a position built upon a foundation of *naming,* whose adherents are convinced that ideal language may be perfected to the degree that it becomes unambiguous, each word having a determined, fixed referent, a 'rational' language with perfect or close to perfect representative value, and on the other extreme a position built upon a foundation of *arbitrariness,* whose adherents are positive that poetic language is, as it were, the negative pole of the first turn's; it is fundamentally unstable with *no* fixed meanings at all, an 'irrational' language ultimately, I believe, ending in glossolalia or music. And in between there are those, among themselves not at all united, who argue that there is but *one* language.

At the same time, there is also a move by certain literary theorists towards, for example, psychoanalysis (see Norman Holland, 1981, and also Freund, 1987: 112–33), and the 'imperialism' of neo-classical economics is matched by linguistically oriented philosophers and literary theorists such as, for example, Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard. This tendency is observed by, among others, the American deconstructionist inspired critic Jonathan Culler:

> semiotics embraces a vast domain: it moves in, imperialistically, on the territory of most disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Any sphere of human activity, from music to cooking to politics, can be an object of semiotic study.
>
> (Culler, 1988b:34)

This move is also recognized by the historian Hayden White who, almost appalled (or is it indignant?), deplores the fact that an 'absurdist' movement in contemporary literary theory is making its presence felt to a not altogether healthy degree:

> no field is more imperialistic. Modern literary critics recognize no disciplinary barriers, either as to subject matter or as to methods. In literary criticism, anything goes. This science of rules has no rules. It cannot even be said that it has a preferred object of study.
>
> (White, 1985d:261)

However, it should be observed that this 'imperialistic' move can be considered from another point of view, not contradicting these complaints but rather supplementing them. Due to certain unresolved problems, its assistance is *asked* for by other disciplines or sciences (cf., for example, Pêcheux, 1982:55).

But the problem of reading is two problems, actually. The first concerns the hows and whys of different modes of reading, how to explain them. The second problem, then, is how to establish, if possible, a proposition for a mode of reading that does not create the same problems as those created by the various readings mentioned below, i.e. how to avoid relativism in critical activity, how to avoid getting stuck in a position where 'the critic, like the writer, never has the last word' (Barthes, 1972a:xii). The scope of the present text, however, is *not* to develop a full-fledged theory of criticism or, which amounts to the same, theory of reading. The immediate task, rather, is to grasp how different modes of critique (or reading) give different (knowledge) effects, i.e. to understand how it is possible that readings of, for example, Adam Smith and David Ricardo can give such contradictory results as those illustrated below. Furthermore, to formulate some *indications* towards which a theory of criticism should strive that does not annihilate these contradictions that are parts of the texts but, on the contrary, takes them into account as a normal part of its practice. The results of this groping are presented in the following. I will thus limit myself to set up—provisionally, I must stress, and at the risk of some oversimplification—some ideas, which will indicate the direction in which I deem it fruitful to proceed to further theorization.

Consequently, it is with these limited aims in mind that I will read and use various literary theorists' texts. In this appropriation of elements of different theories (and I insist: elements), I will obviously not do justice to all the theoretical efforts involved. As my undertaking is more limited, it would take us too far to try to incorporate the total of these systems into the present text. This being so, my use will by necessity do these modes of thought some injustice in that these elements are taken out of context and so will, and to some extent *must,* be distorted; how could it be otherwise since, as the philospher Michel Pêcheux among so many others has observed,

> words, expressions, propositions, etc. change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to those positions…
>
> (Pêcheux, 1982:111)

And even if it would be the case that my position was close to that of some of the theorists below, the respective positions would not be identical. This is, of course, what happens in every 'eclectic' undertaking, although the distortions may be more or less insulting to the (unknowing) lender.

Now, 'criticism', notes Pierre Macherey, is an ambiguous term. On the one hand, it refers to a normative and educational activity, a 'criticism-as-condemnation', involving 'a gesture of refusal, a denunciation, a hostile judgment' (Macherey, 1978:3);[12] this is equivalent, in other words, to the kind of criticism that treats its object of knowledge

not as it is but as it—for one reason or another —should be. On the other hand, criticism is a scientific activity aiming at 'the positive knowledge of limits, the study of *the conditions and possibilities of an activity*'; i.e. 'criticism-as-explanation' (Macherey, 1978:3, italics mine. Cf. also Abrams, 1988:38f). In a similar but not identical vein, Jonathan Culler formulates the task of criticism as

> *to discover the conventions which make meaning possible.* Here the goal is to develop a poetics which would stand to literature as linguistics stands to language. Just as the task of linguists is not to tell us what individual sentences mean but to explain according to what rules their elements combine and contrast to produce the meanings sentences have for speakers of a language, so the semiotician attempts to discover the nature of the codes which make literary communication possible.
>
> (Culler, 1988b:37, italics mine)

It is this, the second of criticism's activities that is of primary interest in the present context—accordingly, the first will to a large extent be left out of consideration.

The understandings of the theories of value in Adam Smith and David Ricardo

Now, before proceeding any further I want to introduce, as an illustration, however limited, some understandings or, perhaps better, spontaneous readings of two 'classics' of the social sciences, i.e. Adam Smith and David Ricardo and their theories of value. These understandings are also examples of what was observed by Althusser, namely that 'every recognized science not only has emerged from its own prehistory but continues endlessly to do so (its prehistory remains always contemporary: something like its *Alter Ego*) by *rejecting* what it considers to be *error*' (Althusser, 1976:114; cf. also Descombes, quoted above).

One reason for the continuing return to Smith and Ricardo by proponents of different modes of thought is the question: whence originates value?

However, this reason and this question do not stand alone, they are connected to an appropriation of the classics in a writing of history; a history of Marxism, say, or of neo-classical economics. In other words, there is a wider implication: it is—in Descombes words—'a lawsuit', inexorably tied to a theme that repeatedly will be in focus below, i.e. that of a striking pursuit of *unity*—working like a blindness of sorts. And I also think—without, however, going into details or trying to demonstrate it here—that this illustration may be generalized to cover the treatment that, first and foremost, all social science 'classics' (but not only the 'classics') are victims of, from which follows—if I am correct—that not only the history of the social sciences could be rewritten, but also that the prevailing views of not only the 'classics' but also that of most social science theorists may be reconsidered, coloured as they are of modes of reading or understanding that to a large extent are quite defective.

Now, this problem, this question—whence originates value? —was inherited by both Marxism and neo-classical economics from this common source (cf. Roll, 1966:298f). It was bequeathed to them by Classical Political Economy—a heritage that was used, that gave the inheritors possibilities of different ways of using it; a will so formulated that it was possible to use it in different but equally legitimate ways; where each inheritor *could* claim sole proprietorship; where each inheritor thought he was the sole legitimate child according to his own very legitimate *claims*. Because, or so at least it seems, it is the claims that make the relation legitimate, not the legacy in itself. And they cultivated the inheritance—each in its own fashion—so that the end results as we can see them today no longer give way to this common origin. This phenomenon is, I think, quite obvious when one takes a look at the economic anthropological discourse, where the question of *value as such* has no prominent position—if any—but where, clearly, the use of the one or the other explanatory structure has far-reaching consequences.

Below, I will give a brief and sketchy view of appropriations of elements of this common inheritance—the classical theory of value. Let us accept Joseph Schumpeter's modest demand:

> By theories of value we mean *attempts at indicating* the factors that account for a thing's having exchange value or—though this is not strictly the same— the factors that 'regulate' or 'govern' value.
>
> (Schumpeter, 1985:590, italics mine)

What I will do below is to point out that elements of this theory (these theories) could be, and in fact were—through a process of theoretical transformations— transferred into the neo-classical and Marxist theories of value. It should thus be clear that I am not interested in the classical theory of value in itself, nor in its faults or virtues.

Strictly speaking, it is of course highly problematical to speak of the theory of value of classical political economy, not only because it can be argued that there is no one such thing, hereby implying that the classical political economists among themselves held different theories of value.[13] It is equally problematical if we try to speak of Adam Smith's or David Ricardo's theory of value (in the singular), respectively. Thus, if I seem to regard the theories of value of Adam Smith and David Ricardo as identical, it is only for expository purposes.

Now, proponents of the two schools of economic thought each appropriate certain crucial characteristics of Classical Political Economy's theory (theories) of value so as to gain sole proprietorship, at the expense of the other. The purpose and rationale behind this appropriation is, I think, to be found in the strategic position of the theory of value that seems to be recognized by the parties involved. That is, within Classical Political Economy, Marxism and neo-classical economics alike, views are expressed to the effect that the theory of value is the nucleus around which the respective theoretical system revolves.

Pertinent in this respect are the following observations:

> almost every speculation respecting the economical interests of a society thus constituted implies some theory of Value: the smallest error on that subject infects with corresponding error all our other conclusions; and anything vague or misty in our conception of it creates confusion and uncertainty in everything else.
>
> (Mill, 1895:298)

> Value is the essence of things in economics. Its laws are to political economy what the law of gravity is to mechanics.
>
> (von Wieser, 1971:xxx)

> Any theory of value necessarily constitutes an implicit definition of the general shape and character of the terrain which it has decided to call 'economic'.
>
> (Dobb, 1972:19)[14]

And once these appropriations are done and cultivations begun, the theoretical courses are set, tending to get lives of their own, while their origins vanish into the background, eventually, it seems, to disappear.

Within the Marxist discourse there has taken place a vivid and vital controversy concerning the role of the value theory in its system of thought. Arguments as to its absolutely fundamental position (for example Fine and Harris, 1976) as well as to its superfluousness have been advanced (for example Steedman, 1977:207; cf. also, for example, Lippi, 1979 and Steedman *et al.,* 1981).

The situation is somewhat different within the neo-classical school where price theory is uncontested. Still, a similar disconnecting effect can be identified here, too, as the development towards the generalized rational choice approach severs the link to its subjective theory of price and value. The American economist Gary Becker (1976) could serve as a good illustration of this tendency, as well as the formalist school in economic anthropology, which may very well be considered the precursor of this development.

On Smith and Ricardo

Smith's theory of value (in the Schumpeterian sense referred to above) is notorious for being 'ambiguous and confused' (Roll, 1966:156), an observation which Adam Smith himself probably would have agreed with: before embarking upon the outline of his value theory he warns the reader that it may 'after the fullest explication which I am capable of giving of it, appear still in some degree obscure' (Smith, 1981:46), a remark upon which Mark Blaug comments: 'Most readers would put this remark down as the greatest understatement in the history of economic thought' (Blaug, 1968:41; but cf. Louis Dumont, an exception to a general tendency, who argues that there is consistency to be found where hitherto only contradictions have been seen (Dumont, 1977:86, but also the whole of Chapter 6 and the Appendix)).

Now, despite a generally agreed-upon ambiguity, inconsistency, etc. in the Smithian value theory, attempts are made to create, as it were, order out of chaos and confusion, to re-create the true value theory held by Smith, and also, by implication and most often explicitly, what theory of value was not held by him.

So, for example, does Schumpeter credit Smith with three theories of value: (a) the labour quantity theory; (b) the labour disutility theory; and, finally, (c) the cost (-of-production) theory that *'he actually used'* (Schumpeter, 1985:590, italics mine). Similarly, Eric Roll identifies a labour theory of value and a cost-of-production theory (Roll, 1966:171), but also notes that even though 'he is not able to *escape* entirely from the vicious circle of the cost-of-production theory' (Roll, 1966:164, italics mine), '*in the end,* his theory rests on…the labour theory of value' (Roll, 1966:157, italics mine). Also, Maurice Dobb finds a couple of theories of value in his reading of Smith, observing that 'there is a hint of a labour theory of natural value' (Dobb, 1975:45), which, however, is abandoned as soon as accumulation of stock and privatization of land has taken place. Even if Dobb admits the ambiguous and unsystematic character of Smith's writing (for example, Dobb, 1975:66, 1972:13), it appears as if he in the end accepts the dominance of an 'adding-up' theory of price (following Sraffa in terminology; see Sraffa and Dobb, 1986:xxxvf), corresponding to what has above been referred to as cost-of-production theory (i.e. Schumpeter and Roll). Gunnar Myrdal recognizes two definitions of value: 'first, labour used up in the production of a commodity…and second, the quantity of labour which a commodity can command in the market', adding that 'No doubt Adam Smith had aimed initially at the first concept. But in his theory of natural price which consists of wages, profit and rent, he approached the second definition' (Myrdal, 1961:67 for both quotes). However, in the revised Swedish edition, this change, this slide is presented as an *effect* of the price theory (Myrdal, 1972:102), i.e. as *a tension between the author and his concepts,* where the logic of the theory is eventually victorious at the expense of the will of the subject-author.

According to Blaug, 'it is clear that he [Smith] had no labour theory of value', and that 'the construction of Book I, chapter 6 *[On the Component Parts of the Price of Commodities]* clearly shows that it was meant to be a refutation of the labor-cost theory of value' (Blaug, 1968:42), and the belief that Smith in fact held such a theory is declared to be 'simply absurd' (Blaug, 1968:54). Such an 'absurd' thesis is, however, advanced by Louis Dumont: 'Smith's [attempt at a] labour theory of value' (Dumont, 1977:99). Dumont also argues against those interpretations that admit the possibility that Smith held a labour theory of value, but pertinent only to 'that early and rude state of society which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land' (Smith, 1981:65): 'quite the contrary' (Dumont, 1977:98).

With Adam Smith, so with David Ricardo. As has been noted, 'Ricardo elaborated his theory of value within the Smithian theoretic structure' (Napoleoni, 1975:69; see also, for example, Sraffa and Dobb, 1986 and Schumpeter, 1985: 590), a connection, however strong or weak it may be (cf., for example, Levine, 1974:293), which is clear from the very first sentences of his *Principles* (Ricardo, 1986:11).[15]

What elements of the Smithian theory that were actually transferred and/or transformed into the Ricardian is a question of some disagreement.

Now, although, as Myrdal (1961:61) notes, Ricardo's exposition is more consistent than Smith's, and although, as observed by Dobb,

> that until 1817, the year of Ricardo's *Principles,* there was nothing that could be called a single theoretical system of political economy, even as a preliminary sketch. A characteristic of the *Wealth of Nations* was its unsystematic character so far as theory was concerned…. With Ricardo, however, we meet something rather different: *an integrated theory of value*
>
> (Dobb, 1975:66, italics mine)

his text is obviously not without its interpretational problems.

According to Alfred Marshall, for instance, Ricardo's presentation is 'confused' and 'ambiguous', and calls for 'generosity in interpretation' (Marshall, 1916:813). In a similar vein, Blaug complains on the chapter on value in the *Principles:* 'so tortuous is Ricardo's exposition that we are likely to deceive ourselves that he actually substantiated the labor-cost theory of value', and even worse: 'The chapter is virtually impossible to follow' (Blaug, 1968:103f).

Encountered with these evident difficulties, it comes as no surprise that—as in the case of Adam Smith—differing views exist about what theory of value (if any) Ricardo actually held. As the picture is quite similar to Smith's, I will limit myself to give just a few examples.

Let us return to 'that early and rude state of society' where Smith sought for the origins of exchangeable value. According to Schumpeter (1985:590–5), Ricardo's theory of value has its point of departure here. But where—according to some but not all—Smith used this state (known as the 'deer—beaver' example) as a limiting case, Ricardo saw it as 'the one to adopt, not only for "primitive" conditions in which there was no scarce factor other than labour, but generally for all cases' (Schumpeter, 1985:590f; see also Sraffa and Dobb, 1986:xxxvif). Thus, Schumpeter accepts a labour-quantity theory of value in Ricardo: 'the quantity of labour that a commodity "embodies"' (Schumpeter, 1985:590), not withstanding some flaws (see, for example, Schumpeter, 1985:594). This view, also shared by, for example, Myrdal (1961:61) and Dobb (1972:13), is not entirely agreed upon by Blaug, who, while not out and out denying its existence, is of the opinion that if Ricardo adhered to the labour theory at all, he did so only out of 'convenience' (Blaug, 1968:96, 119). In the end, Blaug seems to argue, Ricardo held no value theory at all (Blaug, 1968:120), basing this judgement on deficiencies and omissions in the Ricardian text. Similarly, Marshall argues against 'Marx's misunderstanding' (i.e. that Ricardo held a labour theory of value; Marshall, 1916:816), instead interpreting Ricardo as advancing a cost-of-production theory (Marshall, 1916:503), an interpretation which, according to Myrdal 'obscured Ricardo's arguments' (Myrdal, 1961:78) but which, according to Roll, is due to a confusion between value and price inherent in Ricardo's text, and which explains why so many later economists claimed to

see in Ricardo's work nothing but a cost-of-production theory, and why it was possible for them to eliminate the labour theory of value altogether (Roll, 1966:180). Roll might very well have had Marshall in mind here.

By now my point ought to be sufficiently clear: despite admissions that Smith's and Ricardo's texts are difficult to understand, despite most commentators' identifications of contradictions, germs of more than one theory of value, attempts are made to restate the theory of value which is claimed to be Smith's and Ricardo's *true* one and—not less important—what possible theories are *not*. At first sight, this may of course be regarded as quite a legitimate task, because what is involved here is, as Michael Mulkay has so aptly phrased it,

> to make sense of a particular batch of texts (the original text) by formulating a secondary text…The objective of the secondary text is to show any reader, including the analyst, how the original text is to be read or understood. One necessary feature of the secondary, analytical text is that it differs from the original text. If the secondary text did not differ from the original text, it would be a mere repetition of that text and would be analytically empty. The secondary text inevitably selects from the original text, summarizes it, ignores part of it, rephrases it, puts it in a new context, identifies its important and unimportant features, simplifies it, and so on. In other words, the analytical text systematically deviates from and, in this sense, distorts the original text as it performs analytical work on that text and re-presents it for analytical purposes. This systematic distortion is captured in the frequently used distinction between raw data (original text) and results or findings. The raw data are manipulated, re-ordered and re-presented in the analytical text to reveal their…meaning.

> (Mulkay, 1985:237f)

Now, it seems quite natural to assume that both Smith and Ricardo strived for coherence and consistency in their works, whereas the opposite assumption would be rather startling, indeed. But from this 'rational' assumption to infer that it is possible to reconstruct *what was really meant* is, as the anthropologist Lawrence Krader once put it, 'an illusion by those who feel that they have the gift of second sight' (Krader, 1975:13).[16] Anyhow, as these 'interpretational' attempts bear witness, pitfalls obviously abound, a main problem being whether there is a possibility to bridge the gap between these reconstructive ambitions and the theoretically possible— provided, that is, that we do not regard any one interpretation as being the result of someone with less intelligence than the others or as the result of 'defective' data. I assume neither. Then, maybe this task, this reconstructive activity is founded upon nothing but an illusion, and that its supposed legitimacy is at best nothing but formal—formal but impossible. Maybe the best strategy is to identify the tensions that exist in the texts we read, and by so doing show that there are *possibilities*, elements from which to proceed in different directions without giving in to any extreme relativism where *anything* may go. In any event, it seems as if the above

exposé raises a set of problems that should not be just passed by, but demand some kind of assessment.

Guilty understanding

Accepting the thesis that there are no innocent readings, one should pay some attention to the problem of where the guilty readings may emanate from. Now, at least since the publications of the philosopher of science N.R.Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery* (1958) and, some years later, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), we are well aware of the *theory-ladenness* of observation, of 'seeing things differently'. *Aware,* but as the American critic Robert Scholes has remarked, it is one thing to know, quite another to act in accordance with this knowledge (Scholes, 1982:6). One should observe the 'laden' here, since P.K. Feyerabend goes one step further, and speaks of observations or observation terms as not only theory-laden but as *fully theoretical:*

> there are only theoretical terms…There is of course a distinction between theoretical terms and observation terms, but it is a psychological distinction.
> (Feyerabend, 1986a:x)

Thomas S.Kuhn is more conservative, noting as he does in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that *hitherto* no neutral observation language is known to us, but 'perhaps one will yet be devised' (Kuhn, 1970:126), even though he is not too optimistic about that pursuit's feasibility (Kuhn, 1970:126–35).

Now, if there is as Hanson and others argue, 'a sense in which two…observers do not see the same thing, do not begin from the same data' (Hanson, 1981:4), then producing knowledge is *not* (only) a problem of interpreting things differently —the things actually are different: they are different *things*.

It should be noted here the other meaning of 'see' and, as does theoretical physicist David Bohm, we point to its kinship to 'theory': 'The word "theory" derives from the Greek *theoria,* which has the same root as "theatre", in a word meaning "to view" or "to make a spectacle". Thus, it might be said that a theory is primarily a form of *insight,* i.e. "a way of looking at the word"' (Bohm, 1981:3f). Thus, 'seeing' does not only—not even necessarily—involve the seeing of an eye.

So, why do observers not see the same thing, or more accurately: why do they see some things and not others? It seems reasonable to accede to Althusser's observation—Althusser who is close to this way of treating the problem in its general outlines (see particularly Althusser, 1975:24–8) —that what defines the visible is also what defines the invisible; some objects and problems are

> necessarily *invisible* in the field of…[a] theory, because they are not objects of this theory, because they are *forbidden* by it…they are invisible because they are rejected in principle, repressed from the field of the visible, and that is why their fleeting presence in the field when it does occur…*goes unperceived* …
> (Althusser, 1975:26)

What guides observation, then, is the theoretical system from within which one 'sees', from which follows that 'The knowledge is there in the seeing and not an adjunct to it' (Hanson, 1981:22), and thus that 'seeing' seen in this way is 'the *way* in which the…experience is had' (Hanson, 1981:15, italics mine).

It must be emphasized that although Hanson is primarily concerned with elementary particle physics, his claim is that his

> accounts of scientific observation, of *the interplay between facts and the notations in which they are expressed,* and of the 'theory-laden' character of causal talk …apply to *all* scientific inquiry.
>
> (Hanson, 1981:2, italics mine)

In turn, this means that 'seeing' as well as 'things' in, for example, 'seeing things differently' should not be read literally, lest this generality would risk getting lost.

Hanson was not the first, of course; we can recognize the main thrust of his insights in other philosophical or scientific traditions as well. In 1927 Martin Heidegger dealt with the same problem (particularly in section 32), and writes that

> In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it.
>
> (Heidegger, 1962:190)

And in 1934 Bachelard observed what since has almost become a common-place:

> Scientific observation is always polemical; it either confirms or denies a prior thesis, a pre-existing model, an observational protocol. It shows as it demonstrates; it establishes a hierarchy of appearances; it transcends the immediate; it reconstructs first its own models and then reality. And once the step is taken from observation to experimentation, the polemical character of knowledge stands out even more sharply…indeed, it may well be the instruments that produce the phenomenon in the first place. And *instruments are nothing but theories materialized.* The phenomena they produce bear the stamp of theory throughout.
>
> (Bachelard, 1984:12f, italics mine; cf. also, for example, Feyerabend, 1975)[17]

And if we, briefly, widen our horizon a little more, looking at the visual arts we may find comparable views. In Heinrich Wölfflin's treatise on the basic concepts of art history, he starts with the observation that seeing has its history (Wölfflin, 1957:12), and that different, more or less incompatible, 'optical' frameworks lie at the bottom of the visual arts (Wölfflin, 1957:14; cf. also Antoni, 1962:207–28 and Hauser, 1985:120ff) much like, I take it, Kuhnian paradigms, including their shifts (cf. Kuhn, 1970). Similarly, 'The innocent eye is a myth' says E.H. Gombrich

(widely read by literary theorists; cf., for example, Krieger, 1988:172– 92) in one place (Gombrich, 1977:252), and in another, as if repeating Althusser's denial of any existence of an innocent reading, 'There is no innocent eye' (Gombrich, 1985:82).

Now, this may lead one to accept, for example, Nietzsche's *perspectivism*. Nietzsche, who is actualized by 'post-structuralism' and deconstructionism (see, for example, Jacques Derrida, 1979 and his ally, the Yale literary theoretician Paul de Man, 1979a), and who writes that: 'There are no facts, everything is in flux…In short: the essence of a thing is only an *opinion* about the "thing". Or rather: "it is considered" is the real "it is", the sole "this is"' (Nietzsche, 1968: 327, 302), which implies that we

> cannot even speak of these interpretations as 'distorting' reality, for there is nothing that counts as a veridical interpretation relative to which a given interpretation could distort: or *every* interpretation is a distortion, except that there *is* nothing for it to be a distortion of.
>
> (Danto, 1980:37; see also Granier, 1985)

This, in turn, might take us to the French philosopher of science and physicist Pierre Duhem and the American philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine. In 1906, Pierre Duhem summarized what was later to become known as the Duhem— Quine thesis—one instance of a more generalized theory of the underdetermination of theory by data—as the impossibility for the scientist of subjecting

> an isolated hypothesis to experimental test, but only a whole group of hypotheses; when the experiment is in disagreement with his predictions, what he learns is that at least one of the hypotheses constituting this group is unacceptable and ought to be modified; but the experiment does not designate which one should be changed…. Physical science is a system that must be taken as a whole; it is an organism in which one part cannot be made to function except when the parts that are most remote from it are called into play.
>
> (Duhem, 1977:187)[18]

This view is endorsed by W.V.O.Quine in the famous essay *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (1980a, see, for example, p. 41) and also in *Identity Ostension, and Hypostasis* (in both cases referring back to Duhem), where Quine also observes that

> We can improve our conceptual scheme, our philosophy, bit by bit while continuing to depend on it for support; but we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively with an unconceptualized reality.
>
> (Quine, 1980b:79)

This view is further developed by U.S. literary critic Stanley Fish, who claims that:

theories *always* work and they will always produce *exactly* the results they predict, results that will be immediately compelling to those for whom the theory's assumptions and enabling principles are self-evident.

(Fish, 1980g:68, italics mine)

However, this view is not uncontested. So, for example, argues the philosopher and theoretical physicist Mario Bunge that there is such a thing as unsuccessful theories and, moreover, that these show the existence of something 'out there':

HYLAS: This lack of complete overlapping or harmony between thoughts and things; this fact that disagreement between thinking and its objects is more frequent than the corresponding agreement, suffices to prove that thought is not the same as matter. That there is a reality, existing out of the mind, and which we are pleased to call 'matter'.

PHILONOUS: I never expected to see unsuccessful theories of matter used to prove the reality of matter.

HYLAS: In so far as our theories of matter fail, they thereby demonstrate the reality of matter; and in so far as they succeed, they demonstrate that we are able to understand the world surrounding us.

(Bunge, 1981:205)

Hence, there is a complication here, because as Hanson observes, 'wherever it makes sense to say that two scientists looking at x do not see the same thing, there must always be a prior sense in which they see the same thing' (Hanson, 1981:5),[19] or the problem would not be a problem:

Unless both are visually aware of the same object there can be nothing of philosophical interest in the question whether or not they see the same thing. Unless they both see the sun in this prior sense our question cannot even strike a spark.

(Hanson, 1981:7)[20]

Is this not exactly the situation that confronts us when we are confronting readers confronting texts, as in the situation illustrated above by the examples of the readings of Smith and Ricardo? And must not Fish, his radical relativism notwithstanding, agree that the text he actually reads *is* there? And thus if Hanson to illustrate his thesis uses the bird—antelope-example (Hanson, 1981:13), may one not for Hanson's picture substitute language or even single words, as may be confronted in the examples of, for example, Jacques Derrida (1976) and the British poet and literary critic William Empson (1953), though from different positions, on different levels, and with different success in different quarters?

A caution, similar to Hanson's, is—in another context—given by Pierre Macherey, who points out that an unqualified acceptance of the primacy of the observer sends 'the reader back to his faith and condemn[s] the author to a *gratuitous game*' (Macherey, 1978:72, italics mine).

This latter option seems to be the Chicago economist George Stigler's: 'The recipients of a scientific message are the people who determine what the message is' (Stigler, 1982b:91), a view that could be associated with Roland Barthes: 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes, 1982a:148), which in turn should be joined to his attempt to abolish the author from the scene altogether and replace him with the reader:

> a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author…the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.
>
> (Barthes, 1982a:148)[21]

This 'reader-response' inspired approach, under the guise of 'structuralist literary criticism', is the target of structuralist anthropology's grand old man, Claude Lévi-Strauss's objection insofar as it amounts to the deprivation 'of any means of sorting out what is simply received from the one [the author] and what the other [the reader, the critic] puts into it. One thus becomes locked into a reciprocal relativism' (Lévi-Strauss, 1977b:275).

It is thus *not,* according to Hanson, a question of who is the most accurate *interpreter of given* data, phenomena or what have you, which it is the interpreter's task to receive and give back in an essentially unaltered but, still, necessarily different form. Rather, two consequences follow: (a) there are a plurality of possible depictions of reality; and, following from this, (b) no depiction is 'innocent'. And is this not a conclusion that can be drawn from the experiments carried out by, for example, the influential British critic I.A.Richards in the twenties and recorded in Richards (1982) and by Michel Pêcheux in the early seventies (Pêcheux, 1978), where in both cases we have certain texts to be read by certain readers resulting in highly diverging readings of these texts?

Accepting this view in its general outlines will make the phenomenon observed above regarding the readings of Smith and Ricardo less surprising, and is, moreover, a way of throwing doubt on the view that regards the process of knowledge production of texts solely as one of *interpreting* given objects of knowledge.

Now, if Hanson analyses modes of seeing physical reality, Macherey has as his object of knowledge textual reality to be apprehended by a theory of literary production (criticism). Hanson and Macherey thus seem to stand on different sides of the present problem: scientific texts are on the one hand on *reality* (whatever that means) — thus close to Hanson's object of knowledge—and on the other, they are *texts* (as if these were not real) —thus close to Macherey's object of knowledge.

A question poses itself: principally, are we helped in the process of understanding readings of scientific texts by, on the one hand, insights from the analysis of reality, and on the other hand by the analysis of analyses of literary texts? There seems to be good reasons for an affirmative answer to this question, reasons which pertain

to the general process and characteristics of knowledge production, according to at least one account. These characteristics are, in their most general form outlined by Althusser (and we can hear the echo of Bachelard) as

> any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product,* a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of production). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means.
>
> (Althusser, 1977a:166f)

A theoretical practice, as Althusser terms it, is, then, a specific form of practice,[22] distinguishable by its specific form of raw material, its mode of transformation (theory) and its product (knowledge). What is of immediate concern to us here is how to characterize the raw material upon which theory works in order to produce knowledge if we are to return to the question asked above. An extensive quotation from Althusser should make this clear, and will also serve the purpose of giving a reasonable argument for why I think it not out of place to answer this question in the affirmative:

> But what, then, is…the raw material on which the labour is expended? Contrary to the ideological illusions…of empiricism or sensualism, a science never works on an existence whose essence is pure immediacy and singularity ('sensations' or 'individuals'). It always works on something 'general', even if this has the form of a 'fact'. *At its moment of constitution*…science always works on existing concepts…of an ideological nature. It does not 'work' on a purely objective 'given', that of pure and absolute 'facts'. On the contrary, its particular labour consists of elaborating its own scientific facts through a critique of the ideological 'facts' elaborated by an earlier ideological theoretical practice. To elaborate its own specific 'facts' is simultaneously to elaborate its own 'theory', since a scientific fact…can only be identified in the field of a theoretical practice. *In the development of an already constituted science,* the latter works on a raw material…constituted either of still ideological concepts which belong nevertheless to an earlier phase of the science…. So it is by transforming this [raw material] into a…knowledge that the science works and produces.
>
> (Althusser, 1977a:183f, italics added and deleted)

To regard literary production analogously explains also, according to the literary theoretician Terry Eagleton, why it is 'mere mystification to speak of the author as a "creator"' (Eagleton, 1982:147), since, as we have seen, the raw material is already constituted (pre-fabricated as it were or, perhaps even: pre-created), and so already determined (cf. Macherey, 1978:66ff).

Now, put in this general form, there is no decisive difference between approaching 'reality' and approaching 'texts'. There is no reason to believe that the reading of a text should not in the same manner as the 'reading' of 'reality' be determined by the reader's theoretical presuppositions, i.e. the reading of a text is as theory-laden as the 'reading' of social/natural reality (cf. Macherey, 1978:71); as Edward Said puts it:

> No reading is neutral or innocent, and by the same token every text and every reader is to some extent the product of a theoretical stand-point, however implicit or unconscious such a stand-point may be.
>
> (Said, 1984:241)

Any theory of criticism should therefore start from this general supposition, and proceed accordingly.

Notes

1   The reader will perhaps notice a certain abundance of the word 'seem' in the text to follow. I can only excuse myself by citing the following passage:

> From its *seeming* to me—or to everyone—to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1975a:§2)

2   It is possible to further complicate the picture:

> Historical discourse is presumably the only kind which aims at a referent 'outside' itself that can in fact never be reached. We must therefore ask ourselves again: What is the place of 'reality' in the structure of discourse?
>
> (Barthes, 1970b:153f)

3   On 'reference', see, for example, Ducrot and Todorov (1987:247–53). I will be using the term referent in the broad sense implied by Ducrot and Todorov, i.e. as the idea that 'The natural languages…have the power to construct the universe to which they refer, they can thus give themselves an imaginary discursive universe' (Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:247, italics deleted).

4   See, for example, the British sociologist Stephen Savage's critique of the 'epistemological modes of critique' (Savage, 1983:16–23).

5   Cf. also Althusser's appreciation of Spinoza: 'The first man ever to have posed the problem of *reading,* and in consequence, of *writing,* was Spinoza' (Althusser, 1975:16).

6   Cf., for example, Larry Laudan's critique of contemporary history of ideas and intentionalist criticism:

> The historian must be at least as concerned with how ideas are received (what the Germans call *Rezeptionsgeschichte*)…The intentions or the internal thought processes of a man who generates an idea are largely (and often completely) irrelevant to explaining how that idea is received in the appropriate intellectual community.
>
> (Laudan, 1978:183)

7   Among those that merit attention are, without any exhaustiveness or hierarchy intended, for example, Robert Darnton (1984), Miriam Glucksmann (1974), Barry Hindess (1977), Dominick LaCapra (1985, 1987), Donald McCloskey (1986), Michael Mulkay (1985), Stephen Savage (1983),

Quentin Skinner (1969, 1972), Ivan Strenski (1987), Keith Tribe (1978, 1980, 1981a), Hayden White (1975, 1985a, 1987a) and Karel Williams (1981).

8   For the 'first' turn, see Rorty's (1988b) classic collection of essays and Rorty's own introduction, containing essays by the main Ideal Language and Ordinary Language advocates. Cf. also, for example, Foucault (1973:294–300) and Steiner (1976:206–35).

9   This should not be taken to imply that either 'turn' can be considered homogeneous. Quite the contrary—important epistemological, methodological, etc. dissimilarities exist, but are not, at this moment, of my concern.

10   Cf., for example, the inventory in Stanley Fish (1980c:97).

11   The literary theoretical school generally known as Russian Formalism (out of which grew Prague Structuralism (see, for example, Erlich, 1981:156–63) and modern structuralism (Todorov, 1977a: 247), very much through the participation of Jakobson) consisted in fact of two heterogeneous groups, the Moscow Linguistic Circle with the linguist Roman Jakobson as one of its founders, instituted in 1915, and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language, also known by its acronym OPOYAZ, founded a year later in Petersburg, and led by the literary critic and novelist Viktor Shklovsky. Other well-known members of Russian Formalism include, for example, the literary theoreticians Osip Brik, Boris Eichenbaum and Jurij Tynjanov.

   Jakobson was also one of the founders of Prague structuralism or, as it was officially known, the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926. Famous figures of the Prague school include the linguist Vilém Mathesius, the literary theorist Jan Mukarovsky, and the Russian linguist Nikolay Trubetskoy.

   Russian formalism, as later the Prague structuralism, was highly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic views, in its poetics primarily paying attention to the sign rather than the referent. The form and technique as well as the autonomy of the literary work is in focus, at the expense, in the case of Russian formalism but not Prague structuralism, of its content. Both schools differentiate between functions of language, centred around the distinction between the poetic and the referential functions (see, for example, Jakobson, 1987c:66, 69).

   The main difference between the schools is summarized by J.G.Merquior, 'If we take formalism to mean neglect of content in art and symbolism in general, then the plain historical truth is that structuralism reacted against it almost from the outset' (Merquior, 1986:20).

   The classical text on Russian Formalism is Victor Erlich (1981). On the Prague school, see Frantisek Galan (1985) and Peter Steiner (1982d).

12   Which seems to be the original meaning of the term:

   The term ultimately derives from the Greek *kríno* to judge', and *krités,* 'a judge' or 'juryman'. *Kritikós,* as 'judge of literature', was used as early as the fourth century B.C.

   (Wellek, 1981:298)

   For a concise history of literary criticism, see this essay by René Wellek.

13   Of course, even the use of the term 'Classical Political Economy' itself is problematical in so far as it is an a posteriori designation of a theoretical system that may not even have existed.

14   Similar is von Mises's statement that 'In the concept of money all the theorems of monetary theory are already implied' (von Mises, 1966:38; cf. also Schumpeter, 1985:588 and Walras, 1984:207). See also Norwood Russell Hanson (not on economics but on theoretical systems in general): 'The entire conceptual pattern of the game is implicit in each term. You cannot grasp one of these ideas properly while remaining in the dark about the rest' (Hanson, 1981:61).

15   Ricardo on Smith:

   Adam Smith, who so accurately defined the original source of exchangeable value, and who was bound in consistency to maintain, that all things became more or less valuable in proportion as more or less labour was bestowed on their production, has himself erected another standard measure of value, and speaks of things more or less valuable, in proportions as they will exchange for more or less of this standard measure. Sometimes he speaks of corn, at other times of labour, as a standard measure; not the quantity of labour bestowed on the production

of any object, but the quantity which it can command in the market: as if these were two equivalent expressions, and as if because a man's labour had become doubly efficient, and he could therefore produce twice the quantity of a commodity, he would necessarily receive twice the former quantity in exchange for it.

(Ricardo, 1986:13f)

16   Cf: 'My own argument can thus be read as an attempt to interpret what I take to have been Weber's real meaning', Quentin Skinner (1988a:117).

17   On Bachelard, see, especially, McAllester Jones (1991) and Lecourt 1975:32–110, 129–61), but also, for example, Weber (1987b:ix–xv).

18   For the whole of Duhem's argument, see especially Duhem (1977, Part II, Chapters VI and VII). For discussions on the Duhem—Quine thesis, see, for example, Harding (1976) and Hesse (1980).

19   This point is forgotten by Jeffrey Alexander when he discusses Hanson, where he instead makes it his own point, purportedly as an argument against a deficiency in Hanson's argument (Alexander, 1982a:147)! Similarly, Paisley Livingston, discussing arguments presented *on this exact page* (!) in Hanson's book, misses the same point (Livingston, 1988:92f, 100). What blindness is responsible for these oversights?

20   This is the problem Roy Bhaskar discusses in terms of science's transitive and intransitive dimensions (see, for example, Bhaskar, 1979, Chapter 1). Cf. in this context also the American philosopher Donald Davidson, who points out that 'Different points of view makes sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability' (Davidson, 1990b:184; see also Norris, 1988b:64ff).

21   The question poses itself: those who proclaim the death of the author—what do they do with their royalties? But cf. *another* Roland Barthes: 'the signifier belongs to everybody; it is the text which, in fact, works tirelessly, not the artist or the consumer' (Barthes, 1981:37).

22   On this point, see Balibar (1978:225).

3   Language and criticism

In Chapter 2, it was established that reading or critique is as necessarily theoretically based as any other scientific activity, whether the reader's or critic's theoretical basis is articulated or not. Thus, we have moved one step towards the understanding of what is our main problem: why do multiple interpretations of theoretical texts occur?

A further step will be taken in this chapter, where focus will be shifted from the reader to the scientific text and its language. It will deal with some dominant literary theories, and their notions of scientific and literary texts, respectively.

These notions are, in turn, based on certain assumptions that are explored below: one concerning language's referential capacity, another being a specific understanding of (social) scientific practice.

Literary theory's understanding of the theoretical text brings the chapter to a discussion of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics and, primarily, of his theory of the arbitrary sign. It is found that in Saussure and in Jacques Derrida's critique and 'development' of Saussure's difference into *différance,* some clues exist that will be of importance for the further understanding of the text as a condition of existence for meaning production.

Scientific texts/literary texts: scientific language/literary language

Unfortunately, in contrast to literary texts, there seems to be no ready-made theory for the reading of *scientific* texts available, although perhaps Althusser's theory of symptomatic reading may be seen as a first (but unfinished)[1] step in the direction of introducing one. Thus, I think one has to raise some objections against Robert Scholes's statement that 'Where there are texts, of course, there are rules governing text production and interpretation' (Scholes, 1982:1) since it seems to be exaggerated, too general, optimistic or, to my mind, even false—as far as *deliberate* practice is concerned. (We have also to distinguish between deliberate textual production and interpretation on the one hand and spontaneous textual production and interpretation, not necessarily less rule-bound, on the other.)

And even if Scholes directs his remarks to literary theorists, as would-be specialists in the field, his observation that:

> What is immensely clear is that our practice is presently not in conformity
> with our knowledge on this point. We have been behaving as if we thought
> it possible simply to read a text and then produce interpretive discourse
> about it by inspection and intuition. But we *know* better
>
> (Scholes, 1982:6)

only points to the *that,* not to the *how,* of which there is considerable dispute. So,
what can you actually ask of the social scientist?

However, I am not prepared to go as far as to argue that 'there is no constituted
scientific theory of reading presently available' at all (Williams, 1974:43; the same
point was made ten years earlier by Foucault, 1975:xvff). This remains to be seen.
But it may be the case that there is no need for a specific theoretical effort in
this context. Two as different scholars as the British political scientist and historian
of ideas Quentin Skinner (Skinner, 1969, 1972) and the French-Bulgarian structuralist
critic Tzvetan Todorov seem to hold the view that there is not; i.e. there is no
need to create a poetics of science alongside the literary poetics. Todorov, for
example, makes the following remark:

> today there is no longer any reason to confine to literature alone the type
> of studies crystallized in poetics: we must know 'as such' not only literary
> texts but *all* texts…the object of the human sciences is a text.
>
> (Todorov, 1981:71 and 1984:17; cf. also Todorov, 1971)

However, even if it would be true that no special effort is required, due either to
an assumed generalizability of literary theory (cf., for example, Aspelin, 1975:76)
or to an assumed generalization of the literary universe, as is argued by, for example,
Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye:

> all structures on words are partly rhetorical, and hence literary…the notion
> of a scientific or philosophical verbal structure free of rhetorical elements is
> an illusion. If so, then our literary universe has expanded into a verbal universe
>
> (Frye, 1973:350; cf. also White, 1985e:89)

this does not mean that *all* literary theories are equally appropriate to execute the
task of dealing with theoretical texts, and it should be observed that the *overt* claim
to be able to cope with this kind of texts among literary theorists is rare; one of
the very few that deal with the specific problems that scientific texts offer at any
length is Roman Ingarden (1973b:146–67); the covert claim seems, on the contrary,
to be rather the rule than an exception. How one should apply, for example, the
reader-response theory of Stanley Fish (1980e) to the reading of theoretical texts
is not easily perceived; I believe it to be impossible or, more accurately, irrelevant
considering the task I have set myself here.

Fish twists the question traditionally posed by literary theorists, 'What does
this sentence *mean*?', replacing it with what is the guiding thread of his own theoretical

project: 'What does this sentence *do*?' (Fish, 1980e:25, italics mine).[2] By this twist, which conveniently can be contrasted with a New Critic's comparable restatement: the object 'is not, What is this supposed to be? but, What have we got here?' (Beardsley, 1981:29),[3] the text becomes an *event* in which the reader is an inescapable participant; an event, then, which is the text('s meaning). The making of this event, the production of this meaning, is accomplished in the *process* or *activity* of reading by the reader who, in the act of reading responds to the text:

> in an utterance of any length, there is a point at which the reader has taken in only the first word, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, and the report of what happens to the reader is always a report of what has happened *to that point*. (The report includes the reader's set toward future experiences…).
>
> (Fish, 1980e:27)

These considerations lead Fish to more or less ignore (but not to deny; cf. Fish, 1980e:32, 65) the existence of the 'information' submitted by the text, focusing as he does on the word-for-word reception of sentences. To illustrate this line of argument, he chooses two sentences carrying the same information ('That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty.' and 'There is no certainty that Judas perished by hanging himself.'), and comments:

> There is no difference in these two sentences in the information conveyed (or not conveyed), or in the lexical and syntactical components, only in the way these are received. But that one difference makes *all* the difference— between an uncomfortable, unsettling experience in which the gradual dimming of a fact is attended by a failure in perception, and a wholly self-satisfying one in which an uncertainty is comfortably certain, and the reader's confidence in his own powers remains unshaken, because he is always in control. *It is, I insist, a difference in meaning.* (1980e:28, cf. also p. 34, italics mine)

This description of the reading process coincides almost exactly with what I.A. Richards some twenty years earlier with some disgust called 'word-by-word jumping', characterized by 'a randomness about the process in striking contrast with what, to a better reader, will seem the continual invitation to perceive connection and design, tension and outcome, variously balanced throughout' (Richards, 1960:249). Lest anyone should believe Fish is alone in this description of the reading process, I refer the reader to one of the foremost Prague Structuralist spokesmen, Jan Mukarovsky who, in an essay first published 1940, gives an account almost identical to Fish's of this process (Mukarovsky, 1977a:51; cf. also Winner, 1987:273 for Roman Jakobson's similar analysis.)

    With an appropriate extension of the Fishian theory, we may find ourselves in the familiar position where the notion of the text is enlarged to encompass the *work* (or vice versa; see Mukarovsky below) of which any one specific text will be no more than a moment getting its meaning only when seen just as this

moment in a flow of surrounding texts. This approach—not too uncommon—
to texts written by the 'same' author, is adequately expressed by Mukarovsky in
another of his essays, written about the same time as the one referred to above:

> The term *work* can mean a single book but also the sum of all the poet's
> writings, the temporal succession of which traces the line of his development.
> In this developmental context individual writings can acquire a different
> meaning and a different value from that which belongs to each of them in
> itself. The poet's first works are thus subsequently elucidated and revaluated
> by later writings which complete what was before merely embryonic in them.
>
> (Mukarovsky, 1977d:146)[4]

Now, this is obviously not the kind of 'meaning' that is of any help in the kind
of understanding of theoretical texts that are exemplified by the cases of Smith
and Ricardo above. In Fish's distinction between 'the information conveyed' by
the text and its meaning, it is as if information in itself is unproblematical, in
need of no further elaboration (cf. also Fish, 1980d). But as I have tried to argue,
this is exactly what is *not the case;* exactly this *is* the problem, not only with Smith's
and Ricardo's texts, but with all other theoretical texts as well. In *this* respect, to
execute *this* task, Fish's theory (for example) seems quite unsuitable, especially
so, perhaps, since mistakes made in the reading due to, for example, failed
anticipations, in turn owing to, for example, inconsistency, incoherence, etc. in
the information conveyed by the text, are parts of the meaning of the text, 'They
have been experienced; they have existed in the mental life of the reader; they
mean' (Fish, 1980e:48; cf. also Fish, 1980f:154). Fish's strategy in its ultimate
consequences implies an *impossibility* of *misreading texts* (see, for example, Fish,
1980f:159), and a stone-dead author![5] It also highlights, as far as I can see, an
insoluble dilemma in Fish's theory, namely: who is the *actual* master of the reading
process, the *reader* or, rather, the interpretative community to which the reader
belongs (Fish, 1980a:14) or the *text* (remember: 'what does this sentence *do*?')? Is
it the function of language or the function of interpretation that governs the reading
activity? Between these poles Fish seems to be caught.

But the opinion, held by Todorov among others, that literary theory can be
of some assistance in the reading of scientific texts is not self-evident, if we are
to judge the situation from the views on the matter held by many other prominent
theorists representing a diversity of schools of thought within literary theory.

An alleged differentiation between literary and scientific languages took place,
Jane Tompkins notes, as an effect of the attack on poetic knowledge launched
by positivism (a necessary undertaking, given that the arena of conflict is accepted
and bearing in mind positivism's view of language as a neutral medium for
communication of *facts*). To this, the New Critics

> responded by attempting, in effect, to beat science at its own game. The
> first step was to declare poetic language ontologically distinct from scientific

language, and the objects of its investigation ontologically separate from (and by implication superior to) the objects of scientific research. (Tompkins, 1980: 222; cf. also, for example, Abrams, 1991:217–22 and 1988:223; Lepenies, 1988:6, 14; Morris, 1979:84–90; Norris, 1988a:8, 14)[6]

Thus, a 'scientification' of literary studies took place—of which a good contemporary example is Northrop Frye (1973) —simultaneously with this dichotomization of language (see also, e.g, de Man, 1986b:7). Now, this bifurcation of language got its first formulation in two texts by I.A.Richards, New Criticism's 'grand old man'.[7] *In The Meaning of Meaning* (in collaboration with C.K.Ogden; first published 1923) and *Principles of Literary Criticism* (published 1924), Richards presents a theory that distinguishes between two *functions* of language (Ogden and Richards, 1952:viii) or, as he also expresses it, 'two totally distinct *uses* of language' (Richards, 1950:261), the *symbolic* and the *emotive:*

> The symbolic use of words is *statement;* the recording, the support, the organization and the communication of references. The emotive use of words is a more simple matter, it is the use of words to express or excite feelings and attitudes
>
> (Ogden and Richards, 1952:149)[8]

where, in symbolic language it is (or will be) possible to achieve a one-to-one relation between concept and referent (Ogden and Richards, 1952:11) and, thus, this is the *scientific* use of language (Richards, 1950:267), while *poetry* 'is the supreme form of emotive language' (Richards, 1950:273, italics deleted).

Two other prominent advocates of the New Critics, René Wellek and Austin Warren tell us that 'It is fairly easy to distinguish between the language of science and the language of literature' (Wellek and Warren, 1980:22). Scientific language, in its ideal form is purely 'denotative', aiming at a 'one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent' (Wellek and Warren, 1980:22). Furthermore, the sign itself is 'transparent; that is without drawing attention to itself, it directs us unequivocally to its referent' (Wellek and Warren, 1980:23), and 'so far as any body of references is undistorted it belongs to Science' (Richards, 1950:266). On the other hand, in literary language (and perhaps in philosophical language as well), the sign is stressed, its importance shown through various devices such as metre, alliteration, metaphor, etc.;[9] it abounds in ambiguities, is far from being merely referential; it

> has its expressive side; it conveys the tone and attitude of the speaker or writer. And it does not merely state and express what it says; it also wants to influence the attitude of the reader, persuade him and ultimately change him.
>
> (Wellek and Warren, 1980:23)[10]

Now, this separation of languages may lead to something like an incommensurability thesis, as in Cleanth Brooks, who argues that it is *impossible* in the language of

criticism to tell what a poem (written, of course, in the language of poetry) 'means' —all such attempts are resisted by the poem; there is no place where prose and poetry may meet (Brooks, 1975:196–202); thus:

> The poem communicates so much and communicates it so richly and with such delicate qualifications that the thing communicated is mauled and distorted if we attempt to convey it by any vehicle less subtle than that of the poem itself.
>
> (Brooks, 1975:72f, cf. also pp. 74f)

Thus, we have (at least) two 'knowledges', where knowledge acquired and 'communicated' within one area cannot be translated into the language of (is radically incommensurable with) the other(-s) or, at least—because this is not quite clear— where poetic knowledge is not translatable into any other form of knowledge, but where it is uncertain whether this relation (or non-relation) is mutually exclusive or not.

This position is in no way confined to the New Critics alone; thus, Murray Krieger[11] makes much the same distinction:

> I would argue for our viewing the poem as a *micro-langue,* a *parole* that has developed into its own language system by apparently setting up its own operational rules to govern how meanings are generated. Though obviously the poem is but a *parole,* a speech act made in accordance with what the *langue,* as the general system of discourse, permits, it rises as a *parole* to become its own *langue* with its own set of licenses—within the intentionality of aesthetic experience and through the recognizable devices which encourage us to find a bodily presence in it.
>
> (Krieger, 1979a:149)

Also, in speech act theory,[12] a similar differentiation between two aspects of languages exists. The leading British philosopher J.L.Austin, as well as his disciple, the U.S. philosopher John Searle, distinguishes between the *literal* and the *non-literal.* Austin limits his theory of illocutionary acts[13] to cover only serious speech acts. Outside its scope lies the *non-serious* as well as the *non-literal* uses of language (Austin, 1980:122, 136), which include, for example, writing poetry, joking, play-acting, i.e. 'non-committed' uses of language, as well as metaphorical or sarcastic, i.e. 'non-literal' uses (see, for example, Austin, 1980:9, 14, 122, 136, and Searle, 1969:57n1, 1975:320f)

> Language in such circumstances is in special ways…used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use.
>
> (Austin, 1980:22)

Literal language is seen as a reliable vehicle, understandable by each and everyone: it is rulebound, and these rules are universal:

> just as we can translate a chess game in one country into a chess game of another because they share the same underlying rules, so we can translate utterances of one language into another because they share the same underlying rules.
>
> (Searle, 1969:40)[14]

In virtue of this quality, the rules of language establish, as the philosopher and critic Henry Staten remarks, 'meaning as the same for anyone who obeys them' (Staten, 1986:111).

Furthermore, literal language is transparent, thanks to the banishment of non-literal, metaphorical, infected language, and by this move a quality of explicitness is ascertained, where, in the words of Stanley Fish, the former

> stands for a mode of knowing that is, at least relatively if not purely, direct, transparent, without difficulties, unmediated, independently verifiable, unproblematic, preinterpretative, and sure; and conversely, that the mode of knowing [associated with non-literal language] is indirect, opaque, context-dependent, unconstrained, derivative, and full of risk. (Fish, 1989:41; see also Fish, 1980c; cf. also Austin, 1980:22, Searle, 1969:20, and Derrida's critique of Searle, collected in Derrida 1988a, c, d, *passim*).

This view of two languages is in the main also shared by the *structuralist* Roland Barthes who, in effect duplicates Wellek's and Warren's position: 'As far as science is concerned language is simply an instrument' (Barthes, 1970a:411; cf. also de Man, 1986a:33); science is *not,* in contrast to literature, *in* language we are asked to believe, the scientific attitude towards its own language is naive and, in the same vein, 'Science is crude, life is subtle, and it is for the correction of this disparity that literature matters to us' (Barthes, 1983:463).[15] Similarly, on the *hermeneutic* side, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer joins in:

> It can be stated as a fundamental principle that wherever words assume a mere sign function, the original connection between speaking and thinking …is changed into an instrumental relationship. This changed relationship of word and sign is at the basis of concept formation in science and has become so self-evident to us that it requires a special effort of memory to recall that, beside the scientific ideal of unambiguous designation, the life of language itself continues unchanged.
>
> (Gadamer, 1979:392)

Barthes (1984a), has also (earlier) presented the problem in terms that are possible to take as proposing either that the difference that exists between poetic and prose language is, or has rather developed into, one of *kind,* or that it is a difference within language. His line of reasoning involves elements that make his argument vacillate between these alternatives, these two perspectives, the one accepting a distinction *between* languages, the other proposing a difference *within* language.

According to Barthes, the difference between prose and poetry once was one of degrees, not of essence, poetry 'only the decorative *equation*…of a possible prose' (Barthes, 1984a:36, italics mine).[16] With modern poetry, the situation has changed; poetic language is 'no longer an attribute but a substance, and therefore it can very well renounce signs, since it carries its own nature within itself' (Barthes, 1984a:36) and thus, 'poetic language and prosaic language are *sufficiently separate to be able to dispense with the very signs of their difference*' (Barthes, 1984a:36, italics mine). Modern poetry destroys, he claims, 'the functional nature of language' (Barthes, 1984a:39), retaining only 'the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality' (Barthes, 1984a:39). Now, this last proposition points towards a view of language that we can also find in the writings of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur (1983) distinguishes between separate *functions* of language—and here he follows the poetics of Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukarovsky (see, for example, Jakobson, 1987c and Mukarovsky, 1978; see also, for example, Titunik, 1986:189 and Galan, 1985:29)[17] —that is, he makes distinctions *within* language. The two functions in language that he contrasts are, on the one hand the *poetic function* and, on the other the *referential function*. The fundamental difference between the two is, then, that in the poetic function 'a centripetal movement of language towards itself takes the place of the centrifugal movement of the referential function' (Ricoeur, 1983:186). When functioning poetically, language 'glorifies *itself* in the play of sound and sense' (Ricoeur, 1983: 186, italics mine) or, in other words, in poetry the sign refers to itself, whereas in its referential function language refers to something outside itself, to the reality poetry in its modern shape has lost according to Barthes. And Northrop Frye (1973:73f) makes the same point.

One can also notice that this 'referring back to itself' is a fundamental element in Russian Formalism's and especially Viktor Shklovsky's[18] concept of *defamiliarization* and hence 'literariness' (Shklovsky, 1986),[19] which makes possible—or so they claim—to distinguish between 'literary' texts on the one hand, and 'referential' on the other, where 'literariness' is accomplished by the 'device' of defamiliarization. A key characteristic of the literary text is its capacity to 'make strange' —to defamiliarize—'to dislocate our habitual perceptions of the real world so as to make it the object of a renewed attentiveness' (Bennett, 1986:20); the real world 'is presented as if it were seen for the first time' (Erlich, 1981:76). Defamiliarization works in two directions, towards the making strange of both language (which thus 'draws attention to itself') and the world: 'The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception' (Shklovsky, 1986:55, 61), i.e., even if in a literary text such as the novel or short story one finds the presence of 'non-literary' discourse(s), this does not make the text any less literary; this presence is not something lying *outside* the literariness of the text; it is not something that makes the text less of a novel; rather, it contributes, or could at least be argued to do so, through the defamiliarizing device, to the text's literariness, giving it a specific flavour or quality that *heightens* this literariness, no shadow falling upon it because of the defamiliarizing effect[20] (it is easy to imagine, however, how 'strange' elements (jokes, poems, or whatever)

work in the opposite direction in the scientific text, resulting not in a reinforcement of the text's 'scientificness' but rather towards a 'descientification').

The function of ordinary, prose language or, as Bennett says, the 'non-literary function of recognition' (Bennett, 1986:130), on the other hand, is 'automatic' perception of the already familiar (Shklovsky, 1986:55). If Shklovsky's analysis is accurate, defamiliarization may thus make it possible to distinguish between literary and scientific texts.

Now, accepting Russian Formalism's line of thought on this particular point, one could suggest that the effect of the 'pure' scientific text (if such a thing is imaginable) would be instead to 'familiarize the unfamiliar'. I would like to argue instead, however, that in most cases[21] almost the opposite is the case, i.e. that the scientific text is characterized by *both* a *defamiliarization* and a *refamiliarization,* in so far as it makes strange the familiar, the common sense appropriation of the world with the help of its characteristic conceptual apparatus but then by superseding the now defamiliarized with its own 'picture' of the world refamiliarizes it. An illuminating example of why and how could be Marx's condensed presentation of the method of political economy in the *Grundrisse::*

> When we consider a given country politico-economically, we begin with its population, its distribution among classes, town, country, the coast, the different branches of production, export and import, annual production and consumption, commodity prices, etc. It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with for example the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. The classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, without value, money, price, etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole.
>
> (Marx, 1973:100–8)

So, even in this case something like Shklovsky's and the Russian Formalists's defamiliarization takes place where the effect is put in motion by the presence of scientific concepts which makes us experience a 'disturbing effect' (Ingarden, 1973b:164), the scientific text becoming almost by definition, if we stick to the Formalist conception, literary since the quality of literariness is defined as a result of the defamiliarizing process in the text (cf. Jakobson, 1973:62, 69f). Thus, it does not seem that one should be able to argue that 'literariness' is a distinguishing mark between literary and theoretical texts.

The ultimate position, not among 'separatists' since he denies the possibility of making a distinction between languages, seems to be occupied by Jacques Derrida, whose view(s) on language is not always already or easily accessible, and to which

will be paid some attention below. Suffice it here, then, to listen to what he says in *Force and Signification,* an early text from 1963, where he goes as far as disqualifying anything *but* what has traditionally been characterized as poetic language, anything *but* 'the true literary language' of 'poetry':

> It is when that which is written is *deceased* as a sign-signal that it is born as language; for then it says what is, thereby referring only to itself, a game or pure functioning, since it ceased to be *utilized* as natural, biological, or technical information, or as the transition from one existent to another, from a signifier to a signified.
>
> (Derrida, 1978b:12)

And we can find the same idea expressed by Paul de Man, writing that 'In order to come into being as text, the referential function had to be radically suspended' (de Man, 1979a:298).

However, a *differentiation of language* and its elements (words, signs, etc.) along the lines sketched above is a dominant theme in contemporary literary criticism, although not too much thought seems to have been given to at least one part of the problem, scientific language; most often it is just passed by in one or two paragraphs. *Dominant* but not exclusive, since not all critics accept the distinction. Stanley Fish is one of those who argue vehemently against it (see, for example, Fish 1980a, b, and c), as is the trend generally, according to Jane Tompkins, among recent *reader-response* theorists, denying

> the existence of any reality prior to language and claims for poetic and scientific discourse exactly the same relation to the real—namely, that of socially constructed versions of it.
>
> (Tompkins, 1980:224)

Accordingly, Fish's line of argument leads him to view 'literature' as entirely a question of conventions:

> Literature is still a category, but it is an open category, not definable by fictionality, or by disregard of prepositional truth, or by a statistical predominance of tropes and figures, *but simply what we decide to put into it*. The difference lies not in the language but in ourselves.
>
> (Fish, 1980c:109, italics mine)

However, this does not mean that the actual reading practice or theorization among reader-response theorists is any different. Scientific texts are as absent here as elsewhere.[22]

But it should be noted that the view of literature as a social convention or as socially determined (in Fish's case by a consideration of its lack of linguistic specifics), can also be reached by quite another route(s). Balibar and Macherey, regarding

literature (as distinct from science) as an *ideological form,* argue that literariness (and in this specific case the questions of literature and literariness touch)

> is what is recognised as such, and it is recognised as such precisely in the time and to the extent that it activates the interpretations, the criticism's and the 'readings'. This way a text can very easily stop being literary or become so under new conditions.
>
> (Balibar and Macherey, 1981:95)[23]

Now, among those that *do* differentiate language, emphasis is then, conveniently one could say, laid upon *poetic* language, without therefore closing our eyes to Russian Formalism's, structuralism's and deconstructionism's works on prose and philosophical texts, but one could observe the great Russian/Soviet philosopher, literary theoretician, etc. Mikhail Bakhtin's words from the mid-thirties, still valid (cf., for example, Godzich and Kittay, 1987:vii–xx), which perhaps helps explain this comparative negligence in literary study to theorize prose:

> After failure to find in novelistic discourse a purely poetic formulation ('Poetic' in the narrow sense) as was expected, prose discourse is denied any artistic value at all; it is the same as practical speech for everyday life, or speech for scientific purposes, an artistically neutral means of communication.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981b:260; cf. also Holquist, 1981:xxx)

Conveniently and paradoxically, because poetry *in its obviousness* (in its obvious non-obviousness, one might say) may be seen as the least challenging, something of the easy way out, as witnessed by, for example, Roman Jakobson when he, in a dialogue with Krystyna Pomorska, discussing the foundation of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915, notes that 'it was in poetics that the vital relations of the parts and the whole were most clearly apparent' (Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983:11, cf. also pp. 20, 107), and in so far as it, as the American critic and poet Yvor Winters recognizes (from quite another point of view), 'exhausts more fully than any other literary form the inherent possibilities of language' (Winters, 1987: 11; see also, for example, Scholes, 1974:22). Still another reason for this relative neglect of prose, pointed out by Mukarovsky, is the disproportionately higher attention paid to analyses of sound, lexicon and syntax, rather than the semantic properties of the text (Mukarovsky, 1977a:52f), which has led to a state, as literary critic Terence Hawkes has observed, where we have 'methods of analyzing poetry …they can more or less deal with the metaphorical nature of the material…the analysis of prose is less well advanced' (Hawkes, 1983:82).[24] Similar notions on the properties of poetic language are forwarded by a host of literary critics and semiologists; so, for example:

> Poetry…does not *separate* a word from its meaning, so much as multiply— often bewilderingly—the range of meanings available to it. (Hawkes, 1983:64;

cf. also Frye, 1973:78, Eagleton, 1986a:92, Jakobson, 1987c:85, Mukarovsky, 1977c:73f, and de Man, 1988a:31)

In other words, poetic language is *polysemic* and *polyvocal,* making the text written in this language, in the words of Elizabeth Freund, 'unreadable in the sense that it is unable to say its originary experience, but can only communicate its indeterminacy' (Freund, 1987:48),[25] a position that is countered by Stanley Fish, who argues that the text (of whatever kind) is

> always stable and never ambiguous. It is just that it is stable in more than one direction, as a succession of interpretative assumptions give it a succession of stable shapes. Mine is not an argument for an infinitely plural or an open text, but for a text that is always set; and yet because it is set not for all places or all times but for wherever and however long a particular reading is in force, it is a text that can change…to label a sentence 'ambiguous' will be to distinguish it only if there are sentences that always and only mean one thing, and I would contend that there are no such sentences. I am not saying that sentences always have more than one meaning, but that the sentence which is perceived as having only one meaning will not always have the same one.
>
> (Fish, 1980d:274, 281)

If this characterizes poetic language, then 'rational, scientific discourse' is, it is argued, *unisemic* and *univocal,* an opinion shared by a post-Saussurean like Kristeva (for example, Kristeva, 1987a:135), and traces of which may be detected in texts of Paul de Man (for example, de Man, 1988c:110) and Jacques Derrida, who says—rather surprisingly, considering what we have seen above—of his own grammatological project, the 'science of writing', that

> The *positive* and the classical sciences of writing are obliged to repress this sort of question. *Up to a certain point, such repression is even necessary to the progress of positive investigation.* Beside the fact that it would still be held within a philosophizing logic, the ontophenomenological question of essence, that is to say of the origin of writing, could, by itself, only paralyze or sterilize the typological or historical research of *facts.*
>
> (Derrida, 1976:28, italics mine)

We should not, however, because of these similarities, make the mistake of thinking that the positions of, for example, the New Critics, the structuralists and the deconstructionists are identical. Far from it. To be sure, there are many resemblances such as, in addition to the one sketched above, what is the proper object of study (the text, the single poem), what is the role of the author (negligible), etc. But it should also be noted that in the cases where there are similarities of position, these may be open to dispute, because *not* in accordance with other, perhaps more fundamental

positions taken within the respective schools of criticism. So, for example, it is possible to subscribe to the characterization of poetic language without accepting the account of scientific language. There is, in other words, no necessary connection between these two standpoints; the link has to be theoretically produced within the different schools, given their respective conceptual systems. It has to be shown, that is, that there *are* two languages, and that the description of the polysemic and polyvocal character of poetic language *does not apply* to scientific language. Before this is done, it is perfectly reasonable to accept the characterization of poetic language, while denouncing the view that scientific language is univocal, unambiguous, etc., as built upon grave misunderstanding, prejudice or lack of familiarity with scientific texts as *texts*.[26]

However, if we accept the distinction between a poetic (function of) language and a scientific language (with a referential function),[27] it is difficult to see how it would be possible not to agree with Jacques Derrida when he remarks that:

> One cannot subordinate or leave in abeyance the analysis of fiction in order to proceed firstly and 'logically' to that of 'nonfiction or standard discourse'. For part of the most originary essence of the latter is to allow fiction, the simulacrum, parasitism, to take place—and in so doing to 'de-essentialize' itself as it were
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:133)

or *not* to generalize Jakobson's observation that 'a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems…are equally flagrant anachronisms' (Jakobson, 1987c:94), so as to include social scientists as well, since any reading or interpretation of texts, and thus any theory, be it a poetics or (if we take 'poetics' to mean the theory of literary texts) a more generalized theory of the text, necessarily involves and thus demands a knowledge of language and its functions, poetic or not. Otherwise, how would it be possible to assume knowledge of one function—say the 'referential' —without simultaneously knowing (about) the others that are, so to speak, in a work of relational demarcations? And if we don't accept it, we should at least be familiar enough with it so that we know what we oppose.

Now, I think there are quite good reasons for accepting, at least tentatively, the characterization of poetic but not that of scientific language; I believe the unisemity and univocality of scientific language to be a myth, a conclusion also reached by Umberto Eco (1990:45f). But perhaps the 'unintendedness'(!) of ambiguities, of multiple voices, etc. in scientific texts are more troublesome to detect and deal with—hence the 'easy way out'? Perhaps they are characterized by something like that 'difficult lightness' one of the leading Russian Formalists, Yuri Tynjanov, writes about, although applying the concept to 'light verse' (Tynjanov, 1981:37)? Something to this effect is also observed by Jakobson when he notes that 'it is infinitely more difficult to analyze an intermediate phenomenon than it is to study polar opposites' (Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983:107).[28]

Let me demonstrate by way of an example (the applicability of the arguments to be used here to what has been dealt with above will be apparent). The critic

John M.Ellis argues that what distinguishes literary texts from other kinds of texts is the fact that the former 'are pieces of language whose actual verbal formulations are of unusual importance' (Ellis, 1981:24), and he goes on to hold that

> In this respect they are quite unlike most other pieces of language, which rarely have the power to command repeated attention to their unique formulations after they have achieved their purposes in the situation in which they arose.
>
> (Ellis, 1981:24)

If this kind of reasoning was unquestionably true, why then the repeated attention given to the classics of social science? Why then the repeated attention given to and the *dispute* over, for example, Adam Smith's formulations of the value theory?[29] Is not Ellis here a victim of the prejudice, the myth—existing in different varieties (cf., for example, Mukarovsky, 1977a:15 and Steiner, 1982c:511ff) —that scientific language is univocal, unisemic, transparent, where formulations cannot give rise to any specific attention; that such a kind of writing is *possible*? And, furthermore, that, when failing, the failure is on the author's side? Let us make an experiment, and look above at the quotes from Ellis again, but this time I ask the reader to make a very slight modification and think 'scientific', etc. instead of 'literary', etc. When this is done, let us consider the quotation below:

> Scientific texts may embody ideas which, in a superficial sense, can be said to be found elsewhere; but the precise character and individual emphasis that a scientific work gives those ideas make it necessary to see their occurrence in such a context not simply as the reappearance of familiar notions, but also as unique statements of them which demand unique responses. Criticism must surely focus on the unique character and system of ideas of scientific works, with the kind of attention to emphasis and detail which will come to terms with the way in which familiar material is modified and recast so that the result is a uniquely remarkable text.
>
> (Ellis, 1981:24f, *scientific* substituted for *literary* throughout)

Lest anyone should believe the above to be unique, we can look at another text, this time by Frantisek Galan, taken from his book on the Prague structuralist school. There, concluding a discussion on Jan Mukarovsky, a leading exponent of the school, Galan writes:

> In other words, however conspicuous the informational factors of the *literary* work's [read: *'scientific'*] semantic structure may be, this structure cannot be centrifugal, with single structural elements linking up referentially with particular segments of external reality, but is bound to be centripetal, with all its elements creating a series of internal semantic correlations, therein composing the work's contexture. Ultimately, if a *literary* [read: *'scientific'*] work is to be viewed as a work of *art* [read: *'science'*], its *aesthetic* [read: *'scientific'*] efficacy must without exception be judged by its structural coherence*, not*

by its ostensible verisimilitude. In every work of *art* [read: *'science'*], in sum, composition holds sway over representation.

(Galan, 1985:120)

Now, what is so unique? Why should *not* scientific texts be treated in exactly the manner outlined by Ellis and Galan? Is it not when those texts whose conscious design is the opposite to poetry's, those texts that *supposedly aim at* clarity and univocality or *supposedly are characterized by* clarity and univocality, i.e. scientific texts, are understood by criticism in their problematic qualities that tend radically to question and undermine these suppositions, that criticism has grown into 'scientific maturity'? When it is realized, that is, that the social sciences do not 'progress', do not 'develop' in any unilinear fashion but are rather characterized by mutually exclusive and competing schools of thought neither confirmable nor disconfirmable in any simple sense. Thus, that no conceptual or linguistic 'purification' in the sense outlined above takes place and much of the social scientific endeavour is directed at, as Hayden White (1985e:89) points out, its classic texts, which all 'testifies to the essentially literary nature' of its texts (White, 1985e:89). However, the 'the' in White should be replaced by an 'an', since I cannot accept his basic assumption, namely that relations depicted in, for example, historical narrative (i.e. in non-genuine science, according to White's terminology),

> although they *may* appear to the reader to be based on different theories of the nature of society, politics, and history, *ultimately* have their origin in the figurative characterizations of the whole set of events as representing wholes of fundamentally different sorts.
>
> (White, 1985e:97, italics mine; cf. also White, 1975:ix, 30f)

These figurations are the American literary critic Kenneth Burke's 'master tropes' (see Burke, 1969:503–17), upon which White heavily leans, i.e. metaphor, metonomy, synecdoche and irony (see, for example, White, 1975:31–8, 1985b).[30] White's view amounts to a primacy given to these tropes from which then *follows* different theoretical explanatory systems, at bottom thus characterized by the master tropes' *differentia specifica* (cf., for example, White, 1985c:116):

> these modes [theories]…are in reality formalizations of poetic insights that analytically *precede* them and that sanction the particular theories used to give historical accounts the aspect of an 'explanation'.
>
> (White, 1975:xii, italics deleted and added)[31]

Unfortunately, then, there seems a long way to go in this respect, towards this 'maturity', notwithstanding the attempts to read philosophical texts made by, for example, Derrida and de Man. But neither Derrida nor de Man are completely free from this myth; de Man, as well as Derrida as we saw above, is a victim of the myth, distinguishing as he does and in the *way* he does between scientific texts and literary texts, i.e.:

> *Since* they are not scientific, critical texts have to be read with the same awareness of ambivalence that is brought to the study of non-critical literary texts, and *since* the rhetoric of their discourse depends on categorical statements, the *discrepancy* between meaning and assertion is a *constitutive* part of their logic.
>
> (de Man, 1988c:110, italics mine)

And, of course, the 'sinces' here are all-important, giving the game away, in a manner of speaking. Take the sinces away and the discrepancy vanishes in the same move—meaning and assertion becomes one and language transparent.

Moreover, it has to be *shown,* not simply asserted, that scientific language stands in a specific relation to its referents, taken in a wide sense (see Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:247–53), whatever the *aim* is (cf. Wellek and Warren, 1980). It has to be shown, in other words, that the language of science is *not* in the same position as that of *fictive* language, with the latter's specific relation to its *fictitious referents* (cf. Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:259f), and that it does not have—through this relation—the same 'hallucinatory effects' as have poetry (de Man, 1986a:49) or, more generally, literature (Foucault, 1973:300).[32] Wellek and Warren (1980) seem to hold the opinion that this is a clear-cut matter—the language of science 'directs us unequivocally to its referent' —which it is not since, first, as the French linguist Emile Benveniste points out following in Saussure's footpaths,

> Language is the instrument by which the world and society are adjusted; it operates on a world considered to be 'real' and reflects a 'real' world. But in this each language is specific and shapes the world in its own way
>
> (Benveniste, 1971d:71)

and since, second and to complicate matters further, as for example the Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson among so many others has observed regarding different conceptual schemes, 'all perceptual systems are already *languages* in their own right' (Jameson, 1974:152, italics mine), and we know from Saussure what this means regarding the relations between signifiers and signifieds (see more of this below).

But a view opposite to Wellek and Warren's offers no alternative. Ponder for a while the literary theoretician Wlad Godzich's question: 'is language, any form of language, up to playing the role of representational vehicle' (Godzich, 1988:xxvi). It is, in effect, impossible to deny language this quality and at the same time give a 'no' for an answer, notwithstanding Godzich's own attempt to the contrary (Godzich, 1988:xxvif). This denial of language's possibilities cannot reasonably be an answer to this question, because the question is only a disguise; it is a non-question, a paradox. A paradox, because how would it be at all possible, if language was *not* a representational vehicle, even to understand, to grasp this question? Even to grasp what the words, the signs (language, playing, role, representational, vehicle) *represent*? And if understood, as it must have been if a reply is given with *some*

sense in it, the question has cancelled itself, and cannot therefore have been replied to; we have an 'answer' without a question.[33]

Now, consider the existence of competing schools of thought within, for example, the social sciences, and how they read one another. Is it possible, for instance, for a die-hard positivist to regard Marx's writings on, for example, surplus value or social classes as anything but fiction, without reference in reality (from a vantage point different from mine, Stanley Fish makes a similar observation; see Fish, 1980b:199, 237–45)?[34] For the positivist to admit the existence of a referent denoted by the concept 'social class' in the Marxist sense, he must arguably cease being a positivist. But what if he denies this existence—who, then, decides whether there is a referent or not? The *aim* of the author? Of all authors? The reader?[35] What reader (they do proliferate, and the list below is in no way exhaustive, even if perhaps exhausting):

> the mock-reader (Gibson), the implied reader (Booth, Iser), the model reader (Eco), the super-reader (Riffaterre), the inscribed or encoded reader (Brooke-Rose), the narratee (Prince), the ideal reader (Culler), the literent (Holland), the actual reader (Jauss), the informed reader or the interpretative community (Fish)?
>
> (Freund, 1987:7)

And if we grant the reader this responsibility—what about children reading 'fiction': are we sure they do not see worldly referents where there are none (dragons, for example)? Furthermore, is it really so simple that there are no referents, no 'informational function', as Jan Mukarovsky puts it when he makes the distinction between art as an autonomous sign and art as an informational sign (Mukarovsky, 1976:6f) in fictive discourse, albeit not in a 'one-to-one' correspondence? Take Melville's *Moby Dick* or Zola's *Germinal,* for instance. Even if there is no such one-to-one correspondence between Melville's or Zola's texts and some external reality, there is no doubt a possibility of deeming these texts more accurate analyses and descriptions of reality than many historical treatises, and especially so since, as Hayden White has observed,

> the image of reality which the novelist thus constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less 'real' than that referred to by the historian
>
> (White, 1985g:122)

and furthermore, since, and this is also claimed by White, 'the differences between a history and a fictional account of reality are matters of degree rather than of kind' (White, 1985b:78, cf. White, 1985e:82; see also, for example, Mukarovsky, 1979:73 and Mulkay, 1985:10ff).[36] Or take Balzac's *Comedie Humaine,* where the ambitions of Balzac also point at the ambiguous nature of the distinction between literary and scientific texts: he first thought of calling this work *Etudes Sociales,*

thus making his intentions clear (Lepenies, 1988:4). So, all in all, to make a distinction between languages based upon the existence of 'real' instead of fictitious referents seems rather problematic, if not quite impossible.[37]

But now, let us rapidly glance at what I believe to be a basic difference leading up not only to these seeming likenesses *between* the positions taken by the different schools but also to contradictions *within* them.

Languages

Such a *basic* difference is to be found in the critical schools' different conceptions of language,[38] conceptions which in turn may have wider implications highly relevant for the present study. Briefly, the *differentia specifica* of poetic (i.e. literary) language according to the New Critics is, as noted above, the multiplication of a word's, a line's meaning, because of their inherent properties, but as Richard Harland notes, 'those meanings are still conceived in the ordinary way as mental contents and images' (Harland, 1987:134). If ambiguities (Empson, 1953), paradoxes (Brooks, 1975), etc. were not inherent in *language as such,* then it would be possible to argue, as Cleanth Brooks does, that scientific language uses other words, etc., than the words poetic language deliberately uses to convey its 'knowledge' (Brooks, 1975:3). The question then arises whether the author can be said to have a *total* command over language so that, for example, ambiguity is only present by deliberate writing. Now, this extensive claim is not made by the New Critics (cf., for example, Wimsatt and Brooks, 1965:650); rather meaning is, following I.A.Richards, contextbound where words due to a process of 'purification' may lose much of their polysemic nature. This is, together with social convention, what has happened to scientific language (Wimsatt and Brooks, 1965:641).[39] The belief that such a purification is not only possible but already to a large extent achieved has, it seems, repercussions over and above the field of language and meaning, which should be commented upon, albeit rather quickly. It appears to (be able to) lead also to a rather naive view of science, scientists and the history of science. So, for example,

> Science…endeavours with increasing success to bar out these factors. We believe a scientist because he can substantiate his remarks, not because he is eloquent or forcible in his enunciation. In fact, we distrust him when he seems to be influencing us by his manner.
>
> (Richards, 1926:23f)

Such a position *seems* also to be held by Hayden White, when he writes that not 'fully scientized' fields of study, i.e. the human sciences and primarily historiography, are exposed to the 'vagaries' of ordinary speech, whereas those fields already 'scientized' (primarily the natural sciences) are not (White, 1985b:63, 71), that the figurative elements present in discourse play a correspondingly more important role as components of the message of the historical discourse precisely in the degree to which the discourse itself is cast in ordinary, rather than technical, language'

(White, 1985c:105), or again when he declares that 'In the absence of a specific theory', and elsewhere he has argued for this—the specific theory—to be a theory embraced by all practitioners in a field,[40]

> one is *driven* to utilize the tropes of language—metaphor, metonomy, and synecdoche—in order to figure it…. In the absence of a genuinely scientific analysis of the modes of relationship obtaining among the elements of the historical field, tropology is the *only* conceptual protocol we have.
>
> (White, 1985c:115, italics mine)

However, his example of a field 'liberated' (the expression is White's) from these 'vagaries', physics, and he refers to physics after Newton (White, 1985b:71), seems not too well chosen, or perhaps there is no real choice, perhaps there are no 'liberated fields'. It is as *if* the Einstein—Bohr dispute was settled, which it is not (Sachs, 1988:2), and as *if* what characterizes the 'not fully scientized fields', i.e. 'disputes…not only upon the matter of what are the facts, but also upon that of their meaning' (White, 1985b:72) did not matter within these fields, while this is exactly what is at stake in the Einstein—Bohr discussion (Sachs, 1988:235–59). This means, against White's contention, that metaphysical problems are as alive in physics as in, for example, history (which is White's prime example of a 'not fully scientized field of study'). Moreover, since physics is a *factual* science (in contrast to the *formal* sciences; cf., for example, Bunge, 1967:21ff) and factual sciences are, it can be argued, *open*—since in principle 'the scientific knowledge of facts is always partial, indirect, uncertain and corrigible' (Bunge, 1967:23) (and the assumption that there *is* a reality 'out there' and thus the knowledge of which may, in principle, be corrected, is necessary for White's argument) — the possibility to foresee their future conceptual development is *closed* (cf., for example, Bhaskar, 1975:118–26), which means that *even* if physics *today* was characterized by a specific terminological system 'with stipulated meanings for lexical elements and explicit rules of grammar' as an 'orthodoxy' as White claims (White, 1985b: 72), there is no possible way to argue that this state of affairs will go on for ever. And if this is impossible, White would be forced to argue that a fully scientized field of study could develop into a not so fully scientized field (which again contradicts his 'progressivist' view of scientific development; see, for example, White, 1985c:118). So, there seems to be—in White's theory— no escape, within the empirical or factual sciences at least[41] from language's vagaries since, in White's words,

> meaning…will be construed in terms of the possible modalities of natural language itself, and specifically in terms of the dominant tropological strategies by which unknown or unfamiliar phenomena are provided with meanings by different kinds of metaphorical appropriations.
>
> (White, 1985b:72)

Now, Richards's and White's 'optimistic' and 'purificationist'[42] views on the relation between science (or 'genuine science'; White, 1985b:74), language and rhetoric may be compared with that of, for example, Max Planck, which almost seems to be a preanswer to White's assertion that

> The physical sciences appear to progress by virtue of the agreements, reached from time to time among members of the established communities of scientists, regarding what will count as a scientific problem, the form that a scientific explanation must take, and the kinds of data that will be permitted to count as evidence in a properly scientific account of reality
>
> (White, 1975:12f)

by the riposte that

> a fact—a remarkable one, in my opinion: A new scientific *truth* does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.
>
> (Planck, 1950:33f, italics mine)

Also and similarly:

> They survived because prejudice, passion, conceit, errors, sheer pigheadedness, in short because all the elements that characterize the context of discovery, *opposed* the dictates of reason *and because these irrational elements were permitted to have their way.* To express it differently: *Copernicanism and other 'rational' views exist today only because reason was overruled at some time in their past*
>
> (Feyerabend, 1975:155)

and, even more telling:

> The similarity with the arts which has often been asserted arises at exactly this point. Once it has been realized that close empirical fit is no virtue and that it must be relaxed in times of change, then style, elegance of expression, simplicity of presentation, tension of plot and narrative, and seductiveness of content become important features of our knowledge. They give life to what is said and help us to overcome the resistance of the observational material…. Galileo's work…has often been likened to *propaganda*—and propaganda it certainly is. But propaganda of this kind is not a marginal affair that may or may not be added to allegedly more substantial means of defence, and that should perhaps be avoided by the 'professionally honest scientist'. In the circumstances we are considering now, *propaganda is of the essence.* (Feyerabend, 1975:157; cf. also Kuhn, 1970:94 and Lyotard, 1984: 41–53)

Statements to the same effect could be cited endlessly as could, I suppose, statements to the opposite effect but my point here is of course not to show or argue for *how it is,* but merely to point out that opinions differ, something they would hardly do were the 'purificationist' thesis correct. All the same, I think a remark made by Tzvetan Todorov very much catches the gist of the situation: 'To win the trial, it is more important to speak well than to have behaved well' (Todorov, 1977a:80).

Also, rhetoric—used with or without the outspoken intention to be listened to—pervades neo-classical, positivist or modernist economics as shown by economist Donald McCloskey (1986). However, McCloskey uses the concept of rhetorics to cover a bit too much. So, for example, in his chapter on statistics and economists' confusion on the subject of 'significance' (statistic vs substantive), he argues that the mixed-up use of this term is an example of rhetoric in economics (McCloskey, 1986:154–73), although he at the end observes—without really observing it—that it actually is just a question of 'incompetence' (McCloskey, 1986:173); thus *not* a rhetorical device. But then, McCloskey's neo-pragmatist inklings (cf. 'all we have is conversation; that is, just opinions'; McCloskey, 1986: 177, see also, for example, pp. 174, 182) will perhaps make it possible to dispense with 'knowledge of', and so 'incompetence' is merely rhetorical incompetence. On the other hand, however, his critique of 'modernist thought' (i.e. positivism— the terms are interchangeable; cf. McCloskey, 1986:5) is an attack upon a *methodology* as such, *not* a rhetoric (cf. McCloskey, 1986:3–35)![43]

Now, to return to the question of the *ambiguity* of poetic language, it may be desirable to separate Empson's ambiguity from other kinds of ambiguities (the ambiguity of ambiguity!), as pointed out by Wimsatt and Brooks (1965:637–41). Empson's term refers to poetic ambiguity, i.e. to a situation where ambiguities are sought for by the author (and then it is intended) or by the reader (and then it may be unintended as well as intended by the author). However, there is a second kind of ambiguity, the kind that points to the ambiguous nature of expository texts, where one and only one meaning is (assumed to be) intended and in fact, but to all appearances unfortunately, expected. In conformity with New Criticism, this distinction should be essential, but there are two problems connected with it.

First, is this characterization of scientific language correct, and if it is, how many texts *now* considered scientific are really not; the presence, for example, of puns, some quite innocent, others not so innocent would, it seems, disqualify most texts.

According to some views of scientific texts, and this is implied in what we have seen above, puns (for example homonyms) ought to be banned in the name of scientific clarity. But is scientific activity really that facile? Is not, for example, the word 'value' a possible pun in so far as it has not one but multiple signifieds— *at least* one within each mode of thought, be it within the field of economic theory or moral philosophy. And is language in itself that simple?

There are actually two difficulties here: *either* one has to assume that the *word* itself in its isolation can be purified, so that only one meaning and one meaning only is

possible to convey (because the pun does not care about intentions), *or* one has to assume that the *context* gives the word its unambiguous, purified meaning. Now, in the first case, it is obviously not possible to claim that words themselves may escape their polysemanticity, that signifiers may lose all but one signified. It should be sufficient to look up, for example, the words *on and off* in any dictionary to realize this. But even so, such a cleaning-up action would, would it as a thought-experiment be possible, meet strong opposition from, for example, literary quarters: no more *Finnegan's Wake's,* no more comedy, etc., were it temporarily to succeed. But of course, poets, novelists and other insurgents would constantly undermine the effort, reintroducing polysemanticity.

But the second option—sounding sound at a quick glance—has no more hope to provide, because the word itself becomes superfluous in the end, as the American critic Derek Attridge demonstrates:

> The more that context bears down upon the word, the less the word will quiver with signification; until we reach a *fully* determining context, under whose pressure the word will lie inert, pinned down, proffering its single meaning. But at this point something else will have happened to it: it will have become completely redundant. The context will now allow only one meaning to be perceived in the gap which it occupies, and anything—or nothing at all—will be interpreted as providing that meaning!
>
> (Attridge, 1988:142)

The second problem for New Criticism concerns intention: is the intentional aspect really of any relevance in the reading of scientific texts (remember, the author has no total control of the language he uses, and so cannot by will avoid using ambiguous terms, etc.)? All in all, it seems according to the New Critics very much to be a question of *choosing* what language you need for your specific purposes. So, for example, Ogden and Richards argue that

> Instead therefore of an antithesis of prose and poetry we may substitute that of symbolic and emotive *uses* of language. In strict symbolic language the emotional effects of the words whether direct or indirect are irrelevant to their employment. In evocative language on the other hand all the means by which attitudes, moods, desires, feelings, emotions can be verbally incited in an audience are concerned.
>
> (Ogden and Richards, 1952:235, italics mine)[44]

But how this choice is made, on what level it is made, is somewhat obscure. Richards argues that the essential quality of the poet is his *mastery of the words,* it is the way he uses the words that makes him a poet. But this mastery is, it seems to me, of a peculiar nature:

> As a rule the poet is not conscious of the reasons why just these words and no others best serve. They fall into their place without his conscious

control, and a feeling of rightness, of inevitability is commonly his sole
conscious ground for his certainty that he has ordered them aright.

(Richards, 1926:38)

Why this should distinguish the poet from the scientist remains, however, a mystery.

Now, this plurality of meaning attributed to poetic but not to scientific language is not then, as in the Saussurean theory[45] or in any 'development' thereof, a result of the arbitrary nature of the sign. Quite the contrary, at least if we are to seize upon the harsh judgments directed against Saussure by Ogden and Richards (1952: 4–6).[46] If one, despite this, were to use Saussure's terminology, what New Criticism is concerned with is not *langue,* but rather *parole* (cf. Wimsatt, 1968:224). But New Criticism's distinction between poetic and scientific languages contains an embarrassing problem, because how is it possible to argue that in poetry language is built upon ambiguities, etc. while it is not in science, without there creeping in —*contrary to their basic dogma*—the intentions of the author who uses this or that language?[47]

Structuralist criticism and what is commonly known as deconstruction, on the other hand, are wholly preoccupied with a Saussurean inspired *langue,* or more correctly when it concerns deconstructionist criticism, the relations between signifiers and signifieds and signifiers and signifiers, and it is to Saussure's semiology and its aftermaths that I will now turn.

Saussure and his oppositions

Paul de Man (1986b:8) makes the remark that 'Contemporary literary theory comes into its own in such events as the application of Saussurean linguistics to literary texts'. Accepting de Man's observation as accurate and taking notice of the 'Saussurean explosion' in French thought in the 1960s: Althusser, Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Greimas, Kristeva, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Lyotard, etc. —they all read and referred to Saussure[48] —it would seem, then, that in order to understand much of contemporary literary discourse from Russian Formalism to deconstruction, it is necessary to remind of some basic ideas presented in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1972),[49] ideas influential albeit in different ways and directions in the constitution of Russian Formalism, Prague and other structuralisms[50] and deconstruction in particular. However, in order not to become tedious, I will concentrate upon only a few themes in Saussure's text, connected in one way or another with his theory of the sign, his semiology, since it is around this concept— the concept of the sign—and its centrifugal and centripetal tendential properties or possibilities that so much revolves.

First a remark, though: *semiology* and *semiotics* are in most linguistic and literary discourses used interchangeably (see, for example, Ducrot and Todorov, 1987: 84ff). I will use *semiology* throughout. Saussure gave the new science this name, and we should acknowledge our debt to him for the term, because it *ought* to remind even the most frantic post-structuralists, neo-pragmatists and deconstructionists that

there *is* something outside the text (cf., for example, Derrida, 1976: 158 and de Man, 1988f:165). *Semeion,* from Greek, means sign as Saussure (1988:15) points out, but if we play around a little, we also find the Latin *semi* meaning half; thus *semi*-ology is not only a science of the sign, but it is also only *half-knowledge.* Of the other half, of that of which language speaks, of that field of possible knowledge of which semiology *is not about,* we are constantly reminded through the very existence of the term semiology.[51]

Now, then, and keeping the nature of the *Course* in mind—'It is not…a definitive doctrine but rather a working hypothesis' (Jakobson, 1990:84) —and thus admitting inconsistencies and tensions so that no one should be surprised that from Saussure there is more than one direction to take (this point is also made by, for example, Simon Clarke, 1981:124 and Robert Young, 1981:9),[52] one could say that from Saussure two major traditions grew in literary-linguistic thought.[53] The first seizes upon an implicit methodological *binarism*[54] and *structuralism* that permeates the Saussurean system and which in a modified form was strongly conducive in the formation of Russian Formalism and, via the influence of Roman Jakobson (the Russian Formalist, the Prague Structuralist)[55] and Jan Mukarovsky (the Prague Structuralist, see, for example, Mukarovsky, 1982), modern structuralism(s), in particular Claude Lévi-Strauss (for example, Lévi-Strauss, 1977a) and Roland Barthes (for example, Barthes, 1984b). Here the Saussurean system becomes more strictly formalized and narrow in its view of linguistic phenomena (cf., for example, Culler, 1988a:86f, Jameson, 1974, for example p. 101 and Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983:31, 41f). The second seizes upon *difference:* deconstruction (Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man), where language, in a sense, is conceptualized as wider, freer, more playful, unruly.[56]

We are brought to the object of knowledge of Saussure's semiology through a chain of *oppositions,* where in each case one of the terms is—systematically— dropped out of sight. But we should be (a)ware: *out of sight*—yes, but this does not mean, as, for example, Hodge and Kress argue (1988:15–18) that they have been thrown into Saussure's 'rubbish bin'. What happens is rather that although the 'dropped-out-of-sight' oppositions are not part of Saussure's constitutive project *at this exact moment,* they are still logically and inescapably bound to it,[57] and can be reinstated, not at will, but at their proper places in a system more fully completed. They are thus *not* parts of the *theory's* invisible field, they are *not* forbidden by it (to use Althusser's expressions). It is merely that we don't *see* them because their time in the system is yet to come,[58] no matter what Saussure's own intention may have been and, paradoxically perhaps, no matter whether this is seemingly impossible. That is, they belong logically to the system no matter what transformations the system may have to undergo in order either *coherently* to incorporate them or ultimately to *collapse.*[59]

Now, none of these oppositions are uncontested. They thus require some short comments. In the first opposition, that of *synchrony/diachrony* the first term is retained; thus *langue* (language)[60] is to be regarded as a *structure* (see, for example, Saussure, 1988:81), which in turn implies as Saussure points out that *'langue is a form and not a substance',* it is 'so to speak, an algebra which has only complex terms' (Saussure,

1988:120, see also p. 111).[61] Now, Saussure writes: 'The contrast between the two points of view—synchronic and diachronic—is *absolute* and admits of no compromise' (Saussure, 1988:83, italics mine) and, on *synchrony:* 'when one speaks of a synchronic law, one is speaking of an arrangement or a *principle of regularity*' (Saussure, 1988:91, italics mine); on *diachrony:* 'diachronic events are *always accidental* and particular in nature' (Saussure, 1988:92, italics mine).[62] This relation between the synchronic and the diachronic is a main point of divergence between Saussure and Jakobson,[63] who as early as 1919 notes that 'The overcoming of *statics,* the discarding of the absolute, is the main thrust of modern times, the order of the day' (Jakobson, 1987h:30), and who attempts to synthesize time and structure, for example: 'Pure synchronism now proves to be an illusion: every synchronic system has its past and its future as *inseparable structural elements of the system*' (Jakobson and Tynjanov, 1987:48, italics mine), and 'The concepts of a system and its change are not only compatible but *indissolubly* tied' (Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983:58, italics mine).[64] The bringing together of 'structure' and 'history' was one of the main tenets of the Prague Structuralists.[65] On the other hand, it is possible that precisely this distinction, as Ray Selden claims, was 'the crucial factor influencing the formalists' attribution of autonomy to the literary system' (Selden, 1976:97).

In the next opposition, that between *langue* and *parole, parole* is dropped, thereby securing that *langue* is viewed in its *sociality* or, as Saussure says in Durkheimian terms,[66] as 'a product of the collective mind of a linguistic community…as a social fact' (Saussure, 1988:5, 77);[67] individual accidents as they appear in speech *(parole)* are to be disregarded ('langue is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity'; Saussure, 1988: 13, cf. also Saussure's well-known comparison with chess, p. 23).

It is true as literary theoretician Colin MacCabe observes that by separating *langue* from *parole* in this way, the problem of subjectivity is placed within the realm of *parole,* and thus being absent from the *Course* (MacCabe, 1979:294). This does not *necessarily* imply, however, that as a result of this want of theorization of *parole* in Saussure's text, the problem is simply a non-problem *in the text*. The problem of the subject's location in Saussure's system pops up, however, in quite another place, on another level in the text with—however opaque—consequences for the system as a whole. The *locus* of this subject is that of Saussure himself or, rather, that of the *investigating subject,* 'the subject as originating act' (Strozier, 1988:49) which, according to Strozier 'is a determinedly full subject' (Strozier, 1988:239). This 'full subject' should—ideally—harmonize with the subject possible to incorporate into Saussure's theory of linguistics. The place of the subject in the *Course* would certainly merit a study of its own.

The third opposition would be that between *sign* and *referent,* the latter being excluded and also here there is some controversy over whether this *really* is the case. Now, although the referent apparently is absent from Saussure's text, it is present exactly in its absence, for how could it not be? How otherwise could Saussure use the examples of, for example, the tree, the sister, the oxen and ask to be understood (cf., for example, Saussure, 1988:65ff)? Is not *the real* (whatever that

is) what makes these examples possible to *grasp*? Think away this real in these examples, and what have you?[68]

By extension, the problem Saussure points at by these examples is akin to that posed by N.R.Hanson, related above: 'Unless both are visually aware of the same object there can be nothing of philosophical interest in the question whether or not they see the same thing' (Hanson, 1981:7), and to the linguist Benjamin Whorf's 'new principle of relativity',

> which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar.
> (Whorf, 1987a:214)

Without *some kind* of referents, what sense does it make at all to speak of ambiguity, metaphor, etc.?[69]

Through these exclusions, then, we have arrived at what is at heart of Saussure's semiology, the theory of the *sign* in the system of *langue*.

Language, sign, difference and flow of meaning

The theory of the sign is, together with Saussure's predilection for speech or sound over writing,[70] to which theme I will return in the final chapter, one of the main targets for much of deconstructionist criticism, and in particular of Derrida's.

Now, Saussure makes certain claims on behalf of the sign, most important of which is that the sign is *arbitrary* (naturally unmotivated). This is so because of the arbitrary relation between the *signifier* and the *signified,* which together and *inseparably* compose the sign ('Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in *langue* to isolate sound from thought, or thought from sound'; Saussure, 1988: 111), and without which the sign no longer is (or could be): *'A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern'* (Saussure, 1988:66, italics mine).[71] The sign is thus—and this follows from Saussure's conception of *langue* as a social fact—arbitrary in so far as it is a social construction, it is *socially,* not naturally motivated; as Foucault observes, 'the relation of the sign to its content is not guaranteed by the order of things in themselves' (Foucault, 1973:63), a rediscovery, according to Foucault, on Saussure's part of the theory of the sign of the 'Classical Age' (Foucault, 1973:63–7);[72] on the other hand, it is socially *necessary* for the users, as Emile Benveniste (1971a: 44f) has pointed out.

It would, however, be a great mistake to consider the sign in isolation from the system of which it is a part, to see the sign as *nothing more than* a combination of a signifier and a signified. It is within the *system* that the sign gets its value and meaning;[73] *in its relation* to other signs, 'each term has its value through its contrast with all other terms' (Saussure, 1988:88). *Langue,* then, is characterized by the contrasts between its integral parts (Saussure, 1988:105); in short, but most importantly, the consequence of this is, according to Saussure, that

> *In langue itself, there are only differences.* Even more important than that is the fact that, although in general a difference presupposes positive terms between which the difference holds, in *langue* there are only differences, *and no positive terms….* In a sign, what matters more than any idea or sound associated with it is *what other signs surround it.*
>
> (Saussure, 1988:118, italics added, see also pp. 114ff)

Thus, signs are wholly dependent upon other signs, they are relational ('The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside it'; Saussure, 1988:114). It is from this principle of differentiation and from the statement that in language there are *no positive terms,* that I will return to Derrida and his critique of the Saussurean system, a critique resulting in a conception of language upon which a distinction between literary/philosophical texts on the one hand and scientific texts on the other may rest. In reality, Derrida's critique or deconstruction of Saussure's linguistics commences with quite other, more basic points, those of phonocentrism, presence and logocentrism present in and characterizing the whole of Saussure's system,[74] but it would take me too far astray were I to rehearse this. For the present purposes though, my chosen starting point will be adequate.

Before I continue, however, I want to stress that I will not make an attempt to define the notoriously difficult term *deconstruction* (if an *it it* is: 'To present "deconstruction" as if it were a method, a system or a settled body of ideas would be to falsify its nature'; Norris, 1988a:1; cf. also, for example, Dasenbrock, 1989:16), that even Derrida is incapable of defining (see, for example, Derrida, 1988b). Suffice it to refer to Irene Harvey, who observes that

> Derrida defines deconstruction more by what it is not than what it is. A summary of this negative determination would include the following list as a minimal outline or sketch of the field we intend to analyze here: (Deconstruction is not) (a) metaphysics, as per the Western tradition; (b) 'philosophizing with a hammer', as per Nietzsche; (c) 'the destruction of metaphysics', as per Heidegger; (d) dialectics, as per Hegel; (e) semiology, as per Saussure; (f) structuralism, as per Lévi-Strauss; (g) archaeology, as per Foucault; (h) textual psychoanalysis, as per Freud; (i) literary criticism, as per the 'New Critics'; (j) philosophy or epistemology, as per Plato and Socrates; (k) a theory/logic/ science of textuality, as per Barthes; (l) hermeneutics, as per Gadamer; (m) 'Un Coup des Dès', as per Mallarmé; (n) transcendental phenomenology, as per Husserl; (o) a critique of pure reason, as per Kant; (p) an empiricism, as per Locke and Condillac; (q) a 'theatre of cruelty', as per Artaud; (r) a commentary, as per Hyppolite; (s) a translation, as per Benjamin; (t) a signature, as per Ponge; (u) a corrective reading, as per Lacan; (v) a book of questions, as per Jabès; (w) an infinity exceeding all totality, as per Levinas; (x) a painting, as per Adami; (y) a journey to the castle, as per Kafka; nor (z) the celebration of a wake, as per Joyce.
>
> (Harvey, 1986:23)

Immediately after this list, Harvey adds the highly illuminating remark:

> We now seem to be no closer to understanding what deconstruction *is,* although we know what it is not. This is only true if we exclude *is not* from *is,* or not-Being from Being, absence from presence; in short, if we think in terms of classical Western metaphysics.
>
> (Harvey, 1986:23)

Derrida is not considerably clearer himself: 'All sentences of the type "deconstruction is X" or "deconstruction is not X" a priori miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false' (Derrida, 1988b:4). At the same time, as to the term 'deconstruction' Derrida has made the following comment: 'I use this word for the sake of rapid convenience, though it is a word that I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me' (Derrida, 1983:44). Referring to the origins of the term, he has the following to say:

> I had the sense of translating two words from Heidegger at a point where I needed them in the context. These two words are *Destruktion,* which Heidegger uses, explaining that *Destruktion* is not a destruction but precisely a destructuring that dismantles the structural layers in the system, and so on. The other word is *Abbau,* which has a similar meaning: to take apart an edifice in order to see how it is constituted or deconstituted.
>
> (Derrida, 1985:86f; see also, for example, Heidegger, 1962:44f)

Now, in *Superstructuralism* Richard Harland quotes Derrida, and I will use the same lines, since this is a good point of illuminative departure in an attempt to make clear the opposition between Saussure's and Derrida's conceptions of language:

> The meaning of meaning…is infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier…its force is a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest, but engages it in its own economy so that it always signifies again and differs.
>
> (Derrida, 1978b:25, quoted in Harland, 1987:135, italics deleted)

Here, by implication, we can find traces of most of Derrida's deconstruction of linguistics in its Saussurean shape, the most significant in the present context being his insistence on the centrifugal movement of meaning; on what Foucault observes, when he writes

> words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness; they are no longer the marker of things…The age of resemblance is drawing to a close. It is leaving nothing behind it but games.
>
> (Foucault, 1973:47f, 51)

In Saussure, as noted above, the (arbitrary) sign gets its meaning through its connection with other (arbitrary) signs, in its being what the others are *not* (no positive terms). In Derrida, however, signs get their meaning from *traces* of other signs; thus *not* from what other signs are *not,* neither from what other signs *are,* since this latter would imply (mean?!) a *presence* of meaning, an essence in which the sign could find its stable existence:

> This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center of origin, everything became discourse…that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.
>
> (Derrida, 1978a:280, cf. also p. 289)

The traces of other signs 'contaminate', so to speak, all other signs or, in Fredric Jameson's words, 'the sign is always somehow impure' (Jameson, 1974:175), thereby leading us always and endlessly from sign to sign, causing a constant flow of meaning and thus a fundamental instability to the system of language (cf. Derrida, 1973:142f and 1976:65). As Richard Harland says, 'the centrifugal movement of any single word ultimately spreads across every other word in the whole language' (Harland, 1987:133). This, in turn, is a consequence of Derrida's critique of the relation between the signifier and the signified as it is thought in Saussurean linguistics. According to Derrida, the relation between sound and sense is given as one of symmetry in Saussure. This purported symmetry *within* the sign, is denied by Derrida, who points at a fundamental opposition or contradiction in Saussure's semiology between this symmetry on the one hand and, on the other, an inherent possibility, inherent 'in the opposition signifier/signified' itself, to think the signified quite apart from the signifier (Derrida, 1982a:19). Now, if this is possible, if the signified can be thought independently, this provides, Irene Harvey points out, 'the condition of the possibility for translation itself. Without an independent signified, one could not alter signifiers from one language to another' (Harvey, 1986:111),[75] the impossibility of which is one of Saussure's main observations. So, the principle of arbitrariness is effectively threatened and threatening from within the Saussurean system itself. This, thus, contradicts semiology's fundamental principle of difference. For if it is possible to think the signified in isolation, then this will be what Saussure denies existing in language *(langue), a positive term.*[76] But this is impossible argues Derrida, since the principle of difference or rather, as Derrida terms it, *différance*[77] must *logically precede* the signifier as well as the signified (see, for example, Derrida, 1976:62).

Key concepts in Derrida's deconstruction, then, producing this never-ending flow of meaning are *différance* and *trace* (see, for example, Derrida, 1982a:26–9), the result of which is, somewhat briefly, that *'language is originally metaphorical'* (Derrida, 1976:271, italics mine), a view—so that no misunderstanding arises—

not confined to Derrida or deconstruction alone. The much-neglected Swedish Crocean Folke Leander notes that all philosophical language *necessarily* must be metaphorical (Leander, 1943:34), a view thus coinciding with Derrida's when due attention is given to the latter's distinction between 'fact-finding' activities (positive scientific activity?) on the one hand and 'non-fact-finding' activity on the other.[78]

Let me pause here by stressing that for Derrida language implies a never-ending flow of meaning and furthermore that it is metaphorical. To this conception of language and its vagaries should be observed a consequence, spelled out by Derrida, namely that:

> the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system.

> (Derrida, 1976:158)[79]

But we should be aware also of some other consequences as well, regarding, this time, these quoted lines. Disregarding the fact that we don't exactly know what Derrida means by 'discourse' here—whether he means by this term something like Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (see, for example, Foucault, 1982: 31–9), and this seems to be the more probable reading (see, for example, Derrida, 1978a:280), or if he means by 'discourse' just a synonym for the writer's subject matter, of what the writer writes about—certain effects are nevertheless bound to follow.

Now, if 'discourse' is more or less equivalent to a school of thought, and this is as he *loosely* uses the term in, for example, *Structure, Sign, and Play* (see, for example, Derrida 1978a:280, 286), then language and logic appears *outside* this system of thought, outside the writer's discourse as one of its conditions of existence as it were, 'invading', *but only* to a *certain extent,* 'after a fashion and up to a point', the workings of discourse.

It is as *if* Derrida claims that the infinite domain of play and the infinite play of signification (Derrida, 1978a:280) is somehow *arrested* by the writer's discourse, and he says in *Positions* something that may in effect point in this direction: 'The production of differences, *différance,* is not astructural; it produces *systematic* and *regulated* transformations which are able, at a certain point, to leave room for a structural science' (Derrida, 1982a:28, italics added).[80] On the other hand, what he so persistently stresses regarding *'différance'*, 'trace' and 'play' must not be disregarded, so: 'There are *only, everywhere,* differences and traces of traces' (Derrida, 1982a:26, italics mine), 'Being *must be* conceived as presence or absence *on the basis of* the possibility of play' (Derrida, 1978a:292, italics mine), 'the domain or play of signification…*has no limit*' (Derrida, 1978a:281), and '*Nothing*…thus precedes *différance*' (Derrida, 1982a:28, italics added; cf. also, for example, Frank, 1989:255).

Now, given these principles, how is it possible that a system of thought may arrest this never-ending play of language, since a system of thought is no less a play of signs; since, in other words, discourse is *also* language, as Derrida himself observes:

> whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, *no* element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present…. *Nothing,* neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are *only, everywhere,* differences and traces of traces.
>
> (Derrida, 1982a:26, italics mine)

So, so far we have on the one hand language, fundamentally unstable and metaphorical, based on the principles of play, *différance* and traces and, on the other, a discourse to a certain extent *dominated* by the writer—even if we do not know to what extent, only that it cannot be dominated *absolutely.*

But additionally, we have to take Derrida's distinction between *language* and *logic* into consideration. What is the significance of this separation—how is it possible? Is not logic a subspecies of language: 'We *think only in signs*' (Derrida, 1976:50), or as the British philosopher and historian of ideas Christopher Norris observes in his book on Derrida, 'all philosophy, all reflection on thought and language, is caught up in a play of graphic concepts or metaphors' (Norris, 1987: 86), or, again and still on Derrida, 'the idea of a language-independent consciousness is an illusion' (Frank, 1989:228), and thus obeying the same *fundamental* principle of *différance* and the concomitant principles, no less fundamental, of trace and play that govern language's never-ending flow of meaning? But this apart, here as before, it is as *if* language's instability—but *what* language: discourse's language or the language intervening into the affairs of discourse? —has to be arrested if logic is to be allowed to enter the arena, with its own proper system and laws, 'the *logos* of logic' to use a phrase borrowed from Derrida (1988c:92). It is as *if* language either is logic's condition of existence or possibility[81] and has to sacrifice its eternal play of *différance* so as to make logic sensible and stable—for what would be the point of introducing an *unstable* logic beside language? —to give it its *logos,* or else that language is wholly external to logic, a thesis entirely absurd since logic by any definition is concerned with thought, and 'we *think* only in signs', i.e. in and through language. But if the term 'logic' should be endowed with any reasonable meaning, it has to be—exactly—a system of laws that provide it a stability, or else the whole distinction would seem to be meaningless, logic being reducible to language. Will not then—and this is rhetorical —not only logic but also the a-logic and the non-logic collapse and meet at the same place, and receive not only the same status as that of language but also, it seems, the same identity as well, and in the place of a fundamental principle of *différance* do we not get a *fundamental principle of identity*?

But then, what becomes of the *fundamental instability* of language, i.e. of the statement that 'the domain or play of signification…has no limit' (Derrida,

1978a:281)? Of three elements within which or by the possession of which the writer writes—however unsecurely, but still to an extent under his command—there are two, discourse and logic, that somehow seem to annihilate or at least threaten Derrida's principle of the *fundamental instability of systems* and his assertion that 'everything becomes possible against the language-police' (Derrida, 1988c: 100). This seems also to be a possible conclusion to draw from the American philosopher Richard Shusterman when he writes in his deconstruction (analysis) of Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of the organic whole that 'To break the web of *différance* all we need is one independent entity, one positive term with its own intrinsic character' (Shusterman, 1989:110).

We are faced, then, with a basic problem, to which there seems to be no possible solution but only a choice. It is as if we in an ironical and repetitious way have encountered an *aporia*[82] that should have a familiar ring to Derrida, for—as recognized by Manfred Frank in *What is Neostructuralism?* —what Derrida in his critique (deconstruction) of Husserl's phenomenology 'finds fascinating about the aporias in which Husserl's philosophy of time goes astray: it is the problem of "final institution", of a "final grounding" of phenomenology' (Frank, 1989:253). And this basic question, to which no answer seems to be available, is: *how fundamental is 'fundamental'?*[83]

Now, if we temporarily ignore the implications discussed above, and accept Derrida's claims concerning the nature, power and uses of language, how is *then* the distinction made by Derrida (and to some extent by Paul de Man) between different kinds of texts at all possible? How can he seriously argue that scientific 'fact-finding' research should be treated differently from the poetic/philosophic? How is it *possible,* with this conception of language, and furthermore when we consider that, as Derrida states, 'From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. *We think only in signs*' (Derrida, 1976:50), to hold the opinion that 'the *positive* and the classical sciences of writing are obliged to repress this sort of question', and that if not, 'research of *facts*' would be paralysed? And the same questions must be posed to the 'post-modernist' Jean-Francois who expresses an idea as close to Derrida's as can be:

> to the extent that science *does not* restrict itself to stating *useful regularities* and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game.
>
> (Lyotard, 1984:xxiii, italics mine)

Are facts non-dependent upon language, upon the sign, *not* theory-laden (Hanson), let alone fully theoretical (Feyerabend)? As Terry Eagleton expresses it:

> It is not that I can have pure, unblemished meaning, intention or experience which then gets distorted and refracted by the flawed medium of language: because language is the very air I breathe, I can never have a pure, unblemished meaning or experience at all.
>
> (Eagleton, 1986b:130)

And of course Derrida knows that this is the case, he knows that 'pure perception does not exist…. The "subject" of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author' (Derrida, 1978c:226).

And even if we do not wholeheartedly accept Todorov's conclusion—based on Derrida's 'There is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida, 1976:158) —that for Derrida the world does not exist (Todorov, 1988:184), but based on a statement taken out of context, which actually could or should be seen in relation to another comment also made by Derrida and not to be taken too lightly, i.e.

> there are only contexts,…nothing *exists* outside context, as I have often said, but also that the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of nonclosure…the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', socioinstitutional, in short: all possible referents
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:152, 148)

the question must still be posed: 'What is there, *outside* the scientific text?', and how do we get at it if not through language?

Facts, to become facts must be thought, and thus according to Derrida, must be signs, which are elements of language which in turn is metaphorical without any stable meaning possible. This, in fact, seems also to be the conclusion reached by Alan Bass, one of Derrida's introducers to the English-speaking world:

> It must be emphasized that this notion of an origin other than itself, here called 'trace', makes it impossible to locate any origin, ever to constitute a full presence. *The movement of the trace can never be stopped,* or pinned down to a point of absence or presence. (Bass, 1974:347, italics deleted and added, see also p. 349 on 'the double science').

It is as if we have a full circle into which one can enter at any point, never to escape again: fact/thought—thought/sign—sign/metaphor—metaphor/fact.[84] Must not, then, all kinds of texts be polyvocal and polysemic, disseminating[85] (otherwise, what becomes of the never-ending play of language?), and will not Christopher Norris's remark on the relation between philosophy and literature apply to science as well? It seems as if the conclusion would have to be, to use Norris's words with some amplification, that literary texts are less deluded than the discourse of philosophy, and that philosophical texts are less deluded than the discourse of 'positive' science, precisely because they implicitly (and at times explicitly) by decreasing degrees acknowledge and exploit their own rhetorical and metaphorical status (cf. Norris, 1988a:21, 1988c:67).[86] And is this not also implied in de Man's statement that 'fiction is not myth, for it knows and names itself fiction. It is not a demystification, it is demystified from the start' (de Man, 1988b:18)? Or again,

perhaps, in Macherey's words, when he points to 'the absurdity of all attempts to "demystify" literary works, which are defined precisely by their enterprise of demystification' (Macherey, 1978:133). On the other hand, one should do well to remember, as de Man points out in another context, that literature 'is not the less deceitful because it asserts its own deceitful properties' (de Man, 1979a:115) and, as Bill Readings remarks, demystification itself is 'the demystification of the literal as itself a figure among figures, which is to demystify the notion of demystification as a returning of things to their literal being' (Readings, 1989:240n5)! And sometimes, obviously, this deceit is successfully accomplished, as when de Man in his essay on Shelley's last poem is referred by the poem's Rousseau (for example) to the 'real' Rousseau or, at least—and this does not matter since the reference has taken place—to a Rousseau in another discursive universe (de Man, 1979b:39–73), thereby forgetting his own dictum (and not only his) that 'the referential function has to be radically suspended' (cf. also, for example, Derrida, 1976:158)! In other words, the radical suspension of the referent is challenged. Another Rousseau, made possible to present himself exactly through the reference committed by Shelley's poem, strikes back, as it were, showing in his blow that he will not be radically held in suspension, *not even* in an analysis of the self-referential *text par excellence,* the poem.

In sum, it can, then, be argued with some confidence that the clear-cut dichotomy between 'literary' and 'referential' language (or whatever terms one uses) is a myth, contrary to what many literary theorists and linguists claim, and that the scientific text is as polysemantic, polyvocal and opaque as the literary, contrary to 'conventional' wisdom in literary theory and linguistics. Likewise, we may with some assurance say that language—'scientific' as well as 'literary' —is centripetal, pointing towards itself, signs getting their meaning from within language systems, as both Derrida and Saussure argue, and that thus the author's control of his or her language must be questioned: every word is always already 'impure', 'contaminated'. Consequently, the author's control of the meaning of text must also be doubted. And if control is called in question, so is—of course—the importance of the author's intentions for understanding what his or her text says.

However, a common strategy for reading texts is precisely the author's intentions. What the author meant to say is supposed to explain what *the text says* —as if the author is in full control and can never fail. Which leads me to the next chapter, and an analysis of one species of the intentional mode of reading, an analysis of the well-known British philosopher Michael Dummett's teleological reading of the equally well-known German mathematician and philosopher Gottlob Frege.

Notes

1   Cf. Pierre Macherey: 'this is not a concept, strictly speaking' (Balibar and Macherey, 1982:48); see also Barry Hindess's (1977:202–11) critique of Althusser.

2   Which is not to say that Fish's method is limited to the reading of sentences only; cf., for example, Fish (1980e:32, 41f).

3　The leading ideas of the New Criticism are, first, that the poem is an autonomous entity to be analysed in its own right; second, and following from this, that the author's intentions in writing the poem is external to his product and thus not of the critic's concerns (the so-called 'intentional fallacy'); third, a denial of the poem's effects on its reader as part of the critical enterprise (the so-called 'affective fallacy'); fourth, poetic language differs from that of 'everyday' language by its 'self-referentiality'; fifth, the poem (the 'good' poem, that is) is a structured and unified whole. New Criticism dominated the literary theoretical scene in the Anglo-American countries from around the forties to the late fifties. Among its leading exponents are, for example, I.A.Richards, Cleanth Brooks and W.K.Wimsatt. We will have opportunity to come back to this school in what follows.

4　Cf. Chapter 4, below, on Michael Dummett's reading of Gottlob Frege for an account of such a mode of reading.

5　de Man reaches the opposite conclusion in his reading of Fish, placing as he does the responsibility for the reader's wanderings upon the author, giving both text and reader absolution (de Man, 1988e:285ff).

6　This 'development' was not applauded by all literary critics at the time; cf. for example F.R.Leavis's reviews of Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Leavis, 1986a) and I.A.Richards's *Coleridge on Imagination* (Leavis, 1986b), as well as his own conception of the critical enterprise (for example, Leavis, 1986c, d). Leavis is a good representative of the activity that Pierre Macherey calls 'criticism-as-condemnation' (see above).

7　Cf., for example, the American literary critic Murray Krieger on Richards:

> One may see I.A.Richards functioning for these New-Critical claims much as Ferdinand de Saussure functioned for structuralism, with each providing a rudimentary linguistic analysis which becomes the basis for the criticism that followed. The New Critics derive from Richards's dualistic opposition between sign and thing in his argument for the referentiality of science and the non-referentiality of poetry…The difference, of course is that New Critics, anti-positivists all, tended to be less faithful to Richards's dichotomy than structuralists have proved to be to Saussure's.
>
> (Krieger, 1979b:109f; cf. also, for example, Harland, 1993:176)

8　For a rigorous critique of the use of 'statement' as not pertaining to literature but only to science, see Weitz (1983:18ff).

9　See, for example, Jacques Derrida (1982b) and Paul de Man (1981) on metaphors in philosophical discourse. But the analyses of philosophical texts made by, in particular, Derrida and de Man have, as noted by Christopher Norris, repercussions on the status of the literary text itself:

> Once alerted to the *rhetorical* nature of philosophic arguments, the critic is in a strong position to reverse the age-old prejudice against literature as a debased or merely deceptive form of language. It now becomes possible to argue—indeed, impossible to deny—that literary texts are less deluded than the discourse of philosophy, precisely because they implicitly acknowledge and exploit their own rhetorical status.
>
> (Norris, 1988a:21)

The same idea is also expressed by Murray Krieger, who apropos of drama observes that

> rather than trying to 'take us in' (that is, to delude us), they prefer to show us how close they have come to doing so, how marvellously verisimilar their illusion is: one cannot appreciate the verisimilar without being aware that it is not the thing itself. One might thus argue that no work is more illusionary than the most literally mimetic one.
>
> (Krieger, 1979a:147)

10　That 'poetic language' is fundamentally dependent upon 'ordinary language', and thus that it is not a question of two ontologically distinct languages, is argued by, for example, Edward Stankiewicz, who maintains that 'changes in the phonemic pattern of a language lead ultimately to innovations in its metrics' and also that

> the actual distribution of stresses which determines the rhythmic pattern of verse and which 'deviates' from the abstract metrical scheme is in agreement with the distribution of stress within the spoken chain of the ordinary language.
>
> (Stankiewicz, 1960:78, 79)

11   On the American critic Murray Krieger's romanticist criticism, see Lentricchia (1983:212–54). It should be noted that Vincent Leitch, in contrast to Lentricchia, places Krieger well within New Criticism, albeit as a revisionist of sorts (Leitch, 1988:33f, 46).

12   The theory *par excellence* of understanding serious utterances, if we are to believe Quentin Skinner (1972:401f, 1988b:260).

13   Austin's speech act theory makes a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. The difference between the two is the difference between the meaning of what is said (the locutionary act) on the one hand, and the meaning in saying (the illocutionary act) on the other (Austin, 1980: 94–108).

14   The last part of this analogy, together with the parenthesis directly following it, i.e.: '(It ought, incidentally, to be regarded as an extraordinary fact, one requiring an explanation, that sentences in one language can be translated into sentences in another language)' (Searle, 1969:40), cries for an extended comment. Unfortunately, neither space nor time will allow this. Suffice it to point out that from many and different points of view, Searle's analogy would be seen as highly problematic. Already the 'Sapir—Whorf hypothesis', i.e.:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (Sapir, 1985:162; cf. also Whorf, 1987b:134–59. For a critique of the Sapir—Whorf thesis, see, for example, Black, 1968:432–7),

casts doubt upon it, and if we add more recent writings from the anthropological arena, such as, for example, Werner and Campbell (1973) these doubts are undoubtedly strengthened. See also on translation 'proper', so to speak, Benjamin (1989), Steiner (1976), Sturrock (1991) and the collection of essays edited by Joseph F.Graham (1985).

Furthermore, one could point to the 'incommensurability thesis', the problem of 'paradigm shifts', and of translating the language of one paradigm into the language of another; see, for example, two classics: Feyerabend (1975) and Kuhn (1970). Feyerabend discusses the difference between his approach and Kuhn's (Feyerabend, 1978:65–70; see also Feyerabend, 1985:152–61). But see also Donald Davidson's critique and rejection of the Sapir—Whorf hypothesis, of Kuhn and Feyerabend (Davidson, 1990b).

It can also be noted that Searle's account is at odds with Saussure's linguistics, where every sign or word 'is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside it' (Saussure, 1988:114), i.e. every word stands in a relation to all the others in a language system. In this respect one can say that every conceptual scheme (theory, language) differs from all the others —or they would be identical and translation neither possible nor necessary. Thus, language is not or is not merely a nomenclature.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from these texts (and many more) is that the second assertion in Searle's analogy is, to put it mildly, highly questionable, but not that one cannot hint at an explanation of this difference of views. Fredric Jameson (1974) contrasts 'Anglo-American' linguistics with Saussure's, where the former's 'most basic task of linguistic investigation consists in a one-to-one, sentence-by-sentence search for referents' and where in the latter, 'the terminology of the sign tends to affirm the internal coherence and comprehensibility, the autonomy, of the system of signs

itself, rather than the constant movement outside the symbol-system towards the things symbolized' (Jameson, 1974:32; cf. also Staten, 1986:111). Now, viewed as generalized approaches, whether to language or to reality, Searle seems to belong to the former, while the others that I have referred to in this footnote belong to the latter, whether their views of language is Saussurean or not.

15 Let the reader judge for himself whether Barthes makes an exception for historical discourse (Barthes, 1970b).

16 For an analysis of the relation between poetry and prose opposite to that of Barthes's, see Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay who state, in their historico-theoretical study, that

> first there is oral verse, and then there is a writing down of oral verse…And then, somehow, there are works written in prose, which tend to proliferate until they seem to become the dominant mode of written communication.
>
> (Godzich and Kittay, 1987:xii).

17 It should perhaps be pointed out that quite often both Jakobson and Mukarovsky, until at least the mid-thirties, use the term 'aesthetic' function; see, for example, Jakobson (1987d) and Mukarovsky (1977a). This term was used by Jakobson as early as 1919 (Jakobson, 1973). Similarly, Jakobson sometimes writes poetic 'function', and sometimes poetic 'language', obviously referring to the same phenomenon (see, for example, Jakobson, 1987c).

18 Viktor Shklovksy was one of the Russian Formalism's major figures. In 1914, he was instrumental in the founding of the Society for the Study if Poetic Language (the OPOYAZ) in St Petersburg, one of Russian Formalism's two groups.

19 See, for example, Shklovsky (1986:52–63); also Bennett (1986:20–5). The concept of defamiliarization has, together with that of the dominant and the device, by the way, important historiographical consequences for the production of knowledge of literary evolution; cf., for example, Jakobson (1987b:44ff) and Jameson (1974:52ff). It has also, according to Todorov, played an important part in Brecht's aesthetics, for example his *Verfremdung*-effect (Todorov, 1988:35–40).

For a critique of, especially early, Russian Formalism in this respect, see, for example, Todorov (1988:26ff) and Bakhtin and Medvedev (1985:159–73); see also Titunik (1986:184–90).

20 Cf. in this context, for example, Bakhtin:

> In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel, and in fact it is difficult to find any genres that have not at some point been incorporated into a novel by someone
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981b:320f; cf. also, for example, Bakhtin, 262f)

and likewise, Culler:

> There is nothing that might not be put into a literary work; there is no pattern or mode of determination that might not be found there.
>
> (Culler, 1987a:182)

On another level and *within* the field of literature the situation becomes a bit more complicated. Cf. for example:

> the novel can include, ingest, devour other genres and still retain its status as a novel, but other genres cannot include novelistic elements *without impairing their own identity* as epics, odes or any other fixed genre.
>
> (Holquist, 1981:xxxii, italics mine)

But still, language itself is in these cases the defamiliarizing vehicle.

21 There are cases, 'exotic' cases, dealing with, for instance, 'strange' or alien cultures, where it can be argued, and Hayden White does this (see White, 1985e:86f), that scientific or historical texts (White sometimes, but not always, makes a distinction between the two; see, for example, White, 1985b:69, 1985e:86) really 'familiarize the unfamiliar'. To what extent and to whom this actually is familiarizing could, however, be a matter of dispute.

22   Cf. also Umberto Eco who claims (but on what grounds?) the common nature of texts, but then immediately goes on to say that he, however, will focus on *literary* theories (Eco, 1990:45).

23   The 'project' of Macherey (1978) is thus, implicitly, declared erroneous. The question whether this is for the better or the worse I leave for the moment in suspension (for an analysis of Macherey's theoretical trajectory, see, for example, Resch, 1992:269–94).

24   Cf. also, for example, Culler (1988b:87), Eagleton (1986b:51), Fish (1980e:30) and Waugh (1985:145).

25   See also John Sturrock, commenting upon Paul de Man:

> poetry is that knowingly ambiguous and elusive use of language *designed* for interpretation. Poets above all write in order to evoke 'texts' in those who read them. They do not want passivity in their readers. Many would not claim to be 'masters' of what they have written semantically, but to be able to offer only one perhaps of the many interpretations it is open to. Prose writers are more possessive of their meanings.
>
> (Sturrock, 1986:152)

For the difference between ambiguity and polysemy, see, for example, Ducrot and Todorov (1987: 236f).

26   An illuminating case in point is Roland Barthes and his reviews of, for example, on the one hand Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye,* and on the other Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie,* the former provocative and vivid, the latter common-sensish and conventional (see Barthes, 1972b and 1986). Perhaps it is, as Todorov has observed in another connection, that Barthes's originality lies in the form he has chosen to write in and the relation between this form and the subject matter he writes about. Form and subject have to be(come) one; change either and he becomes one 'writer among others' (Todorov, 1988:66). Thus, in writing on Foucault, form and content do not match. We may observe something similar to Barthes but, as it were, turned up-side-down, when reading Catherine Belsey (1980), who in the course of her book reads fiction as well as—and primarily— fellow literary theorists. In the first case, the author is 'dead', in the second s/he is very much alive.

27   Cf. Waugh (1985:143ff).

28   Todorov argues exactly the opposite to this, i.e. that the

> easy way out would have been to practise linguistics but to read only 'average' texts…If a linguistic theory is correct, it must be able to account not only, let us say, for neutral utilitarian prose, but also for the wildest verbal creations of a Khlebnikov, for example.
>
> (Todorov, 1987:283)

My point is, however, that 'average' texts and the problems connected with them have been fundamentally neglected. Cf. also, for example, Attridge (1987:28), Erlich (1981:184), Jakobson (1987c:89),Tynjanov (1978a:130f, 1981:36f) and Waugh (1985:145).

One should perhaps place the novel among these intermediate phenomena, not having received the same attention as poetry by most literary theorists of which, though, Bakhtin is an outstanding exception (see, for example, Holquist, 1981:xxx and Bakhtin, 1981b). It should also be pointed out that one tendency of Russian Formalism's poetics, with its stress upon sound as the organizing principle of poetry, makes it singularly difficult to deal with prose (cf., for example, Bakhtin, 1981b: 260f and Bakhtin and Medvedev, 1985:71). This is not to claim, however, that all Russian Formalists 'avoided' prose texts. Some of the leading members, as for example Viktor Shklovsky and Boris Eichenbaum, devoted most of their works to such texts and this in a manner that makes Robert Scholes claim that 'the formal method has given us virtually all the poetics of fiction we have' and that the study of fiction 'may almost be said to begin with Vladimir Propp's work on the Russian fairy tale' (Scholes, 1974:76, 59; see also, for example, Shklovsky, 1986 and Eichenbaum, 1975) somewhat exaggerated. Propp published this work in 1928.

29   On other whys and hows in the study of 'classical' texts, see, for example, Quentin Skinner (1969) and Hayden White (1987b).

30   The theory is put to work in White (1975). To get a general idea of the theory's outline, the reader may consult White (1985f, especially pp. 252–5).

31 Since this is not the place to engage in a more profound discussion on this, I will be content to remain agnostic to this, in a certain sense, hen-and-egg problem; the replacement talked about above would be the same whether my position *vis-à-vis* White is agnostic or negative, however.

32 Cf. also Balibar and Macherey (1981:92), who write of literature's 'hallucinatory reality' in their attempt to determine 'literature as an ideological form'.

33 If nothing else, it *at least* refers to its own 'discursive universe' (cf. Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:247).

34 Of course, there may intrude a question of sociological and/or psychological relevance here, for example that of collegial respect and a wish to protect the academic profession from external attacks, although in the chosen example, this seems very unlikely. Cf., for example, Popper:

> the objectivity of science is not a matter of the individual scientist but rather the social result of their mutual criticism, of the *friendly—hostile* division of labour among scientists…For this reason, it depends, in part, upon a number of social and political circumstances.
>
> (Popper, 1976b:95)

35 That there may exist a conflict between the opinions of the author and the reader regarding what is to be considered realistic in the text was discussed by Jakobson (1987a) as early as 1921.

36 But, of course, the question 'has the past any real existence?' may always be posed; cf., for example, Ricoeur's (1983:180f) and Hindess and Hirst's (1975:308–13) discussions on this subject.

37 Novels that illustrate my point are, for example, Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989) and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

38 Words to this effect are, for example, Paul de Man's 'The advent of theory…occurs with the introduction of linguistic terminology in the metalanguage about literature' (de Man, 1986b:8).

39 Compare this with the contrary view of Gaston Bachelard and the problem of space-time language: 'What poet will furnish us with the metaphors for which this new language cries out?' (Bachelard, 1984:78). This seems to be a situation Richard H.Brown could have had in mind when he wrote, 'a free or playful use of metaphor is that of the maker, while the use of frozen metaphor is typical of those who reproduce or elaborate existing paradigms' (Brown, 1977:88); i.e. *convention,* not scientificity as such, is what makes it possible to uphold a difference between 'scientific' and poetic languages, in this case a distinction based upon the difference between frozen and free, playful metaphors belonging to normal science in Kuhn's sense and 'pioneering science', respectively.

40 Cf., for example, White (1985b:71); but he is not altogether consistent; see for example White (1985c:116).

41 But Gödel's research into the foundations of arithmetic points to the possible impossibility of excluding even the fields of arithmetic and logic since, according to Ian Stewart, Gödel's work '*proves* the impossibility of an arithmetical proof of the consistency of arithmetic' (Stewart, 1975: 297) and thus leaves the foundations of arithmetic 'wobbly'; i.e. they seem to be open knowledge systems just as the factual sciences are, and similarly open to change.

42 Cf. White's claim that, in the human sciences, it is only '*still* a matter not only of expressing a preference for one or another way of conceiving the tasks of analysis but also of choosing among contending notions of what an adequate human science might be' (White, 1975:433, italics mine). *Still,* that is, but not for ever, because, as he also holds:

> What formal terminological systems, such as those devised for denoting the data of physics, *envisage* is the elimination of figurative usage altogether, the construction of perfect 'schemata' of words in which nothing 'unexpected' appears in the designation of the objects of study.
>
> (White, 1975:33, italics mine)

But as I will try to show, the *real* problem seems to lie, as Geoffrey Hartman observes, 'less with an unstable language than with the stability sought by science' (Hartman, 1980:247).

43 For a 'social psychological' approach to the 'persuasive powers' of scientific discourse, see Rom Harré (1985).

44 Cf. also:

An ambiguity, then, is not satisfying in itself, nor is it, considered as a device on its own, a thing to be attempted; it must in each case arise from, and be justified by, the peculiar requirements of the situation. On the other hand, it is a thing which the more interesting and valuable situations are more likely to justify. Thus the practice of 'trying not to be ambiguous' has a great deal to be said for it, and I suppose was followed by most of the poets I have considered. It is likely to lead to results more direct, more communicable, and hence more durable; it is a necessary safeguard against being ambiguous without proper occasion, and it leads to more serious ambiguities when such occasions arise.

(Empson, 1953:235)

But it is perhaps, despite many similarities, not quite correct to lump Empson together with Ogden and Richards and the New Critics exactly because of his open intentionalism and psychologism (cf. Eagleton, 1986b:51f and Wimsatt and Brooks, 1965:637–41). One should perhaps also add, with de Man, that Empson with his stress upon ambiguity and thus on the fundamental insecurity of reading is on the verge of undermining the New Critical project which ultimately strives for *the* accurate reading (de Man, 1988d:235–43; see also Norris, 1985:79).

45   See Saussure (1988).

46   Cf., for example, the following remarks:

Unfortunately, this theory of signs, by neglecting entirely the *things* for which signs stand, was from the beginning cut off from any contact with scientific methods of verification.

(Ogden and Richards, 1952:6, italics mine)

Such an elaborate construction as *la langue* might, no doubt, be arrived at by some Method of Intensive Distraction…but as a guiding principle for a young science it is fantastic.

(Ogden and Richards, 1952:5)

47   Embarrassing, for two of the main 'Credo-articles' within this school must be borne in mind, Wimsatt's and Beardsley's *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946) and its sequel, Wimsatt's *Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited* (1968). Cf. also Paul de Man's (1988a:24) article on the New Criticism.

48   For short overviews on Saussure's influence, see for example Gadet (1989), Harland (1987), Hawkes (1983) and Sturrock (1986). For short overviews of pre-Saussurean linguistics, cf., for example, Lyons (1968:2–38) and Merquior (1986:11ff).

49   But who is the actual author of this *Course,* what is the referent of the signified of the signifier 'Saussure'? On the problems of what will be called 'Saussure', 'Saussure's' text, etc., see, for example, Culler (1988a), and Angenot (1984). Despite problems of who is really responsible for the *Course,* its historical importance cannot be denied. This importance is, though, attributed to the *text,* not necessarily to its author or editors. It is clear here perhaps more than ever that it is what is in the text that counts. Cf. Harris (1987:vii–xii); also Derrida (1976:329, n. 38).

50   To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let it be noted that I am *not* referring to the Saussure simultaneous 'structuralist linguistic movement' in the U.S.A. (also known as Descriptivism), the leading figures of which were, above all, the anthropologist Edward Sapir and the linguist Leonard Bloomfield (for different points of view on this school, see, for example, Hawkes, 1983:29–32, Kristeva, 1989:237–49 and Sampson, 1980:57–102).

51   The term *semiotics* seems first to have been introduced by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1689–90 (Locke, 1978:II,309; see also Jakobson, 1987f:436f).

52   This is not to deny that, according to Jakobson and Waugh, certain elements in the Saussurean linguistics are still unsurpassed, for instance that of the sign as consisting of a signifier and a signified (originally a 2000-year-old Stoic thesis that Saussure revived) and that of language as being built up by differential units (Jakobson and Waugh, 1979:13, 20).

53   For a short overview of 'Saussureanism's' itinerary, see, for example, Angenot (1984) and Gadet (1989).

54   On the influence of binarism upon Jakobson, see Jakobson and Halle (1956, especially pp 44–8) and, for example, Winner (1987:259). Jakobson's strong appreciation of Peirce should not go unmentioned (cf., for example, Jakobson, 1987e, 1987f), but is of later date, originating in

the fifties (see Steiner, 1982b:83f). It should be noted that Peirce's semiotic texts were not published until the early 1930s (cf. Winner, 1987:268).

55   See, for example, Lévi-Strauss, who acknowledges his profound debt to Jakobson in the 'Preface' to Jakobson's *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Lévi-Strauss, 1978:xi–xxvi; see also Gadet, 1989: 150f and Pace, 1986:158f on the relation between the two); Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss also worked together in, for example, interpreting Baudelaire's *Les Chats* (Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, 1987). Indications of Jakobson's influence on literary theory are also given by, for example, Barthes in the opening line of the essay *A Magnificent Gift:* 'Jakobson made literature a magnificent gift: he gave it linguistics' (Barthes, 1989:159) and Robert Scholes in *Semiotics and Interpretation:* 'The contemporary semiotics of literature is founded on Jakobson's work' (Scholes, 1982:xii).

56   Cf., for example, Culler (1988a:86ff) and Derrida (1976, 1982a). Deconstruction or, as it has also been called, post-modernism, post-structuralism or, even, super-structuralism, can be regarded a reaction against the claims of scientificity made by structuralism:

> The scientific ambitions of structuralists are exposed as impossible dreams by deconstructive analyses, which put in question the binary oppositions through which structuralists describe and master cultural productions.
>
> (Culler, 1987a:219f)

57   Cf., for example, Benveniste (1971c:36). This, I take it, is also implied in Paul Ricoeur's discussions in, for example, Ricoeur (1974a:73–8, 1974b:83–8), where he tries, with the help of Greimas's structural semantics, to 'enlarge' or 'transcend' structural linguistics so as to include discourse and speech (but cf. Don Ihde, 1974:xii for an understanding of Ricoeur contrary to mine).

58   Cf. also, for example, Strozier (1988:5ff) and Thibault (1991:203).

59   Cf., for example, Pêcheux (1982:37) for reasons why the latter will be the case.

60   I will keep the French terminology, since in Saussure *langage* is different from *langue,* and this difference is not possible to convey in translation. I will thus where needed alter translations in accordance with this usage, without this being specified. To simplify without distorting too much, *langage* stands for the general faculty of language, *langue* for the system of language, and *parole* for language in action through speech. I hope these distinctions will become somewhat more clear below. In order to check the French terminology, I have used Tullio de Mauro's critical edition of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1972).

61   Cf.: 'Put simply, algebra contains all relations and nothing but relations' (Bachelard, 1984:29).

62   That Saussure's presentation of how these concepts are to be thought is not wholly consistent is argued by Ray Selden (1976:99f).

63   In this respect Jakobson may be regarded a personification of the ideas of both Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism; see, for example, Matejka (1986) and Galan (1985).

64   See also the whole discussion in Jakobson and Pomorska, (1983:56–78); see also, for example, Jakobson (1990), Matejka (1986:165f) and Galan (1985:6–38). For an analysis concluding a reconciliation between the synchronic and the diachronic to be impossible from within the main outlines of the Saussurean system, and thus that Jakobson's attempt does not hold water, see Jameson (1974:5–22). Jameson, however, ignores Prague structuralism in his discussion.

65   Cf., for example, Mukarovsky (1979), Galan, referred to above, and Jauss (1982b:72ff).

66   On the relation between Saussure and Durkheim, see, for example, Culler (1988a:70–8), Harris (1987:225–31), Holdcroft (1991:144–7) and Sampson (1980:43–8).

67   It seems to me that a not uncommon reduction of *langue* to the realm of psychology (cf., for example, Strozier, 1988:17f) probably rests upon a misunderstanding of the use of the term 'psychology' in Saussure. Granted that Saussure knew of Durkheim's work (see, for example, Holdcroft, 1991:144), it may make sense to point out that 'psychology' in Durkheim has two meanings: individual psychology and 'sociology [which] is a psychology, but a psychology *sui generis*' (Durkheim, 1982b:247). Of 'sociology', Durkheim further notes that he is 'far from denying that, above these particular sciences, there is room for a synthetic science, which may be called

general sociology, or philosophy of the social sciences' (Durkheim, 1982c:255). Now, when Saussure writes the following:

> The study of *langage* thus comprises two parts. The essential part takes for its object *langue* itself, which is social in its essence and independent of the individual. This is a purely *psychological* study
>
> (Saussure, 1988:19, italics mine)

it seems not unreasonable to suspect that what Saussure here refers to is not 'individual psychology' but rather sociology between which two, as we know, Durkheim draws a distinct demarcation line (see, for example, Durkheim, 1982a:52).

68   Cf., for example, Benveniste (1971a:43–8) and Timpanaro (1975:153ff) for two views that argue the existence of the real in Saussure's linguistics, the former deploring, the latter agreeing with this state of affairs; see also Bennett (1986:5).

69   The principal problem concerning Saussure's system as such I leave open since it is outside the scope of the present text. Briefly, the question is whether Benveniste is correct when he argues that the existence of *the real* in this system is 'permanently installing a contradiction' (Benveniste, 1971a: 44).

70   However this is interpreted; see, for example, Harris (1987:16ff).

71   This arbitrariness is illustrated by the example of the signified (the idea, concept of) 'sister' and its French signifier 's-ö-r' (Saussure, 1988:67f). Obviously, there is no necessary relation at work here —if it was, how could different languages exist at all? But see below for the implications of this.

72   That Saussure's idea of the arbitrariness of the sign was neither new nor went uncontested is also shown by Roman Jakobson (1987e).

73   For this distinction, see Saussure (1988:112–18) and Ducrot and Todorov (1987:16f).

74   See, for example, Derrida (1976:12), Johnson (1981:viiiff, xi) and Wahl (1987:349ff). In this way, one can say that Derrida's overall deconstructive strategy continues the basic programme that Whitehead (1933) proposed:

> When you are criticising the philosophy of an epoch, do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them. With these assumptions a certain limited number of types of philosophic systems are possible, and this group of systems constitutes the philosophy of the epoch.
>
> (Whitehead, 1933:61)

And before Whitehead, Marx (1970:21) made the same observation in his famous *Preface* to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

75   See also Jameson (1974:130f, 144f) on this asymmetrical relation.

76   Actually, there is yet another threatening element within the Saussurean system, namely, the possibility also to think the *signifier* in its relative isolation—an opportunity which, beside the Russian Formalist and Futurist (for example Khlebnikov) conceptions of the poetic function of language, is opened up within the realm of metalanguage where, as is pointed out by Frantisek Galan,

> language's referential or communicative function retreats into the background, since the language users' attention is concentrated on the constitution of language as a specific order of functional and semiotic values.
>
> (Galan, 1985:124).

77   For this elusive term of Derrida's, which 'is neither a *word* not a *concept*' (Derrida, 1973:130, the phrase is insistently repeated throughout the essay, see, for example, pp. 131, 135, 136, 140, etc); which is not 'simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general' (Derrida, 1973:140), (see his essay *Différance* (1973) in the collection

Speech and Phenomena, this essay is also published in Derrida (1982c:1–27)). On the other hand, suggestions towards a definition occur in the same essay, such as for example the following:

> On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible…. We provisionally give the name *différance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical.*
>
> (Derrida, 1973:129)

> Within a conceptual system and in terms of classical requirements, différance could be said to designate the productive and primordial constituting causality, the process of scission and division whose differings and differences would be the constituted products or effects.
>
> (Derrida, 1973:137)

See also the interview with Julia Kristeva in Derrida (1982a:26–9). For a concise presentation of *différance,* see, for example, Harvey (1986:210f).

78 But cf. Croce on language in *art:* 'in the aesthetic fact there are none but proper words: the same intuition can be expressed in one way only, precisely because it is intuition and not concept' (Croce, 1972:72).

79 The reader should pay attention to the 'a's in the first part of the first sentence. *If* Derrida is suggesting that one should read 'one' here, this assumption on the part of the writer seems rather unwarranted, in that there is nothing to support or make reasonable the supposition that the writer writes only within *one* logic or even within *one* language; cf., for example, Macherey (1978:100f) and Kristeva (1987c:36). I will return to this question below when discussing text's inconsistencies and intertextualities.

80 This could favourably be compared to Aristotle's more radical 'The rule of the undetermined is itself undetermined' (Aristotle, 1976:200, translation modified).

81 And *not* the other way around as another philosophy of language, represented by, for example, Frege, Husserl and the early Wittgenstein, would argue (Garver, 1973:xiif); for a short overview of the relations between logic, rhetoric, and meaning in twentieth-century philosophy of language, see Newton Garver's preface to Derrida (1973:ix–xxix).

82 This term, which is basic in deconstructive activity, denotes, and I will borrow M.H.Abrams's succinct words:

> a deadlock, or 'double bind', between incompatible or contradictory meanings which are 'undecidable,' in that we lack any solid ground for choosing among them. The result is that *each text deconstructs itself,* by undermining its own supposed grounds and dispersing itself into incoherent meanings, in a way, Derrida claims, that the deconstructive reader does not engender, but merely exposes.
>
> (Abrams, 1988:205, italics mine)

See also Lawson-Tancred (1986:121) under 'puzzle'.

83 There is still one problem left, but I will leave it for the moment and return to it below, namely that of the *writer's* discourse (however we choose to interpret 'discourse'): in what relation does the writer stand to *'his'* discourse?; to what extent does *he* control *it*?; in what sense can the discourse be said to be *his*?

84 Perhaps there is another possibility, hinted at by Newton Garver but which he does not elaborate upon, namely that 'Derrida *seems* at times to embrace a nominalism combined with a sort of radical empiricism' (Garver, 1973:xxviii). Now, this would certainly explain the seeming naivety concerning 'fact-finding', but would on the other hand make the rest of Derrida's theorizing inexplicable, provided, that is, that we should want to arrive at a reading that aims at some kind of *unity* in Derrida's thought!

85 On this term, which Derrida contrasts to the more orderly 'polysemy', see Derrida (1981:350f). See also, for example, Derrida (1982e:44f).

86 See also McCloskey (1986) on the rhetoric of economics.

4 The teleological mode of reading

After some introductory remarks on intentionalism as a general mode of reading, this chapter will primarily be devoted to the British philosopher Michael Dummett's *principles of Frege exegesis*.

Michael Dummett is considered one of the leading philosophers today. His works include studies on the philosophy of language and meaning in general, of the German mathematician, logician and philosopher Gottlob Frege's philosophy in general, and of Frege's philosophy of mathematics and language in particular.[1] Finally, it could be noted that Dummett's philosophy is rather close to Wittgenstein's and Frege's.

Given this philosophical outlook, one would suspect that he would be, as it were, the perfect reader, but as will be shown below, this is far from the case, and this is also the reason why I have chosen to devote a chapter on what I will designate as his *teleological* mode of reading of Frege—to illustrate, in other words, how even one of the world's foremost philosophers of language and meaning can adopt a reading strategy filled with obvious shortcomings. Thus, and perhaps as a consolation, it is not only social scientists that follow naive reading strategies.

Now, Michael Dummett is not alone in choosing this strategy of reading. When reading texts on the works of Marx, Louis Althusser finds himself confronted with a peculiar understanding of these works, an understanding founded upon a 'theory of anticipation' (Althusser, 1977b:56), where—it is claimed—Marx's early texts' meaning, as it were,

> had been held in abeyance until the end, as if it was necessary to wait on the final synthesis before their elements could be at last resorbed *into a whole,* as if, before this final synthesis, the question of the whole could not be raised, just because all totalities earlier than the final synthesis have been destroyed.
>
> (Althusser, 1977b:60)

One of the presuppositions behind this mode of reading identified by Althusser —and to my mind the most important—is the teleological; thus my choice of terminology: the teleological mode of reading. Also, Stephen Savage (1983) discusses a number of modes of critiques, one of which is this mode of reading.

Author and intention

The teleological mode of reading is, you might say, an extension of what Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) criticize, their main line of attack being the thesis succinctly summarized in a few words by Northrop Frye as: 'the notion that the poet has a primary intention of conveying meaning to a reader, and that the first duty of a critic is to recapture that intention' (Frye, 1973:86). The main difference between intentional criticism as analysed by Wimsatt and Beardsley on the one hand and the teleological mode of reading on the other is that in the first case, the object of knowledge is the *single* text while the teleological mode extends this object to cover a *sequence* of texts or even the *works*[2] of an author. It could perhaps be noted that this mode of reading is not seen or, alternatively, is ignored in much 'intentionalist' writings. So, for example, is it absent in the texts by the two foremost intentionalists, i.e. the literary theoreticians E.D.Hirsch (1967a, 1976) and P.D. Juhl (1986). That it should be equally absent from anti-intentionalist texts is perhaps less surprising.

In order to proceed, we will have to consider some of the arguments involved in the debate connected with Wimsatt and Beardsley's *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946). In this essay, the authors proclaimed what was later to become a credo for the New Critics and which, in one form or another, may be found—independently —in many other literary theoretical schools, such as, for example, Russian Formalism and Structuralism, i.e. the more or less complete abolishment of the authors intention from the critical enterprise. Wimsatt and Beardsley make a sharp distinction between 'internal and external evidence for the meaning' of a text (1946:477),[3] arguing that external evidence is 'private or idiosyncratic' while internal evidence is public (1946:477), and that the proper object of knowledge for the critic is the text itself, carrying within it its meaning (cf., for example, Beardsley, 1970:29). In the words of Cleanth Brooks,

> The formalist critic…wants to *criticize the work itself*…he assumes that the relevant part of the author's intention is what he got actually into his work; that is, he assumes that the author's intention *as realized* is the 'intention' that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do.
>
> (Brooks, 1951:75, italics added)

That is, the 'design or plan in the author's mind' (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946: 469) is irrelevant to the critical enterprise.

Another external evidence—not, to my knowledge discussed by the New Critics, although well within their line of argument—not of what the author may have intended, but rather of his or her less than perfect control of the printed text, is the following.

That texts can fare less than well in the hands of editors or publishers is a circumstance that creates problems of its own. Now, these problems are a bit off-side in relation to my main theme, so I will not dwell unnecessarily upon them here, just try to illustrate what is at stake by taking the publication of the second

English edition of the Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) as an example. In this edition the editor states that 'One feature of the original work has not been preserved: a number of chapters are headed by quotations from Goethe, and these have been dropped as non-essential' (Propp, 1968:x). One thing should be completely clear, Propp himself did not like this at all; in an exchange with Claude Lévi-Strauss (Propp, 1984), a reply to Lévi-Strauss's essay *Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp* (1977c), he makes the comment:

> In my book such [philosophical] meditations were present too, but they were hidden in the epigraphs to some chapters. Lévi-Strauss knows my work only in an English translation; the translator, however, has taken an unpardonable liberty. He missed my point and did not understand the function of the epigraphs. At first glance, they do not seem to belong to the text, so he decided that they were useless embellishments and barbarously suppressed them. Yet the epigraphs were from Goethe's works collected under the title of *Morphology* and from his journals; their purpose was to express certain things not stated in the text of the book.
>
> (Propp, 1984:68)

So, some readers have found these lines by Propp and are thus able to read his *Morphology* in a way a reader not familiar with the epigraphs could (the epigraphs can now be found on page 205 in Propp, 1984); this other reader instead must experience a kind of uncertainty when confronted with the editor's comment, wondering what interpretation is behind such an editorial decision. It should also be noticed that the way Goethe uses the term morphology (and he was the one who introduced it) stands in sharp contrast to other uses, for example that of Darwin's, and thus has a specific philosophical pertinence (see Cassirer, 1945:105f).

There are other ways for editors 'innocently' to tamper with texts, such as this:

> However, most of the direct quotations from English-speaking authors have been found and the original inserted. Where this has not been possible, *what are given as direct quotations in Durkheim have been turned into indirect speech*.
>
> (W.D.Halls, 1984:vii, italics mine)

There are ways and ways…And the question arises: whose texts are these?

All in all, the New Critics claim the text to be a 'self-sufficient' entity and what intentions the author may have had is of interest only to the extent that they are realized as meanings *in* the text but then they are identical with the text itself and, thus, do not—as intentions—require separate consideration. All other intentions the author may have had are outside the text, 'external evidence', and as such have no bearing on textual *meaning;* they do not belong to the text, neither linguistically nor semantically—all the less so since the author may have failed to realize his intentions. A case in point is referred to by W.K.Wimsatt:

A classic instance of an author's serious intention, antecedent to and simultaneous with the writing, yet doomed to defeat, is Chekhov's desire (revealed in his letters) to have his *Seagull* and *Cherry Orchard produced* as comedies— resulting only in Stanislavski's successful and now well-established interpretation of them as tragedies—or at least as very cloudy 'dramas'.

(Wimsatt, 1968:214)[4]

Thus, the text is according to the New Critics—in relation to its author—autonomous; there is no necessary connection between the author's intention and the meaning(s) of his text.[5] And Monroe Beardsley summarizes the New Criticist view against intention as a guiding principle in critical activity thus:

Essentially…the argument is this: (1) We can seldom know the intention with sufficient exactness, independently of the work itself, to compare the work with it and measure its success or failure. (2) Even when we can do so, the resulting judgment is not a judgment of the work, but only of the worker, which is quite a different thing.

(Beardsley, 1981:458)

Albeit on a different basis, Paul Ricoeur arrives at similar conclusions regarding the autonomy of the text. As we have seen above, Ricoeur differentiates between spoken and written discourse, asserting in, for instance, *The Model of the Text* (1971), that in the former case—because of the charges existing in a speaker/ hearer situation—the intention of the speaker 'overlaps' the meaning of the utterance 'in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means' (Ricoeur, 1971:534). In the latter case, however, the discourse is no longer private, it is 'universal' (1971:537), the 'text is detached from its author' (1971:541), and he even goes so far as to claim (in *What is a Text?*, 1981) that 'it is when the author is dead that the relation to the book becomes complete and, as it were, intact. The author can no longer respond; it only remains to read his work' (Ricoeur, 1981:147). Thus, any coincidence between intention and meaning no longer exists: 'What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say' (1981:534). And Barthes says, in a similar manner:

writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing.

(Barthes, 1982a:142)[6]

Hence a general conclusion: 'the belief that a text means what its author meant is not sensible' (Beardsley, 1970:17); rather a text may mean what the author is not aware of (cf. Beardsley, 1970:20; see also, for example, Gadamer, 1979:263f).

Also, the British sociologist Barry Hindess points to the futility of a search for the author's 'real' view on matters, as well as suggesting its superfluousness when it comes to the production of knowledge of a text:

> To search the text for the view of its author is to impose a preconceived and possibly spurious coherence on to the structure of its argument. It cannot be maintained that the order of, and relations between, the concepts of a text is a mere expression of the consciousness of its author, nor can it be maintained that this consciousness is, perhaps, more accurately represented in some portions of the text and less accurately in others so that, by judicious selection, it might prove possible to isolate what he 'really' thought. *The theoretical structure of a text is a matter of the logical properties which obtain between its concepts* and not of some ghostly emanations originating, say, from the pineal gland or cerebral cortex of its author's body.
>
> (Hindess, 1977:86, italics mine)

Now, occupying something of a centre ground among intentionalists and being one of the most renowned critics of the Wimsatt and Beardsley thesis, E.D.Hirsch Jr.[7] acknowledges that a text may be open to a plethora of different interpretations:

> there is no absolute standard of coherence by which we can adjudicate between different coherent readings. Verification by coherence implies therefore a verification of the grounds on which the reading is coherent,
>
> (Hirsch, 1967b:238)

but that it is possible and necessary to get at '*the* meaning' of the text (Hirsch, 1967a:5) and this can *only* be done provided that we 'posit the author's typical outlook' (Hirsch, 1967b:238). And for Hirsch there *is* only *one* meaning, a position possible for him to uphold by his contrasting *meaning* with *significance:*

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance* …*na*mes a relationship between that meaning and a person [for example, a reader], or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.
>
> (Hirsch, 1967a:8)

The rationale behind this opposition seems to be Hirsch's aversion against textual indeterminacy associated as it is with an acceptance of several *valid* interpretations: 'To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the *only* compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation' (Hirsch, 1967a:5, italics mine, cf. also, for example, pp. 24f, 46). Significance, then, can and in all likelihood will always change, while meaning is one and determinate:

> When, therefore, I say that a verbal meaning is determinate I mean that it is an entity which is self-identical. Furthermore, I also mean that it is an

entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next—that it is changeless…. Verbal meaning, then, is what it is and not something else, and it is always the same. That is what I mean by determinacy.

(Hirsch, 1967a:46)

And, in addition, 'A determinate verbal meaning requires a determining will' (1967a:46), meaning that to understand *the* meaning of a text is *equivalent* to an understanding of the author's *intention*. However, there is rift between the author's intentions and what he is conscious of doing: 'there are usually components of an author's intended meaning that he is not conscious of' (1967a:21), which leads to the inference that 'It is not possible to mean what one does not mean, though it is very possible to mean what one is not conscious of meaning' (1967a:22). Thus, there is or at least may be a surplus of meaning in the text of which the author is unaware, although, according to Hirsch, intended by him (1967a:48). Hirsch bases his theory on Husserl's analysis of 'verbal meaning', and summarizes his understanding of Husserl's view in the essay *Objective Interpretation,* for Husserl, says Hirsch (1967b:218): 'the general term for all intentional objects is meaning', and 'Verbal meaning is simply a special kind of intentional object'; the significant characteristic of verbal meaning being its potential to be *shared:*

> Verbal meaning is, by definition, that aspect of a speaker's 'intention' which, under linguistic conventions, may be shared by others. *Anything not sharable in this sense does not belong to the verbal intention or verbal meaning.*
>
> (Hirsch, 1967b:218)

Thus, not all intentions are to be found in the text because they are not sharable. Likewise, as we have seen, some intentions are present in the text although the author is not conscious of them. The 'intentions of the author' are, consequently, not identical with those of the actual 'composer of the text': 'Text-authorship and meaning-authorship are not the same' (Hirsch, 1985:50).[8] Clearly, by this move Hirsch also escapes the burden of having to validate un- or subconscious intentions.

However considerable the differences between Hirsch and Wimsatt and Beardsley may be, they do agree upon one noticeable point. For the distinction Hirsch draws between the actual author and the author as meaning producer is also the point in the New Critics' criticism of intentionalism (cf., for example, Wimsatt, 1968:221f). Thus, in both cases meaning is located within the text itself.

There is still another 'intentionalism' that merits attention here, also proceeding from the conviction that the author's intentions are recoverable from the text itself. The difference between this approach—inspired by Austin's (1980) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory—and the one criticized by the New Critics is that in the latter case, it is the author's intention *to say* that is of interest, whereas in the former case, the author's intention is *in saying.*[9]

Quentin Skinner writes confidently: the argument that 'it is actually impossible to recover a writer's motives and intentions, seems straightforwardly false. I assert

this as obvious, and shall not attempt to prove it' (Skinner, 1972:400). Now, this might seem straightforward enough as an article of faith but, as we shall see, matters are neither simple nor that simple.

To understand texts, Skinner writes elsewhere,

> presupposes the grasp both of what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken. It follows from this that to understand a text must be to understand both the intention to be understood, and the intention that this intention should be understood, which the text itself as an intended act of communication must *at least* have embodied.
>
> (Skinner, 1969:48, italics mine)

Thus, the clue to the author's intentions are not to be found by 'identifying the ideas inside his head at the moment when he [wrote]'. Rather, 'the intentions with which the man is acting can be inferred from an understanding of the significance of the act itself' (Skinner, 1988b:279; see also Skinner, 1971:20). The recovery of intentions are thus 'essentially a linguistic matter' (Skinner, 1988a: 112).

Thus, from the properties of the text, including the linguistic *conventions* within which it is written, it is possible to recover the author's intentions (see, for example, Skinner 1969:49, 1972:402).

Now, an author, in saying something, 'may well have different intentions in performing a single social action' (Skinner, 1988c:84, and 'action' here may be understood as writing a text). Things get a bit tangled when this is extended to the assertion that

> an immense range of illocutionary acts will normally be embedded within the types of texts I have been discussing…even the smallest individual fragments of such texts may sometimes carry a heavy freight of intended illocutionary force…. Any text of any complexity will always contain a myriad of illocutionary acts, and any individual phrase in any such text…may even contain more acts than it contains words.
>
> (Skinner, 1988b:284f)

This has the effect that Skinner limits himself to the demand of recovering the author's *primary* intentions (Skinner, 1988c:86) at the cost of all other intentions that may be.[10]

How different—perhaps contradictory and/or unconscious—intentions are identified and weighed is not discussed by Skinner. But this point surely makes the statement that 'it is actually impossible to recover a writer's motives and intentions, *seems straightforwardly false*. I assert this as obvious, and shall not attempt to prove it' look somewhat premature.

To complicate matters further, we may observe that John Searle—fellow speech-act theorist—in his reply to Derrida's analysis of Austin (see Derrida, 1988c, d) notes that 'in fact rather few of one's intentions are ever *brought to consciousness* as intentions' (Searle, 1977:202, italics mine).

This makes it necessary to admit, and it is explicit from the start in Skinner's differentiating 'what the text means' from 'what the author meant in writing it' (see, for example, Skinner, 1969), that the text *may* mean something *not* intended by its author, that:

> the question of what an author may have intended to say cannot possibly be equated with the meaning of what is said,
>
> (Skinner, 1988b:273)

and that

> where a text says something other than what its author intended to say, we are bound to concede that this is nevertheless what the text *says,* and thus that it bears a meaning other than its author intended.
>
> (Skinner, 1988b:269)

On this point Skinner reprimands Searle, observing that the latter 'does not I think succeed in showing that meaning and speech act are *wholly separate*' (Skinner, 1988d:313n27, italics mine). Searle claims—in his reply to Derrida—that in 'serious literal speech the sentences are *precisely* the *realizations* of the *intentions* …The sentences are, so to speak, *fungible intentions*' (Searle, 1977:202, italics mine), quite in accordance with his dictum that 'whatever can be meant can be said' (Skinner, 1969:19). So far, Skinner's criticism seems justified, but as Searle is not altogether clear on this point, Skinner's remark misses a more fundamental mark. Searle's position in his reply to Derrida *also* includes the following statement:

> to the *extent* that the author says what he means the text is the expression of his intentions. It is *always* possible…that the text may have become *corrupt* in some way…these intentions may be *more or less perfectly realized* by the words uttered.
>
> (Searle, 1977:202)

Suddenly, within the space of two paragraphs, sentences are no more 'precisely the realizations of the intentions', they are no longer 'fungible intentions', the author is no longer in total control, not even in 'serious literal speech'.

But this is exactly Derrida's point in his analysis of speech act theory, affecting not only Searle but Skinner as well: *'to the extent', 'more or less perfectly realized'*. To *what* extent can the author say what he means? To *what* extent can the author's intentions be present in the text? And Derrida goes one step further, noticing a general drift in Searle's arguments, and it seems his observations are accurate for Skinner, too:

> The entire apparatus of distinctions on which this discourse is based will melt away like snow in the sun. To each word will have to be added 'a little',

> 'more or less', 'up to a certain point', 'rather', and despite all this, the literal will not cease being somewhat metaphorical, 'mention' will not stop being tainted by 'use', the 'intentional' no less slightly 'unintentional', etc.
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:124)

Now, these points notwithstanding, Skinner's difficulties still seem to bear down to the following: the intentions in writing a text should be—in principle— recoverable from the text itself. But the text itself may—and most probably does —say something *not* intended by its author. The text betrays its author's intention, and it is difficult to see—and especially so if we take into consideration that every phrase of the text may 'contain more acts than words' (Skinner, 1988b:284f) — how it would be possible, from what the author has not said but the text says *for* him, but not on his behalf, and presumably against his will, to recover his intention 'in saying' something from something he never meant to say.

   Yet, this is what Skinner argues we can, and not only in relation to what the author said without wanting to say, but also in relation to another kind of authorized silence, this time intentional. If, in the case above, it is possible to maintain that the author is *silenced* by his own text, Skinner introduces another kind of silence that must be taken into account if we are to recover the author's intentions, i.e. a silence forced upon the text by its author, since 'We need…to be able to deal with the obvious but very elusive fact that a *failure* to use a particular argument may always be a polemical matter, and thus a required guide to the understanding of the relevant utterance' (Skinner, 1969:47). So, there are not only *in* a 'text of any complexity…a myriad of illocutionary acts', there may be as many acts *outside* the text as well. Now, whether this sounds sound or not, there remains the problem of how to detect these silences. Kenneth Minogue asks the question:

> What, then, is the illocutionary force of a silence? Indeed, how does one even detect *a* silence, since all of us are silent about an infinite number of things? It is clear that this is a point where [Skinner's] methodology won't help, for even if we try the obvious ploy of generalizing about all other writers of a period, and seeing which of the generalizations are not true of X, we shall still be dependent upon *instinct* to guide us in finding that silence which might deserve our attention.
>
> (Minogue, 1988:182, italics added)

It could be remarked that in the same essay that Skinner argues this need, this possibility, he ridicules a 'reading-between-the-lines' strategy, because it is, he writes, 'virtually insulated from criticism' since 'to fail to "see" the message between the lines is to be thoughtless, while to see it is to be a trustworthy and intelligent reader' (Skinner, 1969:21, italics deleted). I fail to see the difference between this approach and Skinner's own on the grounds that, as Minogue states, 'all of us are silent about an infinite number of things', and that the criteria for detecting *these* silences reasonably are the same as for seeing silences that only exist between the lines.

In sum, then it seems as if the recovery of the author's intention in *saying* is as futile as the recovery of the author's intention *to say,* encountering unsurmountable problems as they both do.

But moreover, the relation between the author('s intentions) and the text is additionally complicated and obscured in and through Skinner's forceful critique and denouncement of *the mythology of coherence* (Skinner, 1969:16–22), a myth which is presented by Skinner as the belief

> that a writer may be expected not merely to exhibit some 'inner coherence' which it becomes the duty of his interpreter to reveal, but also that any apparent barriers to this revelation, constituted by any apparent contradictions which the given writer's work does seem to contain, cannot be real barriers, because they cannot really be contradictions.
>
> (Skinner, 1969:19)

This belief, this myth has, according to Skinner, to too large an extent guided previous criticism, and resulted in 'a history not of ideas at all, but of abstractions: a history of thoughts which no one ever actually succeeded in thinking, at a level of coherence which no one ever actually attained' (1969:18).[11] In effect, Skinner writes, such barriers have been 'removed' by an illegitimate practice to 'discount statements of intention' or whole texts (1969:18), should these point in a direction *away* from a coherent picture of an author's thoughts. And this brings us, finally, to the teleological mode of reading.

The teleological mode of reading

The teleological mode of reading belongs to those modes of reading that bring 'an external principle to the text in question as a means of extracting its meaning or essence, but this essence is not defined in terms of the internal forms of the discourse but in terms of an *external* principle' (Savage, 1983:26), i.e. to those kinds of reading that read texts as they *ought* to be. The external, extratextual validating principle is in the case of this mode of critique as in that of intentionalism the author's intention.[12] But it should be remembered here that intentionalism as normally understood discusses intention in *one* text, *one* poem, etc., while the teleological mode claims as its object of knowledge texts written over a considerably longer period of time.

Perhaps the teleological mode of reading can be illustrated by a quotation from an early, pre-deconstructivist J.Hillis Miller reading Dickens; Miller's proposal seems to contain most of the important characteristics of a teleologically inspired approach to texts:

> I have attempted…to identify what persists throughout all the swarming multiplicity of his novels as a view of the world which is *unique and the same,* and to trace the *development* of this vision of things from one novel to another

> *throughout the chronological span* of his career…. Taken all together, all the unit passages form the imaginative universe of the writer. Through the analysis of all the passages, as they reveal the persistence of certain obsessions, problems, and attitudes, the critic can hope to glimpse *the original unity of a creative mind*. For *all* the works of a single writer *form a unity,* a unity in which a thousand paths radiate from the same center…the revelation of that presiding unity *hidden* at the center, but *present everywhere.*
>
> (Miller, 1969:viiiff, italics mine)

As Savage points out, the time perspective characteristic of this kind of reading makes it possible to argue that what is *absent* in a text nevertheless may be present —but as a *potentiality,* to be realized in some future text or *end* product.[13] This end product, this final text, is, furthermore, the text that tells whether there are any absences to be realized present in previous texts; in other words, an absence

> can only be known by means of a prior conception of the final or present phase of the evolutionary process. What is defined as absent is thus founded upon the concept of its *future anterior,* a concept determined by the conception of what has already been known to exist. The history of the process is a *history read backwards.*
>
> (Savage, 1983:28, italics added)[14]

Hence, the *final* product governs the reading process, which can be understood as a doubling-back movement; i.e. it has as its *starting point* the *end* product, the last text, as its given knowledge, and treats earlier texts, with which its critical analysis starts, each in turn, as written with the final product before the eyes, as the final end, the *telos,* towards which all these texts—in a more and more perfecting fashion—strive. They exist, according to this view, in order to make possible the *realization* of the *end* product, the *final* text. The crucial consequences of this mode of reading are thus that the texts read are regarded as moments in an evolutionary process thus creating, as we shall see, a continuity where none *necessarily* exists and thereby different texts' specificity are systematically played down or ignored, denying 'the relations between *their* concepts, objects and conditions of existence' (Savage, 1983:29, italics mine).

  Now, it would be rash to deny that there *may* be a continuity between texts written by the same author, but the point is that this does not occur because the author so *intends,* intentions may fail: 'It is always *possible* that he may not have said what he meant' (Searle, 1977:202, italics mine, with an approving nod from Derrida, 1988c:60–77). Neither are an author's intentions *necessarily* 'just one coherent thing from beginning to end of the creative process' (Dutton, 1987: 196), intentions 'change and grow' (Beardsley, 1981:458), and especially so—it is reasonable to suspect—over longer periods of time.[15] So, this continuity is not, then, something of which the author is in full command from the outset—it follows rather from the logical properties of his concepts, theory(ies), etc. Similarly —and obviously, one is tempted to add— continuity may exist between texts *not* written by the same author. And here, too,

command is not in the hands or minds of the authors, but of the concepts, theories, etc. In both cases we are dealing with texts' inherent properties. But, as Michael Riffaterre has pointed out, the intentions of the author should not be *entirely* dismissed. While agreeing in general with the positions on this question presented above, he adds the observation that in the case of a *stated* intention in the text, 'the explanation should consist in showing the *effect* of the statement of intention', the result of which may be 'that two simultaneous readings are called for' (Riffaterre, 1983:5, italics mine), thus implying possible rifts in the text.

Now, the function of the focusing on the *author's intention* is, in the case of the teleological mode of reading as in other cases of intentionalism, precisely to draw attention away from the specific properties of the text, thus reinforcing the tendency of obliterating the individual text; as Samuel Weber says, its function is 'in actual critical practice to obscure the question of the text itself' (Weber, 1986: 199), instead generalizing critical practice to cover the *works* of an author, where the author, as Foucault observes,

> constitutes a principle of unity in writing where any unevenness of production is ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence. In addition, the author serves to *neutralize* the contradictions that are found in a series of texts. Governing this function is the belief that there must be— at a particular level of an author's thought, of his conscious or unconscious desire—a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction.
>
> (Foucault, 1977:128, italics mine; cf. also Wimsatt, 1968:211)

Now, to the extent that the author's intentions function as a 'principle of unity', to that extent his *works* becomes a 'system that compensates for the deficiencies of all others, "balancing" out their deficits, integrating their exclusions' (Weber, 1986:198). It gets 'the status of a self-contained, homogeneous, and meaningful object' (Weber, 1986:199). The text itself, with its *own* particular qualities, becomes an endangered species and especially so when the reliance upon the author's intentions is combined with a teleologically inspired mode of reading.

To this could furthermore be added an observation concerning the *theological* connotations that might be involved here. Kenneth Burke draws attention to this, pointing out that: 'Creation implies authority in the sense of originator, the designer or author of the things created' (Burke, 1970:174), and furthermore that 'the author' has come to mean 'production *ex nihilo*…a "dim analogue of Creation"' (Burke, 1970:8; cf. also Barthes, 1982a:146 and Moi, 1985:8).[16] This 'romantization' of the author will of course affect the reading process in a certain, determined direction, reinforcing the illusion that the text is spontaneously produced 'in isolation' as it were, with no internal determination of its own (cf., for example, Frye, 1973:96f and Kermode, 1961:1–29); the text is an expression of the author's inner self as thought in romanticist expressive criticism, aptly summarized by M.H.Abrams:

> A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poets own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind.
>
> (Abrams, 1971:22)

One might, through a change of a few words in this summary, generalize and elucidate its relevance for other texts than the poetic; viz. (and I italicize the changes made):

> A work of *social science* is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of *thoughts,* and embodying the combined product of the *writer's* perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a *text,* therefore, are the attributes and actions of the *writer's* own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to *text* by the *thoughts* and operations of the writer's *mind.*

Now, this possible drift between 'creation' and 'production' is also an indication of why, in certain theories, such importance is laid upon the distinction between *production* and *creation. Production* is associated with a demand for *raw materials,* in their turn *determining* the possibilities and impossibilities of the product, while *creation,* as in the quotations from Burke and Abrams, is *ex nihilo*—no strings attached.

To summarize, one can say that what is at stake in these attacks upon the author as explaining principle is the picture of *the author as unified and masterful,* of grounding the interpretation of the text in the authority of the author, of coming to grips with a theory of interpretation where, as Barthes says,

> The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.
>
> (Barthes, 1982a:143)

Now, even if it *may* be true that Barthes here assails, as the literary critic John Sturrock says, 'a lamentably simple kind of critical thought' (Sturrock, 1986: 154), I think one should bear in mind that this view refers to literary critical thought where criticism as such is (assumed to be) reflected upon. And even here, in *this* field, 'such simplicity, in respect of the relation between an Author and a Text, is all too common' (Sturrock, 1986:154). To believe that the situation would be better in other disciplines, in other fields, seems to be overly optimistic.

Michael Dummett's 'exegesis'

In order to illuminate what has been said and to show, first, that the contentions made above have some weight and, second, what the consequence of the teleological mode of reading might look like in practice, I will use[17] a chapter I take to be programmatic, entitled 'Principles of Frege Exegesis' in the British philosopher Michael Dummett's book *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (1981a:6–35).[18] I am aware that my reading of Dummett may be accused of being tendentious, and this is true in so far as I concentrate upon what I take to be the *dominant* tendency of his 'exegetics'. Now, Dummett's chapter on 'exegesis'—saturated with speculations on Gottlob Frege's intentions as it is—provides a sample of the effects of the 'author-function' (the term is Foucault's; 1977:125) as rather briefly outlined above, and will show at least some of the consequences of this reading strategy for the understanding of texts as *texts of arguments*.

I want to make clear that I will but occasionally be concerned *only* with *this chapter* where Dummett presents the rules for his mode of reading; where the objective is 'to consider the *general principles* that should govern the interpretation of his writings' (p. 6, italics mine) and where 'It is not the intention…to argue for one interpretation of Frege against another, but to *lay down principles* for judging such interpretations' (p. 26, italics mine). Whether the strategy he advocates is followed through or if he deviates from the path set out is beside the point here. Beside the point is also the question whether Dummett's treatment of his subject matter, i.e. *'Frege's Philosophy'*, is, in any or all respects, accurate or not.

Furthermore, I will not discuss the reasonableness of Michael Dummett's undertaking in itself; whether his approach should be designated this or that, 'biographical' or 'text-critical', for instance. What are normally judged 'biographical data' are to a large extent lacking, and the whole six hundred some pages are nothing but a philosophical discussion of Frege's views. On the other hand, statements on *intentions* are *per se,* I take it, biographical in nature, as is also, of course, the fact that a series of books and articles are written by the 'same' author.

It should be noticed that Dummett divides Frege's thought into six periods, but it seems—for reasons that I hope will be made clear below—rather acceptable in the present context to reduce these into two periods only (see, for example, p. 7), i.e. before and after the 'shattering blow' delivered by Bertrand Russell's paradox in 1903 (p. 21), i.e. the discovery of a fundamental contradiction in Frege's thought,[19] so severe that Frege never, despite serious attempts, managed to solve it (see pp. 21–7), instead realizing that a solution 'could not be accomplished' (p. 22), the effects of which were, according to Dummett, that 'Frege's life was halted by this discovery' (p. 21), and that he had to reconsider his intentions (p. 23). Another way of putting this could be to say that these periods are governed by different Freges, inasmuch as we have to deal with two different patterns of intention where Russell's paradox constitutes something of an 'intentional break'. I will concentrate upon the first period when, according to Dummett, Frege's original intention was still in effect; before, that is, Russell 'prevented' Frege from fulfilling his intention to produce his 'definitive work' (p. 9).

I will use Dummett's 'exegesis' of Frege in an *as-if* manner. As if, that is, his principles of reading Frege were to be taken as a *general* reading strategy for the production of knowledge of philosophical or scientific texts. This as-if manner *may* be all the more called for since Dummett makes a reservation of a peculiar kind in his laying down the exegetical principles to be followed. One should accordingly pay due attention to his phrasing, quoted above but repeated here for convenience's sake: 'the general principles that should govern the interpretation of *his* writings' (p. 6, italics mine). This can be taken to imply that the reading of Frege Dummett promotes is not *general* but rather quite particular. One reason why this could be the case is that Dummett *might* regard Frege an exceptional case. This is, however, not entirely clear. What is clear is a difference between Frege and Russell that Dummett makes. While Frege is pictured as 'single-minded', seldom straying from the goal he has set for himself, thus offering 'a special temptation to treat his work as a seamless garment' (p. 26), Russell—in contrast —is depicted in the following manner:

> No one would be tempted, in discussing such a philosopher as Russell, to ask what he thought about such-and-such a topic; he changed his mind so frequently and so explicitly that one can sensibly ask only what he thought at a certain period. (p. 6)

Who is regarded as exceptional is hard to tell, but it seems fair to assume, on the basis of Dummett's high esteem for Frege, that he is the one. Shaky ground, certainly, but be that as it may, because the difference might not be as decisive as it seems at first sight. As I see it, what Dummett actually does, in his differentiation between Frege and Russell, boils down to a question of the number and length of periods, where Russell's periods according to Dummett are *more numerous* and *shorter* than Frege's. Apart from this single difference, none other is pointed out. This would make it possible to argue that *within* periods, Dummett's recommended principles of reading stand. Thus, his principles may be regarded as *general principles*. What, in other words, would *then* the consequences be? As will be clear below, I think they would be detrimental to the understanding of how these texts direct their readers' attention in different ways to different paths by, among other things, a tendency that I think is fundamental in Dummett's principles of 'exegesis', i.e. the tendency to gloss over or explain away tensions, ambiguities and incoherences. By stating this, I would not like to create the impression that Dummett treats these problems superficially or just skips them. He does not. It is the approach from which he considers them that I am questioning, however profound his treatment may be from within the perspective it is put forward.

What seems to be Michael Dummett's object of knowledge is Frege's philosophy as Frege himself *intended* it to be *in the end* (see, for example, p. 9); thus, Dummett claims:

> precisely because Frege worked so single-mindedly at the perfection of his theories, every change, whether he commented on it or not, must be regarded

as fully deliberate; views expressed in the mature period must be taken as having more weight than earlier ones with which they conflict, and later formulations of old views as having more weight than the earlier formulations. (p. 7)[20]

Now, Dummett does not deliver any explicit discussion of how he considers the concept of intention and the relation between intention and texts, but in discussing Frege's conception of language, he makes the following general observation, pointing out that 'the use of language has a *point*' (p. 30), and he continues:

> To say that an activity has a point is not to say that it has a goal which can be stated without reference to that activity; that, in other words, it is a mere means to an independently statable end; but it is to say that there is a standard by which it may be judged as achieving or failing to achieve what it is *intended* to achieve, (p. 30, italics mine)[21]

I take this to mean that what goes for language use in general *must* apply to Frege as well, in so far as the *point* of activity should be Frege's intentions 'to produce his "definitive work"', and the *standard* by which to judge this point is accordingly his texts or rather, as we shall see, one of his texts.

Thus, Dummett solves the problem of the relation between Frege's thought in the six periods by the presumption that

> earlier views which, on the interpretation adopted, would flagrantly conflict with his later ideas, and about which he says nothing explicit in his later writings, for or against, would have been repudiated by him in the later period had he been asked about them. (p. 26)

Now, Dummett notes that from 1879[22] until the year of Russell's paradox in 1903, 'almost everything he did was subordinated to the goal, *conceived at the outset,* of producing his *magnum opus, Die Grundgesetze der Arithmetik/The Basic Laws of Arithmetic/*'. (p. 6, italics mine)

In accordance with this view, and taking into account that Frege's last major published work was *Die Grundgesetze* in two volumes (1893 and 1903, respectively), Dummett also asserts that

> since *Grundgesetze* was *intended* to be a definitive work, what it contains should be given more weight than anything Frege wrote elsewhere, whenever there is an overlap in subject-matter…there is therefore a presumption in favour of interpreting earlier writing in the light of *Grundgesetze,* rather than the other way around. *Grundgesetze* may help us to see the *intention* behind an earlier, less exactly formulated, statement, (p. 9, italics mine)

In Dummett's interpretation of Frege's philosophy, it appears as if works earlier than *Die Grundgesetze* should be regarded as 'preliminary studies' or 'first drafts':

'The greater part of what he published before *Grundgesetze* is intended as a preliminary study for it' (p. 9, see also p. 20), and 'first drafts' don't count too much as can be seen when Dummett discusses Frege's notion of 'content' as employed in *Begriffsschrift* (Frege, 1980b; first published in 1879):

> When that undifferentiated notion is pressed, it proves not properly coherent, and it was just this that Frege came to realize, and that prompted him to adopt the sense/reference distinction. It is a mistake for us to press the notion of 'content' without admitting that distinction and father on Frege some misbegotten theory for which there is no warrant even in his early writings. (p. 20; cf. also p. 301)[23]

Now, Frege's *Grundgesetze* is not a completed work, which makes necessary a supplementary strategy in Dummett's reading. It causes Dummett to look elsewhere in order to reconstruct ('deduce' is the term he uses) what should have been in that text *were it complete* (p. 16). We may observe this when Dummett discusses a treatise that Frege worked upon but which he never wrote and in which, *had it been written,* an argument would have been found for Frege's theory of meaning as applying both to Frege's formal system and to natural languages:

> It is this justification that *would have been* contained in that comprehensive work on 'Logic' that Frege repeatedly tried, and repeatedly failed, to write, (p. 19, italics mine)[24]

Although he 'wanted' to write on the matter, Frege never 'composed to his satisfaction the treatise on the subject' (p. 19) because, Dummett notes, when 'one reflects carefully' (p. 19) on the scattered writings of Frege on the philosophy of language, there are also

> certain unresolved tensions: observations made by Frege in different connections, though hardly ever in flagrant contradiction with one another, pull in opposite directions, leaving crucial questions unanswered. He may have been aware of some or all of these tensions, but unable to find a way of resolving them. (p. 19f)

This makes it possible for Dummett to assert—in this particular case—that the correct *interpretation* of Frege's thoughts on language is to leave some questions unanswered, as not being resolvable (p. 20). It is here no longer a question of what Frege would have said would he have written in some future on the matter. As in the case of Russell's paradox, Frege's conceptualizations puts a stop to the process. He cannot achieve what intentions he may have had.

I think that by now sufficient indications have been accumulated to make the claim that Dummett's mode of reading is in fact a reading teleologically dominated, with its concomitant 'author-function', as outlined above.

We have seen that the analysis of Frege's philosophy has, indeed, been a 'history read backwards', with *Grundgesetze,* the text where, according to Michael Dummett,

Frege's intentions are most nearly realized, functioning as the 'standard by which' all else 'may be judged' —*the end product as starting point* for the whole enterprise; an endeavour geared towards the creation of continuity and based upon Frege's (alleged) intentions, external to the texts under scrutiny. To this end, by the function of the authors intentions, it has been possible to 'neutralize' incoherences and tensions in earlier texts, as well as 'integrating exclusions' by notions such as 'first draft' or 'preliminary study' and with the help of claims such as 'help us to see the intention behind earlier texts' and 'would have been contained' or 'repudiated', respectively. To see absences in the early texts, in other words, to see what is *still* missing, what is *not* yet clearly formulated and what is *still not* understood and even to *play down* the significance of incoherences, as can be seen, for example, in the following passage, which I quote at some length:

> I do not mean that Frege abstained from giving a coherent account in order to make such features [for example vaguenesses] appear as imperfections of language: rather, it is because he thought he saw that no coherent account is possible that he regarded them as imperfections, which had to be remedied when he devised a language fully apt for the expression of thoughts and the unassailable execution of deductive argument. *For just this reason, little weight is to be attached to the remarks Frege makes when attempting to characterize those features of natural language he regarded as defects; the observations are not meant to be fully coherent, and, if they were, Frege would have shown such features not to be defects, but, at worst, inconveniences.* (p. 33, italics mine)

Thus, this kind of reading makes it possible to argue that what are *absences* or *gaps* in Frege's texts are nevertheless present but as *unrealized potentialities* all the while approaching the perfect, and in this manner safeguarding a myth of unity.

Likewise, we can observe the effect of Burke's 'Author as Creator *ex nihilo*', for Frege's thought is positioned in a kind of splendid isolation, thus making all search for intertextual relations superfluous:

> It has never seemed to me that much illumination is to be expected from a search for influences on Frege or for parallels to his ideas in the works of his predecessors. I confess to having made no thorough investigation…of possible sources of Frege's ideas in the writings of German philosophers of the period immediately preceding him…. I am sceptical about the light they will throw on Frege's thought…My scepticism is more than a hunch. It rests on the indubitable fact that Frege's formal logic has no predecessors, (p. xvii)

It should be observed here how very narrow Dummett makes 'influence'. Were this term to include also, for example, discourses and points of view *against* which Frege positioned himself, and against whose arguments he undoubtedly polished his own (for example, Husserl; see Frege, 1984b) —writing, that is, of *con*text or *inter*text instead of 'influence' —as is implied in a few pages in Gregory Currie's

Frege (1982:7–18), the field of such an investigation would undoubtedly increase. But then, again, with a slight change of Paul de Man's observation, an intertextual

> structure within the larger structure of the complete text undermines the authority of the [author's] voice…And it weakens the figure precisely at the points that establish its genetic consistency: by weakening the authority of the power that sustains, by its presence, the unity between the beginning and the end.
>
>   (De Man, 1979a:96)[25]

Thus, the reading strategy that Dummett advocates would be questioned in its entirety by such a move.

This search for and dependence upon authorial intentions is thus not innocent, and especially not so when aligned with teleological principles, where the past is read as a series of errors leading up to—more or less inevitably—today's perfect state. It has distinct effects: to ascertain not only singularity but above all *unity* in Frege's thought; not a static unity, however, but a dynamic, evolving unity, 'caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence' that will enable Dummett to account for the unfolding of Frege's thought without sacrificing the fundamental idea that Frege's writings should be seen as a whole from beginning to end (p. 6f). The creation of this unity has a price to be paid, though: it diverts attention from the texts themselves as texts with specific properties of their own, 'denying the relations between *their* concepts, objects and conditions of existence' by an obvious disrespect of other-than-the-last text's concepts, etc.; by subordinating them, that is, to an end product—however incomplete.[26] Frege's texts *as such* do not exist, as it were, but with the one crucial exception, i.e. *Die Grundgesetze*.

Now, there is a common criticism directed against all intentionalism, which therefore strikes Dummett as well, and which may be formulated as involving two moments, the first of which comprises the identification of the author and which is fairly well summarized by John Sturrock:

> The Author is in fact a construct, or hypothesis, formed by a reader on the evidence of his or her reading. Whatever is known of an Author is textual, that is; they have no other existence for us. The process by which Authors are constructed is thus circular: we abstract them from their Texts and then use this abstraction to *explain* the Texts.
>
>   (Sturrock, 1986:154; cf. also Beardsley, 1970:113)

Obviously, what is regarded as text may include not only published texts but unpublished as well, of whatever quality—manuscripts, letters, etc.

The second moment gives prominence to the fact that statements of intention have to be interpreted in terms of the intentions that produced them—take notice that these statements to a large extent, and wholly in the present case, are textual—and consequently, as Robert Crosman concludes:

> This leads logically to an infinite regress, which can be stopped only by an act of will. That is, we arrive at the 'author's meaning' precisely when we decide we have arrived there: we *make* the author's meaning!
>
> (Crosman, 1980:161)

These two moments apart, both unattended to by Dummett, there are still some unresolved tensions in his exegetical proposal which have to do with the interconnected problems of intentions and texts and the autonomy of texts. Which will bring us, finally, to Russell's blow.

As we have seen above, Dummett writes about the *point* of activity: 'it is to say that there is a standard by which it may be judged as achieving or failing to achieve what it is *intended* to achieve' (p. 30). And this is also the way he has read and used the texts prior to the *Grundgesetze*. Thus, here is the external, validating principle that both Savage (1983:26) and Wimsatt and Beardsley have pointed to and criticized when discussing the teleological mode of reading and the intentional fallacy, respectively. The latters' expression is astonishingly similar to Dummett's principle, the one but vital difference being that while Dummett agrees, Wimsatt and Beardsley reject:

> If the poet succeeded…then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.
>
> (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946:469)

To this could be added that it is exactly when the text stops to work that the questioning of the author's intentions' explanatory value not only may arise but actually becomes acute. And it would seem as if Dummett follows what Wimsatt and Beardsley eschews: when Frege 'fails', the need to look into 'the point of the activity' becomes crucial—with one outstanding exception. The problem is, however, the dual status accorded to *Grundgesetze* as both a yardstick and as a text to be treated by an exegetical effort in its own right. The problem is intensified by the fact made obvious by Russell that the text is not, in Wimsatt and Beardsley's terminology, a success.

Dummett uses *Die Grundgesetze* as a yardstick against which all other, previous texts are to be measured, and it is against the textual properties of *Grundgesetze* they are compared. Here is the final, 'definitive' text towards which all else was aimed at but the development of which came to a halt by Russell's discovery of its inherent contradiction; the discovery that became known as Russell's paradox. *Die Grundgesetze* must be its own yardstick—there is nothing else because, as Dummett notes, 'Frege's life was halted by this discovery' (p. 21).

As we also have seen, Dummett's analysis of Frege's thought up to that point has relied heavily upon Frege's intentions to explain the properties of the texts, so much in fact that what the texts themselves say are sometimes dismissed in favour either of what Frege would have said were he aware of the consequences of what he actually

was saying or of what Frege says at a later point in time. Thus, his analysis depends to a large extent, if not wholly, upon factors external to the specific texts. At first glance, this seems to be the case also with Russell's blow, but actually it is not. Instead, it is the properties of this one specific text, *Die Grundgesetze,* that put a halt to any further theorization along the lines that are set in this particular text. The role of Russell can instead—if one would want to remain within the sphere of personifications—be seen as that of a catalyst.[27] Now, the difference might seem slight but, as a matter of fact, we will deal with two different explanatory structures and thus different reading approaches between which options Dummett vacillates, the first explaining texts with the help of external factors, the second with properties inherent to the texts themselves. And it is, to my mind, obvious that what Russell does when he delivers his blow is to show Frege to the latter's satisfaction how the *arguments* put forward in *Die Grundgesetze* (i.e. text-inherent properties) are contradictory. These conceptual, etc., shortcomings constitute a *de facto* barrier for any further consistency in Frege's system of thought, and the question of Russell can be seen as being one of time, i.e. a question of *when* these shortcomings would become effective—the contradictions were there, in the text, only waiting for someone to discover them.

This brings the question of textual autonomy to the fore. For Dummett, some texts have a peculiar autonomy, since they are what makes it possible to say whether Frege did or did not achieve what he intended to do (p. 30). In this way they *are*. At the same time, this autonomy is withdrawn: later texts may help recognizing intentions behind earlier ones (pp. 7, 9); later texts count more than earlier ones in so far as concepts presented in earlier texts are denied their right to exist but in the light of later distinctions or 'improvements'; they should *only* be interpreted illuminated by these 'refinements' (pp. 7, 20, 301).

Thus, when certain texts say one thing and Frege's intentions (as Dummett interprets them) say something else, Frege's intentions as realized in later texts have the upper hand, and the texts become, as we have seen, neutralized, denied their self-determination, as it were.

On the other hand, it is obvious that *one* text *does* say something contrary to Frege's intentions, and that that text is there more or less in its own right: *Die Grundgesetze*. Here, Frege's intentions are definitely vanquished. *This* text is allowed to speak for itself—its concepts, etc. are taken for what they are. But it is in *all* cases—not only in *Die Grundgesetze,* that is—possible to argue that Frege's intentions have failed him—none of the texts is the final perfect one. Still, it is only this one text that is singled out as worthy to speak for itself. This is a different way of assessing a text than the way hitherto used by Dummett, in so far as he here really has to take seriously the text's own properties.

How to account for Dummett's change of strategy? There seems to be two intertwined reasons that lie behind the change. One reason for this switch of reading strategies seems to be that in the case of *Grundgesetze* the road not only seems to be but really *is* closed to any further theorization on Frege's part, while in the earlier texts a back door was left open; the conceptual apparatuses did admit further elaboration in different directions, and in the case they did not, the possibility

was always there to argue, with the benefit of hindsight, that Frege later 'developed' his ideas in a more fruitful direction—a direction, however, that came to a halt at a certain point in this 'development' due to its inherent impossibility (that is, in *Die Grundgesetze*). That is, in all the other texts, there existed the *possibility* to refer backwards from *Die Grundgesetze* and thus to create or discover ambiguities, vaguenesses, gaps, etc. that in one way or another could be said to be 'refined', 'developed' or whatever in *Grundgesetze*. For *Grundgesetze* itself, what 'remained' were contradictions, gaps or incoherences that could not possibly be remedied. The Fregean doors were closed.

Also, and related, it seems to me that Dummett's own conceptual apparatus, just as Frege's once was, is a barrier to further theorizing. That is, he cannot within his erstwhile theoretical scheme deal with Frege's writings but *has* to substitute one type of reading for another. It is no longer possible to rely on earlier arguments like 'intentions', 'would have', 'could have' and the like. In the same way as Frege's conceptions put a halt to 'his' system of thought, so it is that Dummett's conception here says stop—it is insufficient to deal with certain questions. Frege's intention to produce the 'final' text can no longer be used, since this intention as realized in this 'final' text was fraught with difficulties caused by properties inherent in the theoretical project's nucleus. Here, Dummett *has* to respect a text in its own right, and *unity has broken down*—it is no longer possible to uphold when the teleological movement and the author-function ceases to play their parts.

To conclude, I would like to point out that Dummett's quest for unity also can be detected in another way. His reading or 'exegetics' may be looked at from two—intimately related—angles, where the one is from the programmatic point of view, i.e, from the point of view of how it is demonstrated to proceed when at work,[28] and the other is from the point of view of how that specific reading activity is positioned by Dummett with respect to other alternative reading approaches. Rather interestingly, there seems to be no alternatives to Dummett's own proposal. It is as if there was only the one way of reading texts and, consequently, any differences of opinion that exist are explained to be due not to the reading approach in use but to a lack of understanding of the texts.

Let me illustrate this latter point of view by referring to two short fragments in his text, i.e. as he writes *'This is a matter of interpretation'* and *'depends upon the interpretation'* (pp. 23, 26), admitting the possibility of diverging opinions concerning the understanding of Frege (p. 23).

For Dummett, the fact that something is a matter of interpretation is not the same as to say that the outcome of these interpretations could be on equal footing, it is rather a question of choosing either the one or the other; they simply cannot be equally valid but for one exceptional case: the relation between Frege's theories before and after Russell's blow. Here the possibility of a discontinuity is admitted by Dummett, although he himself tends to play down the possible discontinuous in favour of unity (pp. 23–6).

In all other cases, it seems, attempts to show that texts may contain elements making possible different readings that perhaps might be equally valid are

automatically excluded, and a strong indication that this really is a just picture of Dummett's reading strategy is when he laments the fact that there is no unity in the community of Fregean interpreters but that instead there exist quite different points of view on the subject:

> This divergence of interpretation is both regrettable and, in my view, unnecessary. It is regrettable since, when the experts disagree about the basic meaning of Frege's writings, the incentive for non-specialists and students to study those writings is much diminished: how are they likely to understand them correctly when it is apparently so difficult to be sure of doing so? It is unnecessary, because Frege is one of the clearest of all philosophical writers …Some divergences may be revealed as only apparent…but the genuine and deep divergences that remain ought to be able to be resolved by careful discussion of the texts in Frege on which they are based. (p. xi)

This means that Dummett cannot, is not allowed by his presuppositions, take into account the possibility that those vaguenesses, ambiguities or outright contradictions that have been detected in a text (Fregean or not) will make that text, in Derrida's words, undecidable (cf., for example, Derrida, 1988d:148),[29] from which, that is, no *single* choice of meaning is presented to the reader or, in other words, that more than one choice of meaning is possible and that these meanings, these choices may be equally reasonable. This omission, this 'blind spot', seems all the more harmful when we consider the fact that what is at stake here are vaguenesses, ambiguities and contradictions that have been detected *between* several texts within a time span of almost twenty years. Been detected, that is, *not* as *real* vaguenesses, ambiguities, contradictions, etc., but rather as moments in an evolutionary movement and thus approached in a way precluding the plural.

　　Dummett's stand-point also adds up to a rejection from the outset of reader-response theory as a possible interpretative strategy. Although not a proponent of such a solution—unqualified—to the problems of reading texts, I want to point out that it is one part of the problem of how to understand that different interpretations of Frege's texts do exist and that a 'careful discussion' of 'raw data', i.e. Frege's texts, may not be enough to solve existing differences of opinion.[30] And actually, at points Dummett is close to recognizing such an understanding. He cautions, commenting upon Frege's *Nachlass,* some of which were selected and typescripted by Heinrich Scholz, that this selection in itself means that what is selected is already 'coloured by an interpretation' (p. 8), and he notices, while discussing Frege's *notion* of language, that:

> I have come to see that the relation of *the meaning of a word* in the language shared by a *community* of speakers and the understanding that an individual speaker has of it is far more problematic than I then supposed, (p. xiii, italics mine. Cf. also, for example, p. 32)[31]

This observation is made, however, without drawing any specific conclusions as to the language *used* by Frege and/or his interpreters (including Dummett himself), as distinct from Frege's *conception* of language; without, that is, connecting this insight to the properties of language-dependent phenomena in general and to Frege's as well as his interpreters' use and understanding of language in particular. Had Dummett seen that connection it could perhaps have given him a clue or two as to what is or may be at stake: the vagaries of language. That is, it is not necessary that the meaning of Frege's words and those of his interpreters coincide, but that— instead—there are gaps between different uses of words making different interpretations not only possible but almost necessary. And, furthermore, that this almost-necessity is part and parcel of the understanding of (not only) Frege's (but all) texts and will become even more pronounced when the texts in question are confronted with reading strategies radically differing where the one, say, regards the texts as belonging to an evolutionary whole, admitting 'lapses' in terminology and conceptualization and where the other, say, does not make such concessions, instead reading the texts in their own right, paying due respect to 'the relations between *their* concepts, objects and conditions of existence'. That is, the 'relation of the meaning of a word in the language shared by a community of speakers' (that is: Frege's interpreters) 'and the understanding that an individual speaker has of it' (that is: Frege himself) 'is far more problematic than I' (that is: Dummett) 'supposed'. And it should furthermore be observed that the different 'speakers' perhaps not even belong to the same 'community' —depending upon what we mean by that word, but let us mean, for example, 'paradigm', 'school of thought', 'language game', or the like—thus aggravating the difficulties of mutual understanding. But, for Dummett: as in Frege's philosophy, so in the interpretation of him: the *singular* reigns.[32]

Without these assumptions of unity based upon what looks like a rather naive conception of what reading texts is all about, and a teleological 'author function', implying an evolutionary textual movement towards greater formal consistency —and explicitly formulated by Dummett as founded upon 'the exceptional continuity in Frege's thought [that] provides a special temptation to treat his work as a seamless garment' (p. 26) —it might more easily be admitted that there may be tensions and gaps in Frege's thought that are due to, for example, changes of mind or 'flagrant' contradictions in parts of the conceptual apparatus in or between texts, realized or not by Frege. And, of course, without this regime it would not be necessary so notoriously to 'save' Frege's earlier thoughts from his older self. It should also be possible not only to *detect* contradictions, flagrant or not, that presumably are *veiled* by this will to unity but to deal with them in their own rights.

In sum, then, Dummett's exegesis amounts to an *unending quest for unity,* where the author functions as the principle of this unity, and perforce that his texts have to constitute a *unified whole*. Moreover, Dummett widens this quest to enclose not only author and text but his interpreters as well, bemoaning the fact that there exist more than one interpretation of Frege's texts, dreaming instead, it seems, of a unified community of Frege commentators.

As such, this search for unity is, I will argue, part of a common fallacy in the reading of texts. Consequently, I will explore this fallacy in some detail in the next chapter, and suggest a direction to another approach that will, in turn, be the object of the book's last chapter.

Notes

1   Dummett's most important texts include *Frege: Philosophy of Language,* 1973, *Truth and Other Enigmas,* 1978, *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy,* 1981, and *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics,* 1991.

2   Whatever *that* is: Is it everything *published* by the author, is it what is published *plus* what publishers may have rejected, are *letters* included—all of them or only some (why?), *notebooks, scraps of paper, drafts* that the author himself may have rejected, but are published after his death nevertheless, etc.? *Time* is another problem here. From when do we include texts, jottings, etc. made by an author recognized by us? Everything from his birth onwards, or from some later point in time? If the latter, according to what rules (what theory) do we determine when the texts, jottings, etc. merit the inclusion into the collected works?

      These themes should at least be given one or two thoughts, something that seldom happens. Michael Dummett, for one, who is a representative of a teleologically inclined mode of reading, and whom I will examine below, does not seem to notice any of the problems that might be involved.

3   It is possible, of course, to ask as does Derrida what is 'outside' and what is 'inside', to ask whether it is at all possible to uphold the distinction: 'There is nothing outside of the text' or 'There is no outside of the text' (Derrida, 1976:158) and, which actually amounts to the same: 'there are only contexts…nothing *exists* outside context' and

> the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of nonclosure…the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents.
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:152, 148)

      I will by-pass these questions here, without therefore denying their importance.

4   A similar fate seems to have happened to Milton's *Paradise Lost,* 'a poem that lives by meanings that its author must have repudiated' (Hough, 1976:236).

5   Cf. also, from different points of view, for example, Frye (1973:87), Wellek and Warren (1980: 149), Ingarden (1973a:22) and Juhl (1986:45).

6   It may be worthwhile quoting David Lodge's comment to the whole paragraph from which this piece of Barthes' writing is taken, showing as it does that perhaps a certain longing for unity is present also in this instance:

> Because this sentence from *Sarrasine* cannot with confidence be attributed to any *single* voice, Barthes argues that we must abandon the whole idea of writing having an origin. Bakhtin would say that this *fusion of several different voices*…is *constitutive* of the novel as a literary form.
>
> (Lodge, 1987:100, italics mine)

7   See, for example, his two classics, *Validity in Interpretation* (1967a) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (1976). Critical introductions to Hirsch can be found in, for example, P.D.Juhl (1986:16–44), Frank Lentricchia (1983:257–80), Robert Crosman (1980:149–64) and Henry Staten (1986: 139–45).

8   Such a distinction is not uncommon in literary theoretical practice. A differentiation along these lines (a 'real' author vs. an 'implied' author) is made by, for example, Wayne Booth (1983, see especially pp. 71–7; see also Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:328–33 and Harland, 1993:186f; for a

critique of this conception along intentionalist lines, see Juhl, 1986:153–95). It should not be confused with that of, for example, 'author' and 'persona' or 'author' and 'narrator', the latter term of the pairs representing the text's 'teller', so to speak (cf., for example, Booth, 1983:73, Wimsatt, 1968:201–6 and Genette, 1980:255–9; also Ducrot and Todorov, 1987). Cf. also Barthes' distinction between 'Author' and 'scriptor' (1982a:145).

9   In Austin's *speech act theory* the distinction between *locutionary* and *illocutionary* acts play a decisive role. This distinction, argued at length in Austin (1980; first published in 1962) and elaborated upon or, as Wolfgang Iser (1980:55) writes, 'systematized' by John Searle (1969), is basically drawn between the meaning of what *is said* (the locutionary act) on the one hand and the meaning *in saying* what is said (the illocutionary act) on the other (Austin, 1980:94–108) or, in other words, as in Skinner, between what the text means and what its author meant in writing it. Thus, an intention *to say* something should *not* be confused with the intention *in saying:* the intention to say precedes the said while the intention in saying is co-present with the said. 'Intention' as used in speech act theory should thus not be confused with 'intention' as used by, for example, the New Critics Wimsatt and Beardsley, who use the term to designate 'design or plan in the author's mind' (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946:469).

10   For problems connected with the possibility or not of identifying primary and secondary intentions, see Holdcroft (1978:139ff).

11   It should be noted that I have no quarrels whatsoever with Skinner's denouncement of this myth.

12   As my primary interest is the reading of scientific texts, I want to point out that it is possible to think of another teleological movement here, i.e. that of the self-development of disciplines or sciences themselves.

13   The reader should be made aware, I think, of the two significant meanings of 'end' here, i.e. end as 'last part' or 'conclusion' and end as 'purpose of action'.

14   Cf. Andrew Woodfield, who writes :

> indeed the standard way, of offering a teleological explanation of why an event occurred is to say that it occurred *in order that* a second event should occur, or *in order to* produce a certain result…. He is claiming not only that the earlier parts led to the end, but that there was a press of events in that direction, such that *the later event provides an understanding of why the earlier events occurred.* (Woodfield, 1976:16, italics added; cf. also, for example, von Wright, 1971: 119 and Whitehead, 1967:194).

On teleology in general, see also Georg Henrik von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding,* Chapter 3: 'Intentionality and Teleological Explanation' (1971:83–131). The 'teleo' in teleology stands for a combination form of the Greek *télos* (end) and *téleios* (perfected); see, for example, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language.*

15   Good cases in point to illustrate this—whatever time perspective—are, for example, the following:

> What interests me about many of the essays collected here is the fact that I could not write them today. I could not write them today because both the form of their arguments and the form of the problems those arguments address are a function of assumptions I no longer hold.
>
> (Fish, 1980a:1)

> By now, I wish I had written a different book altogether. It is either too late or too early to do so.
>
> (Sperber, 1988:ix)

> our *initial conception of the book* as contributing towards the project of constructing a general theory of modes of production. Our investigations compel us to reject that project as scientifically unfounded.
>
> (Hindess and Hirst, 1975:5, italics mine)

16   One may observe here that there are two different conceptions of creation, the one perhaps a male fantasy where God=Man=Adam=the sole creator, the other claiming that creation demands two participants. Extending and transposing this into theories of reading, we may oppose the creative author to Bakhtin's dialogism and intertextuality in general.

17   Cf. Eco's distinction between 'use' and 'interpretation':

> To critically interpret a text means to read it in order to discover, along with our reactions to it, something about its nature. To use a text means to start from it in order to get something else, even accepting the risk of misinterpreting it.
>
> (Eco, 1990:57f)

Strictly speaking, I suppose I may be using Dummett's text 'in order to get something else', but then—from the vantage point of this use—trying to discover 'something about its nature'.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that Monroe Beardsley also makes a distinction between 'interpretation' and 'use', but it is only the terminology that is common property. For Beardsley, Marxist, Freudian, etc. approaches to texts are 'ways of *using* the work to illustrate a pre-existent system of thought. Though they are sometimes called "interpretations"…they merit a distinct label, like *superimposition*' (Beardsley, 1970:44, cf. also p. 40). How any theoretician could possibly avoid 'using' in this sense, one may ponder over.

The different uses of 'use' should thus not be confused.

18   All references to Dummett's book will in the following be made to page numbers only.

19   Neither the nature of Frege's thought nor Russell's Paradox is of primary interest here. Thus, any extended discussion of Russell's paradox falls outside the scope of the immediate discussion. However, to give the reader a general idea of what it is all about, I will cite Frege's own description, from the Appendix to the *Grundgesetze's* second volume, of the paradox that Russell discovered:

> I say that something belongs to a class when it falls under the concept whose extension the class is. Let us now fix our eye on the concept: *class that does not belong to itself*. The extension of this concept (if we may speak of its extension) is thus the class of classes that do not belong to themselves. For short we will call it the class K. Let us now ask whether this class K belongs to itself. First, let us suppose it does. If anything belongs to a class, it falls under the concept whose extension the class is. Thus if our class belongs to itself, it is a class that does not belong to itself. Our first supposition thus leads to self-contradiction. Secondly, let us suppose our class K does not belong to itself; then it falls under the concept whose extension it itself is, and thus does belong to itself. Here once more we likewise get a contradiction!
>
> (Frege, 1980b:215)

On Frege's reaction to Russell's paradox see, apart from Dummett's book, Frege's *On Russell's Paradox* (1980b) and, for example, Gregory Currie (1982, especially pp. 125–39).

20   It may be interesting to note that Dummett gets support of sorts from an otherwise sceptic of intentionalism, Northrop Frye, who notes apropos the 'intentional fallacy' that

> The word intention is analogical: it implies a relation between two things, usually a conception and an act. Some related terms show this duality even more clearly: to 'aim at' something means that a target and a missile are being brought into alignment. Hence such terms properly *belong only to discursive writing,* where the correspondence of a verbal pattern with what it describes is of primary importance. But a *poet's* primary concern is to produce a work of art, and hence *his* intention can only be expressed by some kind of tautology.
>
> (Frye, 1973:86, italics mine)

A similar claim is made by Karl Jaspers: 'A philosopher's books are not essentially works of art or literature, whose creator turns out many of them in the course of his life. They are *a single search for truth in thought which is guided by a unity*' (Jaspers, 1962:4, italics mine). According to Jaspers, then, Russell would be a poor philosopher.

21   Cf. the New Criticist definition outlined by Wimsatt and Beardsley:

'Intention', as we shall use the term, corresponds to *what he intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. 'In order to judge the poets performance, we must know *what he intended.*' Intention is design or plan in the author's mind.

<div align="right">(Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946:468f)</div>

22   Apart from his two dissertations (both published in Frege's *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy,* edited by Brian McGuiness, 1984a), before 1879 Frege had only published four articles, including three reviews, none consisting of more than two pages; see the Bibliography included in Dummett's work, p. 605.

23   There is one exception to this view of 'first drafts': one of Frege's early texts, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik (The Foundations of Arithmetic)* (1978; first published 1884) or, rather, parts thereof, of which Dummett writes:

> These parts of *Grundlagen* should therefore be thought of as belonging with *Grundgesetze,* as essentially being a part of that definitive work on the philosophy of arithmetic to which so much of his effort was single-mindedly directed (p. 11).

24   Or again, in another context: 'Had he been sufficiently interested to do so, he *could have* given an accurate account of the phenomenon of tone' (p. 32, italics mine).

25   de Man actually writes of '*intra*-textual structures', but as far as I can see, his observation is valid for *inter*-textual structures as well. Hence the liberty taken.

26   On what is 'lacking' and why in *Die Grundgesetze,* see pp. 14ff.

27   I borrow the picture from Jurij Tynjanov (1978b:74).

28   And this is of course what I have tried to do above.

29   As Frege's thought in itself is/thoughts in themselves are not my subject here, I leave the question of where such contradictions in Frege should be located to the one side. That they do exist have, I think, been made clear from my exposition above.

30   The other part of the problem *is* of course Frege's texts themselves.

31   'Then', i.e. during Dummett's writing of *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (1973; 2nd edn. 1981).

32   Another indication of this quest of unity is present in the titles of both his books on Frege: *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (1981a) and *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (1981b (1973)); i.e. the use of the singular form, philosophy, not philosophies of Frege.

5   Interpretation and the harmonious whole

In this chapter, the problem of the text's unity will be extended to include interpretation in general, and various and highly divergent literary theories will be examined in order to see to what extent they endorse a reading that searches for, and in this search creates, as it were, the text's hidden, single meaning, its harmonious whole, and what strategies are used in order to accomplish this unity.

Next, some implications or fallacies of this view of the holy whole and these strategies leading to its production will be explored. At the end of the chapter (and as a bridge to the last), Roman Ingarden's understanding of the text will be introduced. His view is based upon the assumption that no text can say everything but must leave things unsaid, that it is necessarily indeterminate, making a realization of the text by readers unavoidable, thereby determining the text's meanings.

Interpretation as repetition

Pierre Macherey's theory of literary production unfolds by the way of a critique of three fallacies of criticism: *the empiricist fallacy,*

> to treat the work (the object of the enterprise of criticism) as factually given, spontaneously isolated for inspection. The work thus exists only to be received, described, and assimilated through the procedures of criticism. Dependent entirely upon its object, the critical judgment is required only to reproduce and imitate it by tracing its obvious outline;
>
> (Macherey, 1978:13)

the normative fallacy, according to which

> the work should be other than it is; its only reality is its relationship to the model which was the very condition of its elaboration. The work can be corrected and effectively modified by continuous comparison with the model which has an independent, *a priori* existence.
>
> (Macherey, 1978:17)[1]

At the third, *the fallacy of interpretation,* I want to rest for a moment.

The purpose of the *interpretive* activity is, says Macherey, *to determine the meaning* of the work, the text (Macherey, 1978:75). Now, certain consequences follow from a task conceived in this way. First, the meaning is not immediately given, recognizable—it is hidden in the textual mass. Second, the interpreter exchanges, as it were, equal values but in a peculiar way: 'Interpretation is repetition, but a strange repetition that *says more by saying less:* a purifying repetition, at the end of which a hidden meaning appears in all its naked truth' (Macherey, 1978:76), it strips the text of its 'ornament that concealed' its meaning (Macherey, 1978:75). The interpreter reconstructs the text in order to make it straightforward, and thus the text becomes in and through this process a commentary to itself and its own true meaning. And Foucault expresses something quite similar:

> *Commentary* questions discourse as to what it says and intended to say; it tries to uncover that deeper meaning of speech that enables it to achieve an identity with itself, supposedly nearer to its essential truth; in other words, in stating what has been said, one has to re-state what has never been said. (Foucault, 1975:xvi; cf. also Frye, 1973:86ff, whose main point agrees with the above)

Thus, an inversion takes place between the text and its interpretation. Interpretation, therefore, creates no new knowledge about the text but is, at best, repetitious. In the words of Derrida, this is the futility of interpretation as it 'dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin' (Derrida, 1978a:292). It should be emphasized that this assumption—that there exists a *hidden meaning* which it is the task of interpretation to uncover—is criticized from different and among themselves distant quarters. From a position quite far away from Macherey's, Wolfgang Iser, reception-aesthetician whose main theoretical effort is concentrated upon the reading process (see, for example, his principal text, *The Act of Reading,* 1980), directs a critique of it that coincides with Macherey's on a surprisingly large number of points given their radically divergent theoretical positions (Iser, 1980:3–19).[2] Similar thoughts on what interpretation amounts to may also be found in, for example, Susan Sontag (1987).

Through words and phrases such as 'repetition' and 'creates no new knowledge' we might take a further step and detect in the conception of the interpretative activity a certain inherent posture. In order to bring this to the fore, in order not to let it just disappear, one may contrast this conception with one on the other extreme, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'authoring', where the understanding of a text is seen as 'something actively produced, both by the author and by the contemplator (in this sense, by stretching the point, one could speak about the beholder's experiencing the creative activity of the author)' (Bakhtin, 1990:67, also p. 66). Bakhtin's point is perhaps even clearer in a text published some fifty years later, where he draws the parallel to (one version of) particle physics:

> The special dialogic nature of interrelations of semantic wholes, semantic positions, that is, utterances, has not been understood. The experimenter constitutes part of the experimental system (in microphysics). One might say, likewise, that the person who participates in understanding constitutes part of the understood utterance, the text (more precisely, utterances and their dialogue enter the text as a new participant).
>
> (Bakhtrin, 1986b:123; cf. also Holquist, 1990a:xxx and Todorov, 1984:107–12)

What Bakhtin argues for here is, in the words of Michael Holquist (one of the introducers of Bakhtin in the U.S.), 'to treat the activity of perception as the structure of authoring' (Holquist, 1990a:xxx). Implied in, or perhaps underneath, these different approaches to the reading of texts—the reader as the 'author' of the text vs. the reader as the interpreter of the text or, to make the contrast even more clear, man as the author of the world vs. man as interpreting the world— there are opposed positions in a more general sense.

   In 'authoring' we have a 'creating', active side as it were, fundamentally an activity of involvement, of *engagement,* whereas in 'interpreting' we detect a certain passivity, aloofness, 'standing-outside-and-looking-at', not taking part of; and remember the observation above: 'interpretation creates no new knowledge'. In the first case we have an act of *production*—but a production of *what*? —and Holquist observes that

> Dialogism conceives knowing as the effort of understanding, as 'the active reception of speech of the other'…'*active* reception' means that quoting is never simply mechanical repetition, but constitutes *work*—it is a labor.
>
> (Holquist, 1990a:xlii)

In the other, an act of consumption ('exchanging like-for-like'), which is also the conclusion reached by Bakhtin/Medvedev:

> The conception of a work of art as an object of individual pleasure and experience is essentially the expression of a tendency to equate an ideological phenomenon to a product of individual consumption,
>
> (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985:11)

an attitude that can be illustrated by a quotation from Barthes, almost perfectly fitting in the context:

> Classics. Culture (the more culture, the greater, more diverse, the pleasure will be). Intelligence. Irony. Delicacy. Euphoria. Mastery. Security: art of living. The pleasure of the text can be defined by *praxis*…the time and place of reading: house, countryside, near mealtime, the lamp, family where it should be, i.e., close but not too close…Extraordinary ego-reinforcement.
>
> (Barthes, 1975:51)[3]

An objection on much the same grounds as Macherey's against the interpretative project is given by Tzvetan Todorov, who also notes its impossibility save under one specific condition, namely that the

> description is merely a word-for-word repetition of the work itself. It espouses the forms of the work so closely that the two are identical. And, in a certain sense, every work constitutes its own best description.
>
> <div align="right">(Todorov, 1981:4; see also de Man, 1988a:30)[4]</div>

And this was precisely the conclusion arrived at by Tolstoy; when asked about the meaning of *Anna Karenina,* he delivered the answer:

> If I wished to say in words all that I intended to express in the novel, I would have to write from the very beginning the same novel that I had already written.
>
> <div align="right">(Tolstoy, as quoted in Propp, 1984:78)</div>

To all appearances this must be the ultimate annihilation of the interpretational-critical task itself, producing in the end what can also be found in Jorge Luis Borges's short story *Pierre Menard. Author of the Quixote* (1978:62–71). Here, the Frenchman Pierre Menard decides to rewrite parts of Don Quixote word by word, not by copying it, and during the process of which Menard 'multiplied draft after draft, revised tenaciously and tore up thousands of manuscript pages' (Borges, 1978:70). His commentator, the story's narrator, concludes in his comparison between the new version (written around the 1920s) and Cervantes's, that 'Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical (cf. 'The interpreter realises a copy of the work' (Macherey, 1978:75)), but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness)' (Borges, 1978:69). Some indications of the differences between the texts are given, among others a comparison of the two authors' stylistics: 'The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign, after all —suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time' (Borges, 1978:69). Menard's new conception of the historical novel is also applauded in opposition to Cervantes's clumsiness when dealing with the realities of his own times (Borges, 1978:68).

   This, it could be argued, is then a good example of an interpretation of a text, in so far as nothing in the primary text (Cervantes's) remains hidden; there is no ornament that conceals or is allowed to conceal. Also, the moment of repetition is quite obvious here, as is its strangeness, it 'says more', *not* this time, however, by saying less since exactly this ornament is non-existent, as in a perfect text that says what it wants to say.

   If the interpretative mode of criticism seems familiar it is not by chance, for what Macherey claims to have done is to have

> posited the principles of an immanent criticism: the work encloses a meaning which must be released; the letter of the work is the mask, eloquent and

deceptive, which this meaning bears; a knowledge of the work is an ascent to this central unique meaning. Interpretive criticism rests on a certain number of fallacies…it locates the work in a space which it endows with its own depth; it denounces the spontaneously deceptive character of the work; finally, it presupposes the active presence of a single meaning around which the work is diversely articulated.

> (Macherey, 1978:76; see also, for example, Jameson, 1982:56, 58)

In this way, the example of Pierre Menard also brings forward a second objection raised by Todorov against the interpretative activity. An objection, valid even if the first one is not accepted as the logical or desirable outcome of interpretation: the *impossibility* to read the work *without* going *outside* it, 'without leaving it for a moment, without projecting it elsewhere than upon itself' (Todorov, 1981:4).

Now, there are, as will be shown in more detail below, two elsewheres, two outsides of the text, of which one is already hinted at by the example of Menard's successful rewriting of the Quixote, i.e. circumstances outside the control of both the author and the reader as well as of the text itself. More important, perhaps, and as Todorov points out, the activity of reading never produces, between two readers, identical results; as Macherey also observes, we tend to add to the text. Hence, Todorov concludes, 'reading is no longer immanent once there is a reader' (Todorov, 1981:4; cf. also Bakhtin, 1981b:288ff).

The unity of the text

Let me now seize upon the last of the presuppositions upon which, according to Macherey, interpretative criticism rests, i.e. that it 'presupposes the active presence of a single meaning' and see what it entails; one that we have seen some examples of above and which seems to be pertinent to the whole enterprise of criticism to such an extent that Paul de Man can say that its *'necessary presence'* constitutes 'the guiding impulse of the critical process' (de Man, 1988a:32),[5] and of which Susan Suleiman writes that

> Perhaps no single idea has had as tenacious and influential a hold over the critical imagination in our century as that of textual unity or wholeness.
>
> (Suleiman, 1980:40)

In other words, let us take the proposition of an *'active presence of a single meaning',* a meaningful unity or whole, a unity of meaning under consideration, because this supposed presence, it seems to me, causes problems of some importance to critical activity.[6]

It is, says David Bohm,

> instructive to consider that the word 'health' in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word 'hale' meaning 'whole': that is, to be healthy is to be whole…

Likewise, the English 'holy' is based on the same root as 'whole'.

<div align="right">(Bohm, 1981:3)</div>

Now, whether the search for wholeness has been, as Bohm suggests, a constant human undertaking—a reaction against a fragmentation which has been seen as harmful and un-natural (Bohm, 1981:3; see also Shusterman, 1989:105) —or, as Lévi-Strauss says, only half the story, the other part being exactly a fragmentization of the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1981:679) is immaterial here. The point is: such a search does exist—to a not too healthy degree.

Under any circumstances, the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce's aesthetics is a good example of this search for unity. In the beginning of his great work, *Æsthetic* (1972), Croce lays down his view of the work of art as an organic whole, it is a 'unity in variety', a *synthesis*.[7] He then goes on to argue, almost as a confirmation of Bohm's observation, that

> The fact that we divide a work of art into parts, a poem into scenes, episodes, similes, sentences, or a picture into single figures and objects, background, foreground, etc., may seem opposed to this affirmation. But such division annihilates the work, as dividing the organism into heart, brain, nerves, muscles and so on, *turns the living being into a corpse*.
>
> <div align="right">(Croce, 1972:20, italics mine)</div>

Yet, this myth of the sacredness of the 'whole' —a myth not in any way confined to literary criticism alone, as we have already seen. Quentin Skinner, for example, remarks in a lengthy discussion on the 'mythology of coherence' (Skinner, 1969: 16–22): 'The writing of the history of ethical and political philosophy is pervaded by this mythology' —may endanger the knowledge production process for, as Macherey points out, linked to the concept of the united whole is a conception of *harmony:*

> Indeed, the traditional concept of the work of art turns upon the central concept of *harmony*. Whether this harmony is natural (reproducing the harmony of a place or of a feeling…) or artificial (the work is the effect of applied rules which in themselves guarantee consistency), in both cases the judgment of the work is a judgment of order. The work exists only in so far as it realises a totality; it is a product of an arrangement…. It does not matter whether this order, this organisation, is intuitive or discursive: the work presents itself (and it is nothing more than this presence) as a consistent entity.
>
> <div align="right">(Macherey, 1978:151; cf. also p. 78)</div>

Not to accept this myth, this 'convention' (Culler, 1988b:68ff) of how to regard the text, *not* to perceive it as a carrier of *one* meaning is, as could perhaps be expected, radically incompatible with most schools of literary criticism:

Certainly most forms of twentieth-century Anglo-American aesthetics and literary theory seem to have sought their ultimate principles and justification in such a notion, whether it located that unity in aesthetic experience or the actual work of art.

(Shusterman, 1989:92)[8]

In one of the classical texts of New Criticism, Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* we can read, for example, the following:

The structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of *unity* which informs it seems to be one of balancing and *harmonizing* connotations, attitudes, and meanings…. The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. It is a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue but an achieved harmony.

(Brooks, 1975:195, italics mine)

And René Wellek, close to New Criticism, succinctly lays down the goal of writing and analysis, which is 'to form a unified image of a totality which is systematic, harmonious, and hence, we must conclude, aesthetically effective' (Wellek, 1970: 282).[9]

The same quest for unity and harmony can also be found in hermeneutics as represented by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, the former who declares that 'The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed' (Gadamer, 1979:259), and furthermore goes on to claim that 'only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible' (Gadamer, 1979:261); the latter that

a text has to be construed because it is *not* a mere sequence of sentences, all on equal footing and separately understandable. A text *is* a whole, a totality.

(Ricoeur, 1971:548, italics mine)

Perhaps one could say that the hermeneutic in a 'hermeneutic zeal that forces "unity" on every literary text' (Scholes, 1974:154) —with the words of Bakhtin— *'transposes a symphonic (orchestrated) theme on to the piano keyboard'* (Bakhtin, 1981b:263, italics mine).

It is also evident that the rejection of this myth is incompatible with traditional or classical structuralism, as described by Jean Piaget:

That wholeness is a defining mark of structures almost goes without saying, since all structuralists—mathematicians, linguists, psychologists, or what have you—are at one in recognizing as fundamental the contrast between *structures* and *aggregates,* the former being wholes, the latter composites formed of

elements that are independent of the complexes into which they enter… the elements of a structure are subordinated to laws, and it is in terms of these laws that the structure *qua* whole or system is defined.

(Piaget, 1973:6f; cf. also, for example, Lane, 1970:14)

Or, some 25 years earlier with words much to the same effect, in an essay from 1941 by one of Prague Structuralism's foremost spokesmen, Jan Mukarovsky:

a structure is more than a mere additive whole, arising through a mere aggregation of parts. The structural whole *signifies* each of its parts, and each of these parts in turn signifies the whole. Another essential feature of the structure is its dynamic nature, a result of the fact that every individual component has a particular function in the common unity which incorporates it and binds it into the structural whole. The dynamism of the structural whole is created by the energetic nature of these individual functions and their interrelations, which are prone to constant change. Therefore the structure as a whole is in constant motion, whereas the additive whole dissolves through change.

(Mukarovsky, 1982:69f)[10]

Provided, that is, if and when such a whole is claimed to *constitute the identity of the text,* as is the case with, for example, Lévi-Strauss who at the completion of the *Mythologies* states that the end-point of analysis is reached when 'the complete myth has been *successfully reconstituted and interpreted as an organic whole*' (Lévi-Strauss, 1981:632, italics mine). But then, again, at the inception of the *Mythologies*-undertaking his view was somewhat different:

There is no real end to mythological analysis, *no hidden unity to be grasped* once the breaking-down process has been completed…. Consequently the unity of the myth is never more than tendential and projective and cannot reflect a state or a particular moment of the myth. *It is a phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation;* and its function is to endow the myth with synthetic form and to prevent its disintegration into a confusion of opposites.

(Lévi-Strauss, 1970:5, italics mine)

The quest for unity is present in both cases, however, even if it is, in the first case, presented as a property of the myth itself that it is the task of interpretation to discover and, in the second, as the property of an interpretative activity only.[11]

And, as a last example, according to Umberto Eco, the only way to check '*uncontrollable* drives of the reader' is 'the internal textual coherence', which he accepts as a 'Popper-like principle',[12] that should guide interpretation (Eco, 1990: 59f).

Richard Shusterman (1989) puts forward a strategy of reading which may have some bizarre consequences. Shusterman denies the unity of meaning *in the text itself,* making this unity instead 'at best an interpretative structure, hermeneutically

and contextually constructed, not a foundational and unchanging given' (Shusterman, 1989:104). There is a 'pragmatic justification', he says, for adopting a *strategy* of *'postulating'* this existence of unity in the literary text, since unity is what gives the reader the satisfaction he seeks. Furthermore, if *not* accepted, the result may be our alienation from 'what constitutes our very forms of thinking, action, and experience' (Shusterman, 1989:105). Now, Shusterman never discusses *scientific* texts, but the reasons he gives for this search may make one wonder whether his strategy is so recommendable or innocent after all:

> The basic human need to perceive and experience satisfying unities in the disordered flux of experience is what motivates our interest in art, whose works not only afford such satisfactions in themselves but can lead to a more satisfyingly integrated experience of the world.
>
> (Shusterman, 1989:105)

So, a 'false' reading, so acknowledged by Shusterman in so far as the reading is based upon a postulate admittedly untrue of the text itself, can lead to 'a more satisfyingly integrated experience of the world', which experience would in turn, one has to presume, enter one's expectations when reading other texts—including theoretical ones—that in one way or another deal with this 'same' reality.

The fallacy of the holy whole

Now, if these conceptions—*the whole as healthy, united and harmonious* and, why not, *holy*—underlie critical activity, certain effects are bound to follow, counter-productive for the production of knowledge of the text, the precondition of which is, as observed by Macherey, that it is 'left as it is' (Macherey, 1978:78); i.e. that, as Stephen Savage observes while discussing Althusser's symptomatic reading,

> discourses are not to be judged according to some correspondence/non-correspondence with a philosophically-advised epistemological structure, nor are they to be judged according to the relative representation in them of a reality external to them…the reading can only aspire to theorise the logical relations between the concepts present in a discourse.
>
> (Savage, 1983:49; cf. also pp. 10–23)

Certain effects are bound to follow that furthermore, as Michael Riffaterre emphatically declares, have to be condemned:

> In accordance with the principle of obedience to the text, *any explanation* that, when faced with a group of obscure or ambiguous words, would attempt to reduce the ambiguity or explain away the obscurity *must be rejected*.
>
> (Riffaterre, 1983:9, italics mine)[13]

Now, given the pursuit for the harmonious whole, certain qualities of the text will be sought for, will be seen, since it is 'an attribute we always manage to "discover" in any work we happen to like' (Fish, 1980b:388n21; cf. also Althusser and Hanson, referred to above), or will be supplemented by making 'connections more firm and delimiting than the connections available in the text' (Fish, 1980a: 6) or again, as Wolfgang Iser points out, although the arts themselves have abandoned the idea of unity as a *leitmotif* in their practices, this kind of

> interpretation developed during the nineteenth century has the effect today of seeming to degrade the work as a reflection of prevailing values, and this impression is a natural consequence of the fact that such norms sought to interpret the work in the Hegelian sense as the 'sensual appearance of the idea',
>
> (Iser, 1980:13)

thus creating an 'illusion of a false totality' (Iser, 1980:12).

Similarly, certain qualities of the text tend not to be sought for or seen, since *they should not be there*.[14] And if certain qualities *are* seen that should not be present in a harmonious, healthy whole, they will tend to be explained away as not belonging to this harmonious, healthy whole but better be regarded as mistakes that should be eradicated or undone in order to get a full and meaningful understanding of the text[15] in a process similar to if not identical with the one Foucault describes regarding quite another sphere of human life:

> The history of madness would be the history of the Other—of that which, for a given culture is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness); whereas the history of the order imposed on things would be the history of the Same—of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities.
>
> (Foucault, 1973:xxiv)

These qualities will tend to be regarded as tumours and treated accordingly, i.e. cut off in order to restore the harmony and health of the whole; the reader will tend to—and this is what Fredric Jameson proposes to do in his essay on Kenneth Burke—'flush out those concepts external to his own system' (Jameson, 1988b: 147). This is, incidentally, what Ronald Meek argues happened to the Ricardian system (Meek, 1967:71ff). The purification, the 'purge' that in this case took place was not, according to Meek, wholly disinterested:

> It seems not too unfair to say that economists like Scrope, Read and Longfield, in varying degrees, tended towards the view that if a doctrine 'inculcated pernicious principles', if it denied that wealth under free competition was

consigned to its 'proper' owners, or if it could be so interpreted as to impugn the motives or capacity of the Almighty, then that doctrine must necessarily be false. Their fundamental approach, in other words, was determined by a belief that what was socially dangerous could not possibly be true…. Ricardo's system, in short, was purged of most of its more obviously disharmonious elements, particularly those which might have been used to suggest that there was a real conflict of economic interest between social classes under capitalism, or that progress under capitalism might be limited for some other reason.

(Meek, 1967:71ff)

Whether this purification is conscious or not and what interests that may lie behind any such purification is, as noted above, immaterial for my argument here. This is not at all to deny that there may be such interests behind such a procedure, only to say that such interests are no necessary ingredient in a purification process.

We can also observe this effect in George Stigler's question already quoted above, i.e. 'which passage in a man's writing do you accept when several passages are inconsistent?', and he gives further voice to this approach when he states that

textual interpretation must uncover the main concepts in the man's work, and the major functional relationships among them. *The interpretation need not account for careless writing or unintegrated knowledge*…. We should not be so literal-minded as to count the passages in a book to decide an author's general position because *the passages are not of equal importance.*

(Stigler, 1982a:69, italics mine)[16]

As expected, this presupposition is also present in Stigler's recommended test of the achieved interpretation, viz. 'We increase our confidence in the interpretation of an author by increasing the number of his main theoretical conclusions which we can deduce from (our interpretation of) his analytical system' (Stigler, 1982a: 69). This should not be viewed, however, as if Stigler aims at a knowledge of what the author of the text *really meant* (what he calls 'personal exegesis'; Stigler, 1982a: 69). What is of importance—because this is what has influenced the scientific community—are the written words, not what ideas an author *may* have intended to express ('this search has no direct relevance to scientific progress'; Stigler, 1982a: 69, 1982b:91f).[17] So, what he wants to accomplish is a textual interpretation that is 'designed to maximize the value of a theory to the science' (Stigler, 1982a: 69) within which the text is produced or read, which of course is a perfectly legitimate task in its own right (see, for example, Foucault, 1977:132–6 and Frye, 1973:345ff), but which does not—necessarily—contribute to the knowledge of the text in itself.

Through a process of *purification* of the whole, then—'Of course men make logical errors or slip into tautologies and otherwise *blemish* their work' (Stigler, 1982a:69, italics mine)[18] —and in accordance with this goal, 'the net scientific contribution' (Stigler, 1982a:69) is assessed. Thus, Stigler's proposal involves, strongly

connected to the assumption of the harmonious whole, a strong instrumentalism which supposedly will co-govern the analysis of the text.

In order further to understand what Stigler is doing, it is worthwhile to repeat the distinction emphasized by E.D.Hirsch (1967a), namely that between *meaning* on the one hand and *significance* on the other.[19] There is a certain blurring of the border-lines separating the two in Stigler's 'textual' or 'scientific' exegesis, although he leans more towards the latter despite the bias of his terminology ('exegesis') towards the former. In *Validity* Hirsch delivers, as a first approximation, this statement as to what the difference is about:

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text…it is what the signs represent; *Significance,* on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.
>
> (Hirsch, 1967a:8)[20]

This means, according to Hirsch, that the meaning of a text is firm, unchanging, while its significance, its meaning *to us* changes (Hirsch, 1967b:255). Thus, there is a fundamental difference between 'meaning-in' the text (meaning) and the text's 'meaning-to' (significance) (Hirsch, 1967a:63) and, as can be seen from the quotes from Stigler above, for him the *significance* of texts to things extrinsic to textual meaning, i.e. to 'science' and 'scientific progress', is of prime importance. It is as if, for Stigler, significance and meaning were the same, as if the problem had not occurred to him, since the purification the text undergoes in his hands is aimed both in the direction of meaning ('to decide an author's general position …the passages are not of equal importance') and in the direction of significance ('designed to maximize the value of a theory to the science'). Now, these two tasks that are assigned interpretative activity by Stigler are not, despite their separate legitimacy, necessarily—if at all—compatible.[21]

Now, there is another, interrelated way of viewing the process of immanent purification, its effects being very similar to those presented above. Still, it merits some mentioning. Criticism, Michael McCanles proposes,

> is a discourse that presents itself as literal, about another kind of discourse that criticism treats as metaphorical. Criticism registers readers' desire to disambiguate the meanings of metaphorical discourse by showing what literal meanings metaphorical statements 'really' have.
>
> (McCanles, 1981:268)

Now, this is in line with Macherey's critique of interpretative activity, even if with an additional dimension, the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical.[22] What is of interest in the present context is of course how this distinction is drawn and used. If we accept McCanles's proposition that criticism's language is literal— or at least pretending to be, since criticism may also be read by another critical language on another level, and then as metaphorical—we do not necessarily have to accept that the language of the other discourse (the criticized language) is

metaphorical *in toto*. We may assume that *part* of the criticized text is treated as metaphorical, part as literal, depending upon how distant or close these 'parts' are to the literal, criticizing language. In this way, what has been observed by McCanles has much to tell of some of the readings of, for example, Smith and Ricardo, viz. 'texts written in the official, literal lexicon of a societal group… claim the privilege of interpreting those texts which are written in some other lexicon, which they necessarily label "metaphorical" (McCanles, 1981:274). Transposed to some economists' readings (cf., for example, Schumpeter's and Blaug's, referred to above), one could argue that pieces (parts) of the texts of Smith and Ricardo written not in accordance with neo-classical logic (here: value theory) are interpreted, necessarily, *as metaphorical, thereby saving the text* for neo-classical canon, and simultaneously this procedure makes it possible to defend these texts against other competing interpretations that claim to have found other theories of value present.

In sum, then, I hope that I have shown that this search for unity in the text is a crucial element in many reading strategies; that it is not an innocent undertaking; that it involves a fundamental lack of respect for the text; that it is based on the readers assumption of what the text *ought* to say; that, finally, a violation of the text is a necessary consequence, where the text is 'purified' from its 'blemishes'.

The starting point in this venture—how the text ought to be, i.e., unified—should aid in explaining the existence of multiple readings and the concomitant existence of different unities, where each unity is dependent on the other assumptions governing the different modes of reading, be they Structuralist, Hermeneutic, New Critical, or whatever.

Indeterminacy

However, before this chapter comes to an end, there is one more property of the text that should be analysed, a property that may help further the understanding of how different readings are not only possible but quite likely also necessary. Here, too, the conception of the text's unity must be questioned. But in this case, it may be overcome.

To illustrate, it is convenient to take off from the Prague Structuralist Felix Vodicka's attempt in 1941 to sketch a theory of the *reception* or *concretization* of literary works, an attempt built upon influences from primarily Jan Mukarovsky, also a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, and the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden,[23] from whom Vodicka borrows the term concretization (see, for example, Vodicka, 1982, passim and Galan, 1985:153–64). Incidentally, in this undertaking Vodicka arrives at a position similar to that of Stanley Fish some thirty years later.

Vodicka's initial problem is the historical relativity of the reception of literary works, and how changes in reception over time is to be explained. Not too surprisingly, given Prague Structuralism's sociological stance (see, for example, Galan, 1985:38), he reaches the conclusion that *social norms of reading* ('interpretative

communities' in Fish's terminology) determine the individual reception of a work, and simultaneously order the social hierarchy of works among themselves. Now,

> It can, of course, happen that two or three established concretizations coexist, but this follows from the fact that two or three norms, differentiated, for example, by generational affiliation, run parallel to one another in the literature of a given moment.
>
> (Vodicka, 1982:111)

From this, Vodicka continues, it follows that the normative context may change and so

> causes the semantic interpretations of works to shift to an entirely new semantic plane, *although the text itself may not suggest it*.
>
> (Vodicka, 1982:121, italics mine)

An essential assumption underlying Vodicka's analysis is that the work is in itself *a sign*—a thesis he borrows from Mukarovsky (see, for example, Mukarovsky, 1976:87) —and therefore a united whole, albeit unstable (and here we can see that what may have looked in the first instance as another example of Hirsch's distinction between meaning and signification now turns out to be something quite different), not to be expressed apart from the perceiver's socially determined frame of reference; its 'meaning and esthetic value…comprehensible only on the basis of the literary conventions of a specific period' (Vodicka, 1982:110; see also 1976:197–208). In his analysis, Vodicka is quite close to Stanley Fish's conception of 'interpretative communities' (see, for example, Fish, 1980f:167–73) and the latter's radical relativism, in which the text runs the risk of being totally subjected to the whims of social norms more or less accidentally prevailing in different interpretative communities at a given point in time, or in the words of Frantisek Galan:

> what Vodicka and other students of reception may end up mapping is not the systemic alteration of literary norms but the 'whirligig of taste', a chaos of critical views…'vacillations of fashionable prejudice'.
>
> (Galan, 1985:162)

Now, there is an all-important difference between Vodicka's use of the crucial term *concretization* and Ingarden's. For Vodicka, 'concretization' 'will designate the reflection of a work in the consciousness of those for whom it is an esthetic object' (Vodicka, 1982:110); for Ingarden, on the other hand, there is a somewhat more complicated process at hand. Vodicka's understanding, the effect of which is that he can uphold the idea of the whole as a unity, misses—it seems to me— the potentialities of the concept and vital parts of Ingarden's argument; arguments moreover that are not only relevant for *literary* texts but, as I hope will be clear below, for *scientific* ones as well.

As Wolfgang Iser (1980) —in many respects a follower of Ingarden—points out, there is a tension in Ingarden's text. Iser's argument hinges on a quest for *harmony* present in Ingarden's theory, and it is this quest that Vodicka seizes on. Iser's point is obviously correct; Ingarden writes the following:

> Their polyphonic harmony is the aesthetic value of the work of art; when they are missing or do not lead to any harmony, ending rather in a qualitative conflict which cannot be resolved in any higher harmony, then the work in question is either entirely without value or else has a negative value *[Unwert],* and *any further good qualities it may have are still unable to save it as a work of art*.
>
> (Ingarden, 1973b:151, italics mine)

But as I will try to show, it seems as if *this demand of harmony can be dispensed with,* without therefore sacrificing the salient features of Ingarden's theory, and this can be done considering the place it occupies in Ingarden's theory.

The harmony sought for by Ingarden is sought for because, just as Iser points out, 'it is to give rise to an *aesthetic* experience' (Iser, 1980:175, italics added).[24] And in this context, the sheer level and number of *places of indeterminacy* (see below) may threaten an harmonious experience; 'there must be limits to the tolerable level of indeterminacy, and if these limits are exceeded, the polyphonic harmony will be shattered or, to be more precise, will never come into being' (Iser, 1980:172). But in the present context, I am *not* interested in the aesthetic *experience* but at most the aesthetic relevant qualities of the text that *as properties of the text* may or may not disturb, 'descientificate', it. This also seems to be Ingarden's view on the difference between the literary and the scientific text: the aesthetic dimension is irrelevant to the latter, it is a 'dispensable luxury' (Ingarden, 1973b:151; cf. also pp. 163f). The aesthetic properties of the work or its aesthetic effects on the reader are of no concern to us since the scientific text need not be 'saved as a work of art'. And so, Ingarden's quest for harmony or unity becomes, as he says himself, *'completely irrelevant'* (Ingarden, 1973b:155, italics mine). An aesthetic harmony may or may not (and by all probability *not*) be present in the scientific text or in the reader's experience of it, but in this context, whether it does or not, does not alter the fundamental insight, i.e. the presence in a text of *places of indeterminacy* and *potentialities* identified by Ingarden.

Ingarden proposes that the literary work is to be considered a determined and determining unfinished and unfinishable whole, *with places* or *spots of indeterminacy* as well as *elements of potentiality* that must be distinguished from the various concretizations of the work. These *gaps* in the text are crucial in Ingarden's theory. Ingarden formulates it thus:

> taken in…isolation, the literary work is a *schematic* formation in which… various elements persevere in a *characteristic potentiality*. These two circumstances have as their consequence the fact that at least some, if not all, aesthetic value

qualities and their metaphysical qualities in the work do not attain, themselves, *full development* but remain in a *latent state of 'predeterminacy' and 'holding in readiness'*.
(Ingarden, 1973a:372)

What these places of indeterminacy and the work's schematization add up to is in broad outline the texts relation to its object(s). Obviously, no text can give a complete picture of its objects, it must present them in a schematized manner. Thus, according to Ingarden the text is, and I will quote at length,

> a *schematic* formation with spots of indeterminacy of various kinds and with an infinite number of determinations positively assigned to it…This schematic structure of represented objects cannot be removed in any finite literary work [or scientific, for that matter], even though in the course of the work new spots of indeterminacy may continually be filled out and hence removed through the completion of newer, positively projected properties. We can say that, with regard to the determination of the objectivities represented within it, every literary work is in principle incomplete and always in need of further supplementation; *in terms of the text, however, this supplementation can never be completed*.
> (Ingarden, 1973a:251, italics mine)

To this paragraph, Ingarden adds a revealing and highly significant footnote, drawing in this respect a parallel between on the one hand literary and, on the other, scientific texts (Ingarden, 1973a:251n51), which is exactly what is implied in my presentation here: places of indeterminacy and potentialities are just as present in the scientific as in the literary text.

So, these places of indeterminacy and these potentialities are to be *filled out*— however incompletely—and will thus partially be removed in the process of *concretization* (Ingarden, 1973b:13). This process—the location of the places of indeterminacy and the determination of them that is going on in the concretization of the text—is what explains the possibility or necessity for and existence of different readings of one and the same textual structure:

> The places of indeterminacy are removed in the individual concretizations in such a way that a more or less close determination takes their place and, so to speak, 'fills them out'. This 'filling-out' is, however, not sufficiently determined by the determinate features of the object and can thus vary with different concretizations.
> (Ingarden, 1973b:13f; see also 1973a:262ff)

And even if it would be true, as Iser states, that 'The most that can be said of the indeterminacies is that they may *stimulate,* but not that they *demand* completion from our existing store of knowledge' (Iser, 1980:177), it is nonetheless also true that they as properties of the text open for the possibilities or, as the case may be, even necessities of different readings, and as such they will be instrumental

in the understanding of the process by which the text exerts its *determinate and indeterminate influences* (cf. also, for example, Foucault's 'empty spaces'; Foucault, 1977:134f).[25]

In this way, it is possible to escape from the relativism that Vodicka's approach leads to (remember the quote above: 'although the text itself may not suggest it'), and to—at least partially—explain how it is that readings of texts are not wholly fortuitous but nevertheless differ from one another—in a predetermined way.

But, as will be argued below, it is not enough to establish the presence of indeterminacies and potentialities in the text. It is also a question of whether there may be some, in the text inherent, reason for their existence.

Notes

1   Cf. also, from a general point of view quite different from Macherey's, Wolfgang Iser (1980:13).
2   Cf., for example, Freund (1987:134ff, 141–51) and Holub (1984:82–106) for short overviews of Iser's work.
3   But see also Barthes: 'the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (Barthes, 1990b:4).
4   It should perhaps be pointed out that Todorov in a later work has changed his terminology, so that 'description', which in the quote above is seen as an inalienable part of interpretation, later becomes something quite different, i.e. a term referring to 'the linguistic-oriented studies essentially concerned with the analysis of poetry' (Todorov, 1977b:239, see also pp. 240f).
5   But de Man is not consistent on this point (why should he be? who is?); so, for example, 'this mutilated textual model exposes *the wound of a fracture* that lies hidden in *all* texts' (de Man, 1979b:67, italics added). However, the vocabulary used suggests an *unhealthy* quality of texts that, reasonably, ought to be cured.
6   On the pre-history of the next few paragraphs, see, for example, G.N.Orsini (1972) and William K.Wimsatt (1972).
7   Cf. a statement by the New Critic Cleanth Brooks (1975:255) to the same effect.
8   A peculiar way to get around the problem of the unity of the work is presented by Edgar Allan Poe, enabling him both to have the cake and eat it:

> This great work [Poe is writing on *Paradise Lost*], in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression.
>
> (Poe, 1981:229)

9   Cf. also Leitch (1988:31–5), on the search for 'unity, inclusiveness and harmony' in the poetic text as a fundamental dogma in New Criticism.
10   For an early attempt by Mukarovsky to outline the structuralist approach, see his review article on Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose,* published in 1934 (Mukarovsky, 1977b:134–42). Roman Jakobson was probably the first to use the term 'structuralism' (in 1929); see Peter Steiner (1982a:218 n 119).
11   Not all 'structuralists', of which Barthes may be one (even if here on the brink to what has later been labelled post-structuralism; see, for example, Merquior, 1986:129), accept this property of the text, though: 'a text is made of multiple writings' (Barthes, 1982a:148) and 'the text unravels multiple and simultaneous codes' (Barthes, 1990a:80). Taking Barthes as representative for structuralist literary theoreticians, we may refer the reader to Lévi-Strauss's critique of this tendency as being in opposition to structuralism's (as Lévi-Strauss understands it) basic tenets:

the structural method consists in perceiving *invariant forms within different contents*. But the structural analysis that certain critics and historians of literature unduly claim to apply consists, on the contrary, in seeking *recurring contents under variable forms.*

(Lévi-Strauss, 1977b:274, italics mine)

12 A 'Popper-like principle': 'according to which if there are not rules that help to ascertain which interpretations are the "best ones", there is at least a rule for ascertaining which ones are "bad"' (Eco, 1990:60).

13 This pronouncement Riffaterre tries, quite unnecessarily I think, to make compatible with his own quest for unity, as for example: 'the characteristic feature of the poem is its unity' (Riffaterre, 1984: 2; see also 1983:96f, 118), thus forcing unity upon ambiguity and obscurity, thereby denying the possibility of, for example, what deconstruction terms *aporia,* i.e. unresolvable conflicts in a text.

14 This may but need not coincide with a distinction discussed by Jonathan Culler, i.e. that between what is *central* and what is *marginal* in the text (Culler, 1987a:140).

15 The controversy of 'unity' or 'harmony' vs. 'anomaly' in texts goes back to ancient times. Thus, according to Luciano Canfora, at the library of Alexandria a principle of textual unity was used in order to judge whether a text should be accepted as authentic or not; a principle leading sometimes to the 'damaging' and 'arbitrary meddling which *struck out entire passages* of so famous a text as Demosthenes' *On the Crown* on the grounds that the great orator could never have used such "vulgar" language' (Canfora, 1990:49, italics mine). At the same time—around 200–150 B.C. —at the competing library of Pergamum textual anomalies were accepted, curing 'all cases of textual doubt':

> What interested them was the 'hidden' meaning, the meaning that lay 'behind' the classical, and especially Homeric, texts—the 'allegory', as they called it, concealed within these poems.
>
> (Canfora, 1990:49)

16 This conception of critical practice is not—lest one should be inclined to think so—limited to non-literary theorists alone; cf., for example, one of the leading British critics of all times, F.R.Leavis: 'One deals with the individual poet in terms of *representative pieces* of his work' (Leavis, 1983:10, italics mine).

17 Samuel Hollander protests against the fruitfulness of this distinction in his study of *The Economics of David Ricardo,* arguing instead, as I take it, that the two should be one:

> Biographical information may, I conclude, be of considerable help in isolating the net *scientific* contribution of an author…Ricardo's style and mental habits are thus of great relevance for an understanding of the analytical content of his theories.
>
> (Hollander, 1979:648, 646)

18 Cf. Gramsci: *'contaminated'* (1985:135, italics mine).

19   The distinction itself is modelled upon Frege's *sense* and *meaning* (*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*), as Hirsch acknowledges (Hirsch, 1967b:211; see also Frege, 1980a:56–78).

20 It should be observed that Stigler's distinction between 'scientific' and 'personal' exegeses does not correspond to Hirsch's, in so far as the question 'what the author really meant' is solved differently. In the case of Hirsch's 'meaning', the author's meaning or intention is literally *there,* in the text, while for Stigler additional biographical data may be sought in order to determine this 'meaning' or intention (cf. Hirsch, 1967b, and Stigler, 1982a, b).

21 A very similar story, this time concerning the writing of the history of philosophy, is critically told by Michael Ayers (1978, see especially pp. 49ff).

22 On the possibility of switching between the metaphorical and literal in the act of reading, see, for instance, Culler (1988b:61f). I must for the time being leave the question of the nature of language, and hence the sensibility of making a distinction between literal and metaphorical, to the one side.

However, on the *impossibility* of reading metaphors as anything *but literal,* see Donald Davidson:

> This paper is concerned with that metaphors mean, and its thesis is that *metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more*
>
> (Davidson, 1990a:245, italics mine)

Paul de Man, however, is of the opposite opinion: 'The only literal statement that says what it means to say is the assertion that *there can be no literal statements*' (de Man, 1988c:133, italics mine).

    For theories of the metaphor, see, for example, the collection of essays edited by Sheldon Sacks (1979), Gunnar Backman (1991) and Roman Jakobson (1987g).

23   For two concise presentations of Ingarden's work, see Freund (1987:139–41) and Holub (1984: 22–9).

24   This 'aestheticism' is also present in Vodicka as can be seen from the quotes above; cf. also Jauss (1982b:72f) and de Man (1986c:63).

25   There is another essential difference with regard to the concept of concretization between the two, i.e. that for Vodicka *the text* becomes historicized in its concretizations, while for Ingarden the structure of the text is there (as it is for Hirsch), irrespective of time (see also, for example, Jauss, 1982b:72f).

    It should also be made explicit that I only utilize or, perhaps better, extract certain elements of Ingarden's theoretical system, while altogether disregarding others.

6   Holes in wholes in wholes

> this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds
>
> Roland Barthes

> interpretations vary in unpredictable ways; they are determined
>
> Jonathan Culler[1]

My critique this far has mainly been what is commonly recognized as negative. What has been considered above are different proposals for how texts should be understood. However, these proposals have one thing in common: they do not seem to be able consistently to account for the different ways in which theoretical texts may be read. Negativity, however, seldom thrives on its own—in one way or another, concealed or not, positivity is present as its necessary counterpart. The time has now come to make this positivity a bit more explicit. I will below present a proposal which I deem fruitful further to theorize if we want to advance our understanding of the phenomenon of multiple readings of theoretical texts. Above, I have reached certain conclusions regarding other approaches' shortcomings. My proposal aims at avoiding these shortcomings, shortcomings that inhere, for example, in the dichotomization of language, in the intentionalistic or teleologically inspired modes of reading, in the quest for meaningful unity in texts, etc. This means, among other things, that I am not interested in legitimizing the text's meaning(s) but rather in *identifying structures* and mechanisms that produce and carry meaning(s), i.e. in the text's *possibilities* to mean to others (cf., for example, Culler, 1988b:48 and Jameson, 1988a:14) and, by implication, how these possibilities may be differently exploited in the meaning production by different modes of reading. However, I will not present a full-fledged theory but merely an outline of some essential elements for further thought.

   This proposal rests upon what I take to be an undisputable fact, namely that in the social and human sciences and/or disciplines there exist *different and co-existent ways of thinking and producing knowledge of reality,* be they called modes or schools of thought, methodologies, discourses, horizons, paradigms, theoretical schemes or systems or whatever—neither terminology nor exactness is necessary at the moment. I want to emphasize, in this connection, that schools of thought, more

or less articulated, more or less homogeneous, are present both in the text and in the activity of reading and understanding texts (cf., for example, Stanley Fish's 'interpretative communities', 1980a:14).[2]

Terminologies

Roughly and ideally, a school of thought (which can be said to be an academically institutionalized mode of thought) is a theoretical system that includes (and thus *excludes* other) ontological and epistemological assumptions, rules for knowledge production and a conceptual apparatus (Coniavitis, 1984:49f), in which the concept gets its meaning in its *relation* to the other concepts of the system.[3] Thus, the meaning a term gets in a theoretical system is analogous to the way a sign gets meaning in Saussure's *langue* or Wittgenstein's *language-games* (cf., for example, Hawkes, 1983:27 and Harris, 1990:22f). In other words, in these systems meaning is *relationally determined*.

To say that a word or term gets its meaning from the place it occupies within a linguistic system—be it *langue,* language-game or school of thought—is simultaneously to say something else. It is to say that the word or term has no meaning *outside* a system, it is to say that it does not have a meaning 'of its own' (Pêcheux, 1982:112). In other words, words or terms are 'theory-laden', and may be so in contradictory ways. As we know, different schools of thought do have different *conceptual* apparatuses. However, they do not necessarily have altogether different *terminologies*. Rather, it happens quite often that some terms are common property, belonging, so to speak, to more than one theoretical system, even if the concepts differ radically (the terms 'value' and 'class' are cases in point).

To put it differently, these terms are *polysemous,*[4] i.e. they have the quality of simultaneously pointing in more than one direction; pointing, that is, *at different concepts* (in Saussurean parlance, this would be equivalent to say that the signifier is attached to several signifieds).

Often, this does not create problems—it is reasonable to assume that in most cases the term is contextualized enough to indicate or make clear which concept is used. In other cases, however, the inherent polysemy does create problems by making statements and texts ambiguous, contradictory or undecidable. These 'pointings' are not random events. They are the *implications* that follow from insufficient contextualization. Strictly speaking, no contextualization in a text can ever be completed, 'any given context is open to further description. There is no limit *in principle* to what might be included in a given context' (Culler, 1987a: 123f, italics mine. Cf. also, for example, Derrida, 1988d:9 and Foucault, 1982:

But let us be content, provisionally, with the assumption that terms may be *sufficiently* contextualized. Now, in cases of 'insufficient' contextualization, a statement or passage becomes contradictory, ambiguous, undecidable, etc. *in its relation* to other statements or passages, which in turn may be consistent or not in their relations to all the others. This incoherence, etc. or, more precisely, this incoherent, etc.

section of the text might then *imply* or *make necessary* a theorization that goes outside the theoretical system in relation to which it is contradictory, etc. This 'outside' may be other schools of thought, ideologies, or whatever. It may *also* be the case that the implications are of a nature that demand a whole new theoretical effort, *outside any existing theoretical system,* it may be the case that the section of the text is an answer to a question that *could not* have been posed (cf. Althusser, 1975:22f). In short, these insufficiencies of the text make possible or even necessary leaps from one mode of thought into another, i.e., leaps that I below will designate as *paradigmatic leaps.*

Polysemy may thus be considered a part of an explanation of how and why different readings of a single text occurs. But as such a part, it has to be situated in *the context of the text,* which in turn has to be contextualized, and to which I will not return until certain other points have been made.

In order to illustrate this 'theory-ladenness' of terms, I will take the opportunity momentarily to turn to Quentin Skinner and his essay *Language and Social Change* (1988d), where he holds the view that there is a class of terms, the appraisive, of which his definition runs as follows:

> To apply any word to the world, we need to have a clear grasp of both its sense and its reference. But in the case of appraisive terms a further element is also required. We need in addition to know what exact range of *attitudes* the term can *standardly* be used to express.
>
> <div align="right">(Skinner, 1988d:122, italics mine)</div>

For appraisive terms—and he exemplifies with the terms 'exploitation' and 'political' —it is the case that there exists a kind of *normal usage* 'in virtue of its *agreed* criteria' (Skinner; 1988d:125, italics mine), he says, and he claims that no 'genuine' discussion can take place between adherents of different theoretical approaches if they do not use certain terms in these normal, agreed upon senses.[5]

But it may be the case, I will argue, that—normally—there are *no normal uses, no agreed upon criteria,*[6] even for most of these terms, since they reasonably are determined in the same way as those other terms that are part of linguistic or theoretical systems, in so far as terms in ideological or belief systems also get their meaning from the places they occupy in a conceptual scheme[7] although the concepts may not be so well defined as they purportedly are in theoretical or scientific systems and although, admittedly, one characteristic of this kind of mode of thought is that it may differ from theoretical systems in that it may be— but not necessarily is—contradictory to a larger extent. But this will only make the meaning of these terms *more* ambiguous, not less, and thus further questions the existence of common, agreed upon criteria. The examples Skinner has chosen to illustrate and argue his thesis—'exploitation' and 'political' —seem to confirm this.

Whether Marxism is seen as science or ideology, these two terms are *normally* used within Marxism in a way quite different from how they are used in Liberalism

(and it is hard to see a neutral ground between the two), and to argue as Skinner does that a discussion between representatives of these two modes of thought cannot seriously take place if the Marxist cannot show 'with some plausibility that he is employing the term in virtue of its *agreed* sense, i.e., the Liberal's' (Skinner, 1988d:125), makes the norm and agreement seem somewhat one-sided. This will become even clearer if instead of a Liberal debating with the Marxist, we take a neo-classical economist and let them discuss the question of *exploitation,* also a term which might be claimed to be 'appraisive'. Clearly, in neo-classical economics, whether seen as science or ideology, there *is* no reality corresponding to such a term while for the Marxist exploitation is a concept, part of a theoretical system that claims to explain the world, getting its meaning from the other concepts in the system, concepts such as, for example, class, value and surplus-value. Now, to ask of the neo-classically inclined person that he should accept the agreed upon criteria for that term's normal use in Marxism, a theoretical system about which he may know absolutely nothing, seems rather far-fetched.

Now, if it is true that appraisive terms get their meaning just as any other term that is part of one or more modes of thought, then what is *normal* is one thing—it seems to be a matter either of the most common usage defined by sheer number of users of a specific vocabulary or it is a matter of which group in society dominates, is most powerful, etc. Quite another question is, though, what is *agreed upon,* because there is nothing indicating that such an agreement exists but superficially, even though disagreement in particular cases may be hard to detect, since users of different vocabularies seldom confront one another in depth.[8]

And if *this* is the case, if it is the case that each theoretical or ideological approach uses terms in, from *its* point of view, perfectly *normal* ways but that these uses from other points of view are perfectly *pervert* ways—who shall then *decide* what is the *most normal way*? And why should the outcome of such a decision force certain adherents of certain theoretical or ideological approaches to accept *this* definition of what is normal and change their vocabulary? The feasibility seems dim, and it seems rather odd to claim, as Skinner does, that 'a refusal to apply the term in a situation may constitute an act of social insensitivity or a failure of social awareness' (Skinner, 1988d:125).

The conclusion seems to have to be: terms do not exist in splendid isolation or on 'neutral' grounds and cannot be treated as if they so did (see also Bakhtin, 1981b:293). A pluralism exists, in the scientific field as well as in the ideological, in which fields these terms form part; a competitive pluralism built upon power relations in many cases, no doubt (cf., for example, Feyerabend, 1987:260ff). But that such a pluralism of linguistic practices should cause Skinner to draw the following conclusion is short of fantastic:

> When we encounter a wide measure of agreement about the application of key social terms, we must be dealing with a strikingly homogeneous social and moral world; *where there is no such agreement we can expect chaos*.
>
> (Skinner, 1988d:131)[9]

Schools of thought

I will for the moment leave terminologies and polysemy to one side, and instead pay some attention to conceptual systems or schools of thought. Here, I would like to claim that any such theoretical system can 'work', i.e. produce 'reliable' knowledge in an absolute sense, only if it is consistent.[10] This means that concepts that stand in a contradictory relation to each other cannot, *ultimately,* be part of the same school of thought since their logical implications in the knowledge producing process will produce contradictory results.

However, leaving the ideal for a second to avoid possible misunderstandings, a school of thought as an academically *institutionalized* mode of thought in the here and now will in all probability be plagued with internal incoherences, etc. not yet detected (cf., for example, Lakatos's, 1974, ideas on 'research programmes') incoherences that supposedly the academic milieu will strive to correct.

But furthermore, consistency should here—in the non-ideal world—be taken rather loosely, as may my use of the terms 'absolute sense' and 'ultimately' (above) indicate, in so far as they refer to an 'idealized' situation never likely to occur in actual scientific practice.

Not drawing upon Gödel's *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems* (1992), concerned as it is with the consistency of formalized arithmetical calculus, i.e. of a 'deductive system starting from a limited number of axioms' (Braithwaite, 1992:2) —a state some social sciences may aspire to but more likely than not never will attend—I will instead use some arguments closer to the social sciences put forward by Christopher Cherniak (1986) to show the difference involved between the 'ideal' and the 'practical'.

Following Cherniak's analysis of rationality, two things must be emphasized. First, humans are 'finite objects' and, second, humans may 'have less than perfect deductive ability' (Cherniak, 1986:3), leading to the 'platitude' —the term is Cherniak's—that nobody is perfect (Cherniak, 1986:7). This platitude's bearing upon the *practical* problem of a theoretical system's consistency is huge, as I hope will become clear in a moment.

What is at stake here is the possibility of having a complete view of a theoretical system as a whole, a view which would enclose every statement possible to make within the system, including every statement's logical implications, and the logical implications of these implications, and so on. This is not sufficient, however. It is also necessary to be able to check the logical consistency between these statements, between their respective logical implications, and between the implications of these implications, and so on. The possibility of having and doing this is summarized by Cherniak as the idealization 'A actually believes (or, infers, or can infer) all and only consequences of A's beliefs' (Cherniak, 1986:12). This task not only requires 'ideal deductive ability', it is also infinite (1986:12f), 'entailing the use of infinite resources' (1986:78). Already a system consisting of no more than '138 logically independent propositions' (1986:93) would demand the power of a super computer (see 1986:143n13, for specifications) for more than twenty billion years (1986:93), i.e., for a time longer than 'the entire history of the universe' (1986:143n13).

It should be noted that Cherniak's argument rests upon the assumption that what is dealt with is a system where there is no additional knowledge 'input' —a static system, in other words. Taking 'new' knowledge into account, the process obviously becomes more complicated…

Given that Cherniak's argument is correct or, at least, approaching the correct, it seems as if a demand for absolute consistency is illusory, and that we will have to do with something less demanding, i.e. that a theoretical system is—at any point in time, and *as far as we know*—free from inconsistencies. Again, that is, a 'Popper-like principle', where we should not look for the best but for the bad and do something about it.

After this diversion, let us return to the schools of thought. Different schools of thought have different *conceptual* apparatuses. The implication of having different conceptual apparatuses is that not only do different schools of thought *see* (understand, explain) different things but also that they *do not see* (understand, explain) different things. What *is* seen and what is *not* seen is determined by the respective conceptual apparatuses. To evoke a Derridean saying: 'there is no outside', to which one could add: there are only different insides. Following Althusser, we may say that

> the invisible is defined by the visible as *its* invisible, *its* forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible…the outer darkness of exclusion—but the *inner darkness of exclusion,* inside the visible itself because defined by its structure.
>
> (Althusser, 1975:26)

Thus, different schools of thought produce, each in its own way, different knowledges by their conceptual apparatuses that define their insights and blindnesses, i.e., still following Althusser, 'the invisible is no more a function of a *subject's sighting* than is the visible' (Althusser, 1975:26). Each specific object of knowledge is, in other words, defined within the domain of specific schools of thought, the object of knowledge is not simply something 'out there', it is produced within the confines of theoretical systems, which is not the same as to say that a school of thought produces the 'real'; rather each school of thought '*re-produces* reality… by submitting it to its own organization' (Benveniste, 1971e:22).

Accepting the argument this far means that the knowledge producing process will be understood largely in terms of a conceptual system—the knowledge product is to a certain degree determined. It also means—this follows from the relative determinateness of knowledge—that a school of thought or theoretical system, and in this it seems to be similar to any linguistic system, 'is endowed with a *relative autonomy* that makes it subject to internal laws' (Pêcheux, 1982:58). We have already read Derrida on this theme, asserting with some insistence that 'the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely' (Derrida, 1976:158). And if it actually is the case that conceptual systems produce knowledge, then, as Pierre Macherey observes, 'the writer's choice is indeed the illusion of a choice' (Macherey, 1978:

48).[11] Hence, Derrida's conclusion that 'everyone writing is thus taken by surprise' (Derrida, 1976:160).

This line of thought corresponds in its generality to analyses made by a number of different theoreticians in different fields. So, for example, states already Jurij Tynjanov, the Russian Formalist, on the relation between the text and its author, that

> the interrelationship of elements within a work, changes the 'author's intention' into a catalyst, but does nothing more. 'Creative freedom' thus becomes an optimistic slogan which does not correspond to reality, but yields instead to the slogan 'creative necessity'.
>
> (Tynjanov, 1978b:74)

Much in a similar vein, Michel Foucault exemplifies with the case of a mathematical treatise, worth quoting at length:

> if in the main body of the treatise, one meets a proposition like 'Two quantities equal to a third quantity are equal to each other', the subject of the statement is the absolutely neutral position, indifferent to time, space, and circumstances, identical in any linguistic system, and in any code of writing or symbolization, that any individual may occupy when affirming such a proposition…. The subject of such a statement will be defined by these requisites and possibilities taken together; and he will not be described as an individual who has really carried out certain operations, who lives in an unbroken, never forgotten time, who has interiorized, in the horizon of his consciousness, a whole group of true propositions, and who retains, in the living present of his thought, their potential reappearance (this is merely, in the case of individuals, the psychological, 'lived' aspect of their position as enunciating subjects).
>
> (Foucault, 1982:94)

This is also one reason why, according to Foucault, analysis should be situated at the level of 'the said' (Foucault, 1982:122).

Finally, the philosopher and Popper-disciple Imre Lakatos writes (also on mathematics, but as much on human activity):

> Mathematical activity is human activity…mathematical activity produces mathematics. Mathematics, this product of human activity, 'alienates itself' from the human activity which has been producing it. It becomes a living, growing organism, that *acquires a certain autonomy* from the activity which has produced it; it develops its own autonomous laws of growth, its own dialectic. The genuine creative mathematician is just a *personification,* an incarnation of these laws which can only realise themselves in human action. Their incarnation, however, is rarely perfect. The activity of human mathematicians, as it appears in history, is only a fumbling realisation of the wonderful dialectic of mathematical ideas.
>
> (Lakatos, 1977:146, italics mine)

The concept of personification is, Lakatos adds in a footnote, 'closely analogous to Marx's concept of the capitalist as the personification of Capital'. This footnote also includes the significant remark that 'human activity can always suppress or distort the autonomy of alienated processes' (Lakatos, 1977:146n1, italics mine). Thus, it seems, for the moment at least, that the author has to be situated somewhere between the perfect and the imperfect, granting him the right to introduce inconsistency, incoherence, etc. into the product which, incidentally, accords with the literary theoretician Richard Harland's view on this matter 'In fact, hypotheses about intentions are probably most useful in explaining failures of meaning' (Harland, 1993:35, italics deleted).[12]

Language practices

My next step will be to make an analogy between the world of schools of thought on the one hand and certain elements in Saussurean linguistics and Wittgenstein's language games on the other. However, in doing so a certain 'rectification' is necessary. What needs to be rectified is, it seems to me, Saussure's two-layered system of *langue* and *parole*. In this venture, it is worthwhile once more to consider that words have different meanings within different schools of thought: 'words, expressions and propositions get their meanings from the discursive formation to which they belong' (Pêcheux, 1982:189; cf. also Ricoeur, 1974a, *passim*), because this fact will have effects on how we think language. It will no longer be possible only to observe, as Saussure did, differences between, say, the English and the French languages (think of the sheep/mouton-example), but it will also be necessary to recognize what Saussure did not deal with, i.e. a systematic difference *within,* so to speak, each language, a difference perhaps so great that it may be impossible strictly to speak of, for example, *the* English language in action at all (cf. Bakhtin, 1981b:291), *except* as a *condition of existence* for different language practices or communities (cf. Pratt, 1987:49) in much the same way as in Saussure *langue* can be said to be thought of as the condition of existence for *parole* (cf., for example, Jakobson, 1990:90 and Culler, 1988b:22). This condition of existence can thus be considered a *repertory* to which different modes of thought as language practices have a more or less limited access. Such a view does not imply the ontological presence of different languages as Jane Tompkins argues is the case in New Criticism, as we have seen above.

   These practices, it should be noted, are not restricted only to different schools of thought in the *scientific* community but covers the whole range of social classes, sub-communities along or across gender lines, etc. in society. Thus, for example, both the French semiotician Algirdas Greimas and Bakhtin notice in ways that resemble each other the existence of a plurality of language practices. Greimas notices that

> cultural differentiation in macrosocieties produces semiautonomous socio-
> semiotic groups that possess their own specific knowledge and discursive

competence and *within which closed communication circuits are set up.* (Greimas, 1990:23, italics mine. See also Greimas, 1987a:184–7, 1987b:199f)

And Bakhtin, in a different language, observes the existence of

> a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices…The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) —this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981b:262f; cf. also Jakobson, 1985:30ff)

To which one should add, of course, a prerequisite not only for the novel but for any text, and a condition for social life altogether as we know it.

Furthermore, these language practices *cannot* be thought of in terms of Saussure's *parole* where

> Speech…is an *individual* act of the *will* and the *intelligence,* in which one must distinguish: (1) the combinations through which *the speaker* uses the code provided by *langue* in order to express *his own thought,* and (2) the *psycho-physical* mechanism which enables him to externalize these combinations.
>
> (Saussure, 1988:14, italics mine)

From this follows also, and Saussure points it out, that speech, or *parole,* 'is *always* individual, and the individual is *always master* of it' (Saussure, 1988:13, italics mine). As we have seen above, many times over, this belief in 'mastery' that has been put in question from more angles than one, ignores both language's capabilities to disobey and the consequences that follows from the relative autonomy of schools of thought.

To Saussure's 'speech act'-individualism and the extreme but abstract freedom it grants the speaker, Voloshinov comments as if by direct reply that

> In point of fact, the speech act or, more accurately, its product—the utterance, cannot under any circumstances be considered an individual phenomenon in the precise meaning of the word and cannot be explained in terms of the individual psychological or psychophysiological conditions of the speaker. *The utterance is a social phenomenon* (Voloshinov, 1986:82; cf. also Bakhtin, 1986a:80f. See also Jakobson's critique of Saussure on this point, 1990:90–3).

Now, Saussure's view of speech as an individual act is, to a striking degree repeated by Quentin Skinner in his attempts to account for Wittgenstein's theory of the language game. Thus Quentin Skinner seized upon the idea of the language game in the early *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas* (1969:37), and has adhered to it since (see, for example, Skinner, 1975:209, 1988b:260). 'Meaning is use', Wittgenstein is reported to say in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1968: §43). What he actually writes is this:

> For a *large* class of cases—though *not* for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its *use* in the language (Wittgenstein, 1968 §43, italics added; for an analysis of this paragraph, see Henry Staten, 1986:86–8).

Still, it seems to me that there is another reading possible of the Wittgensteinian language game, in which the understanding of the games and consequently the use of 'use' will radically differ from Skinner's. What 'use' denotes in Skinner's hands becomes clear when he claims that meaning is: 'the *use* of the relevant sentence by a *particular* agent on a *particular* occasion with a *particular* intention (*his* intention) to make a *particular* statement' (Skinner, 1969:37, italics added). It is important to take notice of Skinner's insistence on the *particular* here because this, I will argue, is a key to his deviation from Wittgenstein as I understand him, and Voloshinov's critique of Saussure would be equally pertinent to Skinner.

   Now, I think that together with elements of Saussure's linguistics, Wittgenstein's language games will in an important way aid in completing the picture of language practices as I envision them. Not, however, as the language game is understood by Skinner.

   To get clear about this difference in understanding, and thus to get to the point where Wittgenstein's language games might be said to add to Saussure's linguistics, it is necessary to give a brief summary of Wittgenstein's idea of language games as I see it.[13] Wittgenstein expresses his view with but small variations in various texts, for example in *The Blue and Brown Books* (1975b), *Philosophical Grammar* (1980) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1968). For Wittgenstein, then, and in contradistinction to Skinner:

> The sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the *system* of signs, from the language to which it belongs. Roughly: understanding a sentence means understanding a language
>
>   (Wittgenstein, 1975b:5, italics mine)

and furthermore:

> *Systems* of communication…we shall call 'language games'…. We are not …regarding the language games which we describe as incomplete parts of a language, but as languages complete in themselves, as *complete systems of human communication*
>
>   (1975b:81, italics mine)

and he adds, significantly and immediately following the above:

> To keep this point of view in mind, it very often is useful to imagine such
> a simple language to be the entire *system of communication of a tribe* in a primitive
> state of society. Think of primitive arithmetics of such tribes.
>
> > (1975b:81, italics mine)

Similarly:

> A name has a meaning, a proposition has sense in the *calculus* to which it
> belongs. The calculus is as it were *autonomous*.... *The* meaning is the *role* of
> the word in the calculus.
>
> > (Wittgenstein, 1980:63, italics mine)[14]

And he points out that 'It is only *in* a language that I can mean something *by*
something' (Wittgenstein, 1968:18, italics mine), and therefore no thing has 'even
got a name except in the language-game' (1968:§49). The implications of this is,
of course, that a 'sentence only seems queer when one imagines a different language-
game for it from the one in which we actually use it' (1968:§195), it becomes
meaningless (cf. 1968:§47). Among other things, then, a language-game is a 'method
of representation' (1968:§50).[15]

   Now, the conclusion must be that language games are not *private* as Skinner's
use makes them, they are *social practices* (and we are back to Voloshinov again)[16]
and more like conceptual schemes. The British linguist Roy Harris, seeing in this
respect a similarity between Wittgenstein and Saussure, points out that for both

> the function of a word is no longer to be explained by reference to the thought
> it allegedly expresses; nor the thought in turn to be explained by reference to
> some 'object' or feature of the external world which it mentally 'represents'.
> Instead the word, now treated as an indivisible unit...is explained by contrasting
> its role with that of other words in the linguistic system of which it forms part.
>
> > (Harris, 1990:29)

But Skinner's use of 'use' has very little in common with this relational property
of language. For Skinner, 'use' seems to change with every new occasion, with
every new intention, with every new statement. It is almost as if Skinner rather
would endorse a theory of 'private' language, the possibility of which Wittgenstein
strongly argues against throughout his later writings, and particularly so in the
Philosophical Investigations.[17] What then is a private language? Gerd Brand, para-phrasing
Wittgenstein's position, gives this summary:

> Three traits characterize it: its words are related to what only the speaker
> knows; they are related to the private sensations of the speaker; whence it
> follows that another person cannot understand this language.
>
> > (Brand, 1979:59)

But, as Wittgenstein argues, *'it is not possible to obey a rule "privately": otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it'* (1968:§202, italics mine). Thus I find Skinner's interpretation of Wittgenstein's language games to be rather eccentric. It is as if Skinner believes in Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty:

> 'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less'. 'The Question is', said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean different things'. 'The question is', said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all'…. 'When I make a word do a lot of work like that', said Humpty Dumpty, 'I always pay it extra…Ah, you should see 'em come round me of a Saturday night', Humpty Dumpty went on, wagging his head gravely from side to side: 'for to get their wages, you know'.
>
> (Carroll, 1975:220f)[18]

Now, instead of Skinner's interpretation there is a possibility to draw a parallel between Wittgenstein's language games and, for example, modes of thought, paradigms or language practices. At least, there is the similarity that words get their meaning from their use *within* given language games or paradigms, respectively, and that, as Wittgenstein writes, 'the concept of knowing is *coupled* with that of the language-game' (1975a:§560, italics mine).

Thus, whether we name them language games, utterances, or language practices, we are dealing with social phenomena.

Moreover, it should be emphasized, in contradistinction to Greimas (above), that language practices *do not necessarily exist in isolation from one another*. Rather, different language practices, such as schools of thought in the social sciences, may have different relations (that may or may not be uneven and/or unequal) of dialogue, contest, interference, appropriation or exclusion with (some of) the others, much in the same vein as outlined by Mary Louise Pratt in her suggestion of a 'linguistics of contact' (Pratt, 1987:59–64),[19] although I have some reservations concerning the term 'contact' as do MacCabe (1987b:293) and Derrida (1987:253). MacCabe's suggestion of a 'linguistics of domination', even if more to the point does not, however, seem *wholly* appropriate since it loses sight of other elements that are inscribed in this plurality, i.e. the elements of dialogue and contest, that as far as the social sciences are concerned put the schools of thought in antagonistical *and* dialogical relations in which, partly at least, these different schools of thought develop (see, for example, Macdonell, 1986:43– 59).[20]

Due to the misgivings Saussure's *parole* has caused (Voloshinov, above; cf. also Pêcheux, 1982:58, 174), it seems reasonable either to replace it as a systemic level or at least to supplement the *langue/parole* couple[21] with a level constituted by the plurality of language practices as presented above, in a provisional form (cf. Pêcheux, 1982:58f). The importance of this level to the understanding of texts will become apparent as we proceed.

From the foregoing, it seems to me that it is possible to claim in analogy with Saussure's *langue* that not only do words get their meaning from the same differential relations within the respective systems but also that each school of thought as a language practice can be considered a *langue* in its own right, albeit at a level less abstract than Saussure's *langue* and with a crucial difference: Saussure's system of *langue* is the *condition of existence* for meaning production—it is an 'algebra', remember—while in schools of thought the 'complex terms' that constitute this algebra have got 'substance' (cf. Saussure, 1988:120) and through this substantiation they are *meaning producing systems.* Furthermore, viewing a school of thought in analogy with *langue,* two other and crucial relations that are present in Saussure's *langue* can and should be taken into consideration, namely the syntagmatic and paradigmatic *relations.*

For Saussure, in discourse words are on the one hand related linearly, horizontally, they are 'strung together one after another' in a sentence (Saussure, 1988: 121), just as in the one you are reading right now. This relation Saussure calls *syntagmatic,* and he points out that 'in a syntagma, any unit acquires value simply in opposition to what precedes, or to what follows, or to both' (Saussure, 1988: 121). On the other hand, there is the associative, vertical, or *paradigmatic*[22] relation. As the term 'associative' indicates, it is a relation between each word in the syntagmatic sequence and the words *not* chosen, between words, that is, that *were* chosen and those words that *could have been* chosen in their stead (to select 'choose' instead of choosing 'select' would be an example of this relation).

Thus, according to the analogy, in the case of a school of thought the syntagmatic relation is the horizontal or linear relation between concepts, and the paradigmatic relation is the vertical or, as Saussure writes, 'associative' relation between concepts that are and are not present in the syntagma. This latter relation is, I will argue below but not until the properties of the text have been introduced, another substantial moment in the understanding of the phenomenon of multiple readings of theoretical texts.

However, it is already at this stage possible to point out a consequence that has to be taken into consideration when reading theoretical texts. Paul Ricoeur (1991a) argues that there is a fundamental difference between ordinary and scientific language that is based upon the different aims of the two. The aim of ordinary language is communication, he claims, while

> Strictly speaking…communication is not the aim of a scientific language. *When we read a scientific paper,* we are not in the position of an individual member of the speech community…*All readers are, in a sense, one and the same mind, and the purpose of discourse is not to build a bridge between two spheres of experience,* but to insure the identity of meaning from the beginning to the end of an argument…*The meaning is contextually neutral,* or, if you prefer, insensible to the context, because the main purpose of this language is that the meaning remain the same all through the arguments.
>
> (Ricoeur, 1991a:75, italics mine)[23]

Ricoeur uses this argument to sustain a claim that whereas ordinary language is polysemous, scientific language aims to be a '*"langue bien faite"* ruled by the principle of a one-to-one relation between signs and entities, *of one meaning for each word*' (Ricoeur, 1991a:75, italics mine). However, if it is the case, as I have argued with some insistence, that observation is theory-laden, that terms are theory-laden, and that the different theoretical systems are the means by which we see and not see and experience and not experience, then the claim that all readers of a scientific paper are of 'one and the same mind' is highly debatable. Rather, it seems—if you admit the plausible assumption that readers 'belong' to or work within different schools of thought—that readers are *at least* of as many minds as these schools of thought.[24]

Furthermore, whatever the purpose Ricoeur claims on behalf of scientific 'discourse', there do exist within the scientific community different spheres of experience, as many *at least* as there are schools of thought through which experience is articulated. If this is the case, and if it is also the case—and it would be impossible not to be—that the paper we read is written within some conceptual apparatus(es) belonging to some theoretical system(s), then meaning is not, and cannot be, contextually neutral—it is contextually dependent upon at least the school(s) of thought from within which it is written. The author finds himself, as Bakhtin says:

> inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language. With each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it, it chooses, in other words, a 'language'.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981b:295)[25]

Without bringing once more to discussion the possible *control* the writer has over the language so chosen, the question whether the 'meaning remains the same all through the argument', as Ricoeur seems to claim, is, if my argument so far is reasonable, beside the point, even if one may wish to congratulate the writer for succeeding in being consistent. Thus, within the social and human sciences (at least) a *langue bien faite* seems a chimera; a dream upheld and a claim made, for sure, by all schools of thought within these fields, and it may of course be the case that of all these schools that do exist, one really *has* the right to this claim. To pursue *this* problem would, however, lead us afield, into the question of a 'discourse of order' instead of the present one which is rather, as has already been stated, on the problem of the 'order of discourses'.

From the preceding it follows that once we admit the existence of different schools of thought with divergent conceptual apparatuses but with (some) terms in common in the sense that I have described above, polysemy will be inscribed in social scientific practice as a possibility and, it seems, a *necessary* possibility as long as these co-existing schools of thought continue to exist. Thus, this necessity has to be taken into account by any theory that pronounces judgement on or that purports to analyse the properties of theoretical texts or scientific language. It is as if the general conclusions of this

possibility reiterates those of another possibility, the possibility of the absence of the 'sender', the 'receiver', etc. of a given 'message', and of which possibility Derrida writes in his limited 'communication' with John Searle:

> if one admits that writing (and the mark in general) *must be able* to function in the absence of the sender, the receiver, the context of production, etc., that implies that this power, this *being able, this possibility* is *always* inscribed, hence *necessarily* inscribed *as possibility* in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark. Once the mark *is able* to function, once it is possible for it to function, once it is possible for it to function in the case of an absence, etc., it follows that this possibility is a necessary part of its structure, that the latter must *necessarily be such that* this functioning is possible; and hence, that this must be taken into account in any attempt to analyze or to describe, in terms of necessary laws, such a structure.
>
> (Derrida, 1988c:48)

It also follows that *referentiality,* taken as a 'one-to-one relation between signs and entities', must be questioned. This questioning, however, depends upon from which perspective it is made. There are, at least, two different angles from which one may claim such a referentiality. The first one is from *within* a specific school of thought and meant in such a context I will neither have quarrel with nor the space to pursue the problem. However, if it is made in the name of science as an alleged unitary practice, as a metastatement, then the questioning becomes serious. The matter will in any case not be as simple as Jan Mukarovsky believes when he juxtaposes the sign in its theoretical and aesthetic functions, where in the former the sign 'is subjected to control with respect to its conformity to…reality' (Mukarovsky, 1978:46) and where the 'theoretical function deprives the signs which it uses of any initiative, rendering them as maximally fixed terms' (Mukarovsky, 1978:47). What Mukarovsky says here amounts to a view where, in theoretical texts, signs have stable, unequivocal meanings. There is no possible opening for different modes of thought with different languages which may or may not use the same vocabulary but use it differently.[26]

The questioning of referentiality may, in other words, proceed from the same existence of different schools of thought that inscribe polysemy as a possibility in everyday scientific practice. Not only may what is a 'one-to-one relation between sign and entity' to adherents of one school of thought be sheer fantasy to adherents of other schools of thought, even the *conception* of reference may differ.[27]

Regarding, then, a school of thought as one language practice among others, I am inclined to argue that 'scientific language' as materialized in a school of thought works in two directions simultaneously, centrifugally and centripetally. As purporting to 'explain something' (Gaukroger, 1978:3), it points centrifugally at this 'something', at its object of knowledge. As a theoretical *system,* it points centripetally to *itself,* to its quality as language and thus to the relations between its signs: it 'draws attention to itself' as Russian Formalists would say. In other words, a school of thought is

not only a mechanism for producing *knowledge,* it is also a *meaning-producing system.* As such, it does not only refer outside itself, towards that part of reality that it has set out to explain, it *also* refers to *itself*— something those who advocate a difference between the poetic and everyday functions of a language tend to deny. As a meaning-producing system it refers to its own possibilities to produce meaning, to its own rules for producing knowledge. Each concept, for instance, does not only draw attention to itself, it simultaneously draws attention to the *whole* system, since the concept's meaning, in Saussure's words, is not what it is *in itself,* but what it becomes in relation to the other concepts in the system—it is, like *langue,* a system of differences or, better, as in Derrida where each word, each concept, is entangled in a system of *différance,* and where it is thus 'contaminated' by the whole language within which it is written, so that in each concept the others are implied— they all leave their 'traces' in one another. A difference, that is, between the discreet (Saussure) and the indiscreet (Derrida). In most literary theories that we have become acquainted with above, this centripetal quality is classified as belonging to poetic language or the poetic function, and denied referential or scientific language (see, for example, Chapters 4 and 5). But it should *also* be remembered that the centrifugal quality of scientific language is rather specific: it points to something that is *internally* organized and defined. In other words, the centrifugality has also centripetal qualities. If this is the case, then it seems possible to claim, with Roman Jakobson's words, that 'Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification' (Jakobson, 1987c:69). However, the last part of the next sentence in Jakobson's text would have to be somewhat modified. He writes: 'The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent' (Jakobson, 1987c:69). The subsidiary nature of the poetic function, understood in this way, seems to change into the major position, and what Jakobson observes concerning poetry, i.e., that although the poetic function dominates the referential, it does not 'obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous' (Jakobson, 1987c:85) could equally well be applied to theoretical texts.

Let us be reminded, however, that we have had ample evidence in preceding chapters that *both* these problems, that of polysemy and that of referentiality, have been sadly ignored by most of those who claim that science and scientific language are characterized by unisemity and univocality, *including* Jakobson.

The text

The time has now come to look a bit more closely at the text, the site for the realizations of schools of thought, polysemy, undecidability, ambiguity, contradiction, incoherence, etc.; the text which is, according to Bakhtin:

> the primary given of all these disciplines and of all thought in the human sciences and philosophy in general…The text is the unmediated reality (reality

of thought and experience), the only one from which these disciplines and this thought can emerge. Where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either.

(Bakhtin, 1986b:103)

I claimed in Chapter 1 that the text is less abstract, i.e. that is has more determinations, than a theoretical system or school of thought. This was done by reference to a statement made by Stephen Savage, one of the social scientists to discuss criticism and modes of critique, who had reached the conclusion that a text is a plurality of different view points. This theme has now to be elaborated upon.

The phenomenon of *the text* might be thought of as a *given* that is present on the pages in a book, in a collection of essays or in a journal. Actually, it is not quite that simple. As we have seen above, Michael Dummett includes the works of an author in order to understand and create unity in what is said, others rip off from the text some of its qualities in the same pursuit and in order to reach its same 'pure' unity, yet others force upon the text qualities it has not asked for, as for instance foreign epistemologies. They all face the same dilemma, though: they *add and/or subtract,* and thus *change* the text from what it is to what it, perhaps, could have been or *ought* to be. Accordingly, these procedures do not produce knowledge of the text as such, but only of some of its *putative* properties. They are processes of both restricting and extending the text in a unifying venture and although perhaps not illegitimate *per se* they have no place where the purpose is to understand peculiarities of a text. In the words of Derrida, this 'motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence,* is decidedly the one to be destroyed' (Derrida, 1982e:63) if these peculiarities are to be revealed.

Generally speaking, even Macherey's proposal if criticism is to be a 'rational enterprise' demands that one would have to leave the text, whatever one wants from it (cf. Macherey, 1978:90 and Todorov, 1981:4): the text

must be elaborated, *used* [i.e. not passively consumed, perceived], for without this it will never be a theoretical fact, an object of knowledge; but *it must also be left as it is,* if we are to achieve a theoretical judgment and avoid value judgments. It must be constructed and maintained within its proper limits: that is to say, not used for edification.

(Macherey, 1978:78, italics mine)[28]

This 'methodological hypothesis', as Macherey calls it, is familiar to readers of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations,* in which Wittgenstein develops principles for philosophy consonant with this demand of Macherey's upon criticism; thus in §§ 124 and 125 Wittgenstein writes, and I will quote extensively:

124. Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language… *It leaves everything as it is.* It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A 'leading problem of mathematical logic' is for us a problem of mathematics like any other.

125. It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us: the state of affairs *before* the contradiction is resolved. (And this does not mean that one is sidestepping a difficulty.) The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand (i.e. get a clear view of). It throws light on our concept of *meaning* something. For in those cases things turn out otherwise than we had meant, foreseen. That is just what we say when, for example, a contradiction appears: 'I didn't mean it like that.' The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem.

(Wittgenstein, 1968:49ef)

For the text 'to be left as it is' means, in other words, that neither 'purification' nor 'contamination' can be considered licit; i.e. in order to know a text *nothing* should be added to or subtracted from it (cf. also Riffaterre, 1983:6).

Such a fundamental respect for the text should, I think, be contrasted with an approach not uncommon in the readings of scientific texts, as that of, for example, Joseph Schumpeter and Marc Blaug. Schumpeter writes, when discussing Adam Smith's value theory, that

A. Smith expressly states: 'Wages, profit, and rent, are the three *original* [my italics; J.S.] sources of all revenue as well as of all exchangeable value.' *If words mean anything,* this is conclusive. His theory of value was what later on came to be called a cost-of-production theory.

(Schumpeter, 1985:309, italics added)

To uphold this cost-of-production interpretation, Schumpeter has to violate his dictum that words mean something, and reject other Smithian phrases by comments like 'those treacherous platitudes that may mean anything and nothing' (Schumpeter, 1985:309) and

he tries to motivate his decision by so many arguments that seem to claim deeper meaning for it…and seems himself so little clear about what is and what is not implied in choosing something for a numeraire that it is almost excusable if many later economists misunderstood what he actually did mean.

(Schumpeter, 1985:310, italics deleted)

Similarly, Mark Blaug, when arguing against a labour theory of value in Smith: 'The phrase "labor is the foundation and essence of wealth" was among the shibboleths of the time, a convenient weapon against mercantilist thinking' (Blaug, 1968:54).

Now, by not respecting the text, and by arguing that *words* matter (even if not *all* words, not *all* phrases), Schumpeter and Blaug reduce and reformulate the problem, because what is at stake, and what they cannot see, is a question *not of words but*

of functions, not of terms but of concepts (a similar observation is also made, in another context, by the literary theoretician Michael Riffaterre, 1983: 298) —concepts that their mode of reading seems unable to spot, concepts that, so to speak, threaten the—assumed—unity of the text, belonging as it were to another unity, to another mode of thought; strange fruits forbidden to pluck.

So much for the meaning of words…

Now, no matter how much respect one pays the text, it is still not 'given'. That is, even if we agree with Mikhail Bakhtin's observation that for the social or human sciences 'where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either', it nevertheless remains to conceptualize this text, to produce (knowledge of) it, and in order to do this, it has to be worked upon, it has to be treated as 'raw material' of a 'second order' (a product turned raw material) —in short, it has to be constituted as an object of knowledge. Not until this is done, will we know what it is made of and what might be produced with the help of it (for example, in terms of readings).

Yet, I want to argue below that to see the text as a plurality of 'points of views' of whatever kind will be as close as we possibly may come to respecting the text on its own terms and 'leave it as it is', neither adding nor subtracting but instead taking notice of its plural determinations.

In order to indicate what this plurality may represent and at the same time letting it serve as a starting point for the discussion of my own proposal, I will use a quotation from Paul Thibault that in a condensed form catches most of the themes that I want to discuss:

> A particular text is, generally speaking, the material site of a plurality of heteroglossically related social discourses and their voicings. Specific texts, therefore, both instantiate and realize the heteroglossic relations of alliance, conflict, opposition, and co-optation among discursive positioned-practices.
> (Thibault, 1991:120)

Actually, the text first became problematized along these lines by the Bakhtin Circle in the Soviet Union (M.M.Bakhtin, V.N.Voloshinov and P.N.Medvedev)[29] in theorizing the *novel* as opposed to the poem.[30] Later on, Julia Kristeva, one of the introducers of Bakhtin's thought into the Western world,[31] elaborated upon Bakhtin's notions of *dialogue* and *heteroglossia* and introduced her own *intertext* and *intertextuality* (see, for example, Kristeva, 1987b, c),[32] and these terms have since won widespread acceptance.[33] The basic ideas contained herein were also advanced, although neither by names nor by terms, by Pierre Macherey, whose *Theory of Literary Production* appeared a year before Kristeva's texts.[34]

My aim is to exploit some elements—and I want to emphasize: elements[35] — implied by the notions of intertext and intertextuality in the examination of social scientific texts. Such a generalization seems at times to be in opposition to a crucial element in Kristeva's theorizing: she makes *a sharp distinction and opposition* between the poetic and scientific languages and discourses, where the latter is seen to be

univocal—*'univocal, rational, scientific discourse',* she writes (Kristeva, 1987a:135, italics mine) —the effects of which really should be the exclusion of inter textual relations from scientific texts.

However, Kristeva's general conception of the text is that it is characterized by 'a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech…to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances', and intertext 'is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another' (Kristeva, 1987c:36). Similarly, she notes of intertextuality that it denotes a

> transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another…*every* signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality)…In this way, polysemy can also be seen as the result of polyvalence— an adherence to different sign systems.
>
> (Kristeva, 1984:59f, italics mine)

These general outlines of intertext and intertextuality *cannot,* to my mind, exclude theoretical texts: it would be rather odd, for example, to argue that theoretical 'discourse' would not be a 'signifying practice', and since, in her own words, '*every* signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality)', so theoretical texts must, according to *this* definition, be included in the domains that can be thought with the help of the notions of intertext and intertextuality. If this is so, then 'rational, scientific discourse' *cannot be* univocal. It is possible, therefore, to *disregard* Kristeva's opinions on the alleged differences between poetic and scientific languages from which it follows that theoretical texts are univocal, and instead maintain that the basic notions of text, intertext and intertextuality may be of use in analysing theoretical or scientific texts as *fundamentally polyvocal.*

For Bakhtin (Kristeva's source of inspiration), on the other hand, *dialogue* in theoretical texts is explicitly seen as constitutive; thus, already in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (first published in 1929):

> The scholarly article—where various author's utterances on a given question are cited, some for refutation and others for confirmation and supplementation— is one instance of a dialogic interrelationship among directly signifying discourses within the limits of a single context. The relationships of agreement/ disagreement, affirmation/supplementation, question/answer, etc., are purely dialogic relationships, although not of course between words, sentences or other elements of a single utterance, but between whole utterances.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1984:188)

This *polyvocality* of the theoretical text is constituted by a 'diversity of languages …and a diversity of individual voices' (Bakhtin, 1981b:262), where language can be conceived of as

heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth.

(Bakhtin, 1981b:291)

This hierarchization of languages does not—this parallels the discussion on language practices above—as Caryl Emerson stresses in her preface to Bakhtin's Dostoevsky-volume, exclude 'intersections' and 'overlappings' between the different languages where, in these 'meetings' meaning transformation occurs; words are pulled 'into various gravitational fields and casting specific light and shadow' (Emerson, 1984:xxxi).

The field from which the material that goes into the text is taken is predetermined. Michael McCanles introduces the term *discursive space,* an extension of Wittgenstein's 'logical space' outlined in *Tractatus,* 4.463,[36] to deal with this determinateness, and I quote:

'Discursive space' is this synchronically conceived field of meaning from which each text selects those statements that can be formed into logically coherent wholes…a text can come into existence only by selecting from its funding system of available statements some statements and rejecting others. And since this system must consist not only of a set of semantically interrelated terms but also their contraries, every text is potentially liable to having to confront other, competing texts formed from those statements likewise generated by the same synchronic system, which statements nevertheless contradict the first text.

(McCanles, 1978:192)[37]

The discursive field may for analytical reasons be differentiated into two subfields, I suggest, where the one field, consisting of the 'set of semantically interrelated terms', could be called the *syntagmatic* subfield and where the other, consisting of the first's 'contraries', could be called the *paradigmatic* subfield. This will, as I hope to show below, enhance our understanding of how certain mechanisms of the text encourages multiple readings.

Through the arguments any theoretical text always is involved in ('The speaker is not the biblical Adam'; Bakhtin, 1986a:93), explicitly and implicitly, *pro* and *contra,* by quotations and citations, by allusions (consciously put there or not), as a rejoinder or as waiting for response, by its quality of being thoughts on thoughts, where all languages 'are specific points of view on the world' (Bakhtin, 1981b: 291), where each word gets a meaning from within the language practice(s) or school(s) of thought to which it belongs, and where 'there can be neither a first nor a last meaning; it always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning' (Bakhtin, 1986c:146; cf. Macherey, 1978:100), the text becomes not only a meeting place for a plurality of voices, but also a materialization of schools of thought, of world views, etc., it is 'a theatre of cultural war, the critical scene where the

combatants are schools of thought and polemical judgments, and the prize is institutionalized authority' (Lack, 1991:132); i.e. it is a plurality of meanings. However, the meanings of these confined meanings is no simple and clear-cut matter; they are not under the complete control of the author. Each and every quotation, citation, etc. that is incorporated into the text, and 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations' (Kristeva, 1987b:66), becomes contextualized anew, and will mean something it did not mean before since meaning is context-bound. Henry Staten points this out, supplementing his observation with a caution:

> As a word slides from one set of surroundings to another, it undergoes subtle shifts of function ('meaning') in response to variations in the surroundings, and if we keep our attention fixed on the unchanging element in the meaning, we miss the shift.
>
> (Staten, 1986:95, see also p. 122)

Thus, what a word or string of words meant when the author confronted it in its erstwhile context, and which meaning he might have wanted to transfer will, in the new context into which it is recontextualized, have the possibility to mean something else; this 'overlapping of structures is the…agent of semantic change' (Riffaterre, 1983:41) and will be among 'those disparities that point to a conflict of meaning' (Macherey, 1978:79).

Not only, then, is the theoretical text polyvocal, it is polysemic as well. In the words of Pierre Macherey: *'diversity is the principle of the text'* (Macherey, 1978: 26, italics added). In other words, neither the polyvocality and polysemy of the text, whether in the form of quotations or allusions (for example), nor, thus, the text as a whole, is something freely produced or totally controlled by the author.

Another way of locating intertextual references is to look for possible indices of polyvocality and polysemy. Such indices would be the presence of contradictions, incoherences, ambiguities, etc., in or between statements. That is, a contradiction (or a series of contradictions) or tension (s) in the text may be a sign of the existence of other schools of thought, of world views, etc. It may also be the sign of a demand for—and this cannot be stressed enough—a whole new theoretical system. This 'phenomenon', this occurrence can, I think, be subsumed under what Bakhtin describes by the term *organic hybrids* or *hybridization:*

> What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages', two semantic and axiological belief systems… there is no formal…boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1981b:304f)

Bakhtin adds that the hybridization is a blend not only of 'two social languages' but also of 'two socio-linguistic…world views', into the field of which I would regard as included schools of thought, and that this mixture or articulation 'remains mute and opaque, *never* making use of *conscious* contrasts and oppositions' (Bakhtin, 1981b:360, italics mine). Thus, this fusion may be seen as a result of co-existing theoretical systems in a text and its indication is the contradiction, tension or undecidability that has been encountered (cf., for example, Foucault, 1982:152). This is not to assume, however, that either of these systems of thought are thought through in the text, or that the author of the text is aware of their presence. It is only to assume that since concepts have logical implications, these implications 'strive' in different directions, imply different other—also contradictory—concepts contained, implicitly or explicitly, in other (possible) theoretical systems.

In his analysis of d'Alembert's *Discours Preliminaire,* Robert Darnton points precisely to such a co-existence of schools of thought. Thus, he notes that

> Arguments often burst at the seams with incompatibilities, not because their author intended them to but because he unconsciously utilized different idioms. D'Alembert wrote at a time when scholastic, Cartesian and Lockean language jostled one another in philosophic discourse. He easily slipped from one idiom to another whenever he dropped his guard.
>
> (Darnton, 1984:204)[38]

In contrast to quotations, citations, etc. which make their presence immediately felt, contradictions, tensions, etc. are not as obvious. Yet, it is perhaps here that the mechanisms that make possible multiple readings are at work in their most efficient manner. Facing quotations and citations, the reader knows—or *may* at least know—what to expect. The confrontation with hybrids—without any *real* confrontation—takes place without caution.

This confrontation, it should be emphasized again, that originates in, for example, contradictory statements, i.e. possible traces of schools of thought strange to the text, shall not be understood as if the text would be a ground upon which 'meetings' occur on equal terms. Rather, as Derrida writes, 'the writer writes in a language and in a logic' which he cannot dominate but which on the contrary dominates him (Derrida, 1976:158). Derrida also notes, and this is not, I will take it, the same thing, that the writer's 'writing is inscribed in a determined *textual system*' (Derrida, 1976:160, italics mine). To explicate: writing 'in a language and in a logic' is to be situated within the confines of a theoretical system, writing with *its* language and within *its* logic, using *its* concepts and being bound by *its* rules for knowledge production. To be inscribed in a 'textual system' is to be situated in an intertextual field and a discursive space, which is something altogether different. These positions are of different orders, something that may be made clear by reference to the text. The text is written, as a *dominant tendency,* within a language and within a logic but it has access to the intertextual field and discursive space to which belong those other utterances, words, etc., that are 'taken from other texts', those other

'signifying systems', etc., that together with the language and logic within which the writer writes make up the text. The point of this is that the writer's language and logic, the text's 'primary code' (Riffaterre, 1983:120) as it were, has the upper hand in the text, is in a dominant position: 'The process of intertextual reference is governed by the rules of the discursive formation within which it occurs' (Frow, 1991:46). However, the other language practices, be they schools of thought, world views, or whatever (with their own internal logics for producing concepts and knowledge), that, subordinated, appear in the text tend to *undermine* the claims made in the name of the school of thought in dominance through their concepts, conceptual relations, statements that are not compatible with the concepts, conceptual relations or statements in dominance.

Inside any text, that is, several different and between themselves contradictory modes of thought may be realized and one of these will in all probability be in a dominant position. Note that nothing is said here about the author being conscious of the existence of but one of these tendencies (which is not the same as to say that he necessarily must be unaware of the other(s)). It is fair to assume—but not necessary—that what the writer sees as his main thread is governed by the mode of thought to which he consciously adheres, but this does not imply that what others see as important or even determining aspects of the text could not be governed by a tendency, a mode of thought, about which the writer is totally unaware.[39] These *subversive* tendencies—subversive from the point of view of the writer and from the point of view of textual consistency, since they do not support the dominant tendency but in one way or another are at odds with it, contradicting it, undermining its concepts and theses—may very well be so prominent as to undermine the writer's professed theory to such an extent that he cannot recognize his own text when read by others; the text becomes undecidable but determinate —following here Derrida's distinction between indeterminability and undecidability: 'undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities… These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations' (Derrida, 1988d:148) —making its readers simply 'mis'-state its author's intentional meaning, they 'mis'-read him, they 'mis'-understand what he is trying to convey. In such a case, there is not much to be won by referring to 'explicitly pointed out' influences, whether these contradict in a most severe manner the subversive tendency(-ies) at work or not. The intentions of the writer to let this or that mode of thought govern his text is obviously not enough, and there is nothing 'preposterous' about pointing out that other tendencies—dominant or not— govern the text, in part or wholly.

Simultaneous with these subversive challenges, the dominant theoretical system, however, has the power, in its quality of being the *context* within which the subordinated schools of thought, etc. are re-contextualized, to alter—not the schools of thought themselves, but statements that in one way or another bear the traces of them. The text is, then, a *hierarchy* of meaning producing practices, an articulation of different schools of thought, etc., where 'This articulation involves relations

of dominance and subordination between registers, and this clash of languages is a clash of realities' (Frow, 1988:169). If we accept the argument so far, it follows that the author works upon an already available material; in this complexity of the text lies its necessity according to Macherey: 'The work does not develop at random, in undiscriminating freedom; it grows because it is precisely determined at every moment and at every level' (Macherey, 1978:39). The necessity of the text is not, however, a pre-determination, a plan, an intention, to which it adheres; it is, rather, a *product*. The text is 'the point where several lines of necessity converge' (Macherey, 1978:42). These lines of necessity thus constitute the text not as unity but as polyvocal, polysemous and contrapuntal. This is *not* to deny that the author has decisions to make, and that he makes them, but it is to argue that he cannot decide whatever he pleases at any given moment: 'his decisions are determined…[and] *certain* directions are *firmly closed* to him' (Macherey, 1978:48, italics mine).

It also follows that an analysis of the text cannot be content with or reduced to a search for *influences,* one reason which is, as Staten states, that 'what matters is not the historical fact of influence but the existence of such important correspondences that they could lead one to suspect an influence' (Staten, 1986:xvii), but has to take into account the text's *intertext,* which also—supplementing Kristeva's above—can be seen as 'a general field of anonymous formulae…of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation-marks' (Barthes, 1981:39; cf. also Frow, 1988:157).

Finally, it follows that the text is neither self-sufficient nor complete. It has a 'determinate insufficiency' (Macherey, 1978:79), and although 'the movement of the text is systematic…its system is not simple and complete' (Macherey, 1978:100), it is dependent upon the intertextual field and discursive space upon which it thrives. It is actually doubly incomplete or open-ended in so far as science in itself is a forever open endeavour but, more important here, it is also incomplete in its relation to this field and space where so many threads and meanings necessarily are hanging loose and to which it reaches out but cannot dwell upon if it is ever to be. As we have seen above, in Roman Ingarden's terminology, the text is *inevitably* 'a *schematic* formation with spots of indeterminacy' (Ingarden, 1973a: 251, italics mine).

In order to gain knowledge of the text, then, it is not only essential to take cognizance of the multiplicity of *determinations* (and hence of possible meanings), to identify 'the heteroglossically related discourses' that are realized within its domain, to discover contradictions, undecidabilities, etc., it is also vital to locate in this which *cannot* ever say *everything* the spots of *indeterminacy* that invite 'concretization',

> so that at least some of the spots of indeterminacy are removed [but these] are frequently replaced by determinations that not only are not determined by the text but, what is more, are not in agreement with the positively determined objective moments.
>
> (Ingarden, 1973a:252)

Thus, neither its—the text's—conflicts of meaning nor its unfinishedness are signs of *imperfection,* they are necessary constituents of any text.

Now, let us leave the text after this tentative description of its complexity or, at least, of certain aspects of this complexity,[40] and move on to its possibilities to (be) mean.

Meaning production

Approaching the text as a meaning-producing mechanism, there are some threads still hanging loose that have to be picked up before we proceed. I am thinking particularly of two such threads, both connected with Saussure's semiology, that were left in need of untanglement, i.e. the problem of speech vs. writing on the one hand and the problem of difference and *différance* on the other. Both these topics are of importance for the question of how meaning can be produced.

First of all, we must clear up the question of Saussure's predilection for speech over writing to which I have promised to return.

Second, in the case of difference and *différance,* there is a difference that I will explore, and which seems to me to be pertinent to the understanding of meaning production in texts. Saussure's concept of 'value' will be seen to be a means towards this end.

That Saussure gives primacy to speech or sound over writing is agreed upon by commentators,[41] and the primacy given to speech, which we may call the *sound thesis*, is one of the issues against which Derrida has directed his critique of Saussure's semiology.[42] However, instead of trying to find the reasons as to why and how Saussure places such importance upon sound and speech in relation to writing, I will be content here simply to state as a fact that the thesis is there, in Saussure's text.[43] What I will do, rather, is to bring forward the question whether the sound thesis is at all a *necessary* component in Saussure's system, and my contention is that *it is not*.

One indication that it is unnecessary is what may justifiably be regarded as *the* fundamental thesis of Saussure's linguistics, namely that *'langue is a form, not a substance'* (Saussure, 1988:120, italics mine). In accordance with this, Saussure also states:

> The essence of a language, as we shall see, has nothing to do with the phonic nature of the linguistic sign…. In any case, it is *impossible* that sound, as a *material* element, should in itself be part of *langue.* Sound is merely something *ancillary,* a *material langue uses*…. Linguistic signifiers are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in *any* way. They are constituted *solely* by differences…
> (Saussure, 1988:7, 116f, italics mine, see also p. 119)[44]

Now, I have deliberately omitted the last part of the last sentence, and I have done this in order to draw attention to precisely this omission, because *it may not*

be necessary, although of course it is in full agreement with the 'sound thesis', namely: '…which distinguishes one such *sound* pattern from another'.

There is one reason why this last part of the sentence *may* be non-essential stemming from Saussure's discussion of *langage,* i.e. the languag*e faculty*, which is described as 'the faculty of constructing *langue,* i.e. a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas' (Saussure, 1988:10). Thus, he says, it is *not* '*spoken* language which is natural to man' (Saussure, 1988:10, italics mine), but this general faculty that functions *over and above* the ability to speak or write (Saussure, 1988:11). Saussure thus opens for the possibility to regard speech and writing as different instruments for or rather and more accurately, different realizations of this general faculty, of language (cf. Holdcroft, 1991:24, 34).

Similarly, the attributes of the signifier are extended, as Roy Harris points out, when Saussure compares '*visual* signifiers' with auditory ones (Saussure, 1988: 70, Harris, 1987:75). Here, the signifier is no longer equivalent to an 'acoustic image' —it has been generalized. Even if this comparison does not *in* itself constitute a conclusive argument against the 'sound thesis' it casts some doubts about it and, furthermore, it is consonant with the statements that 'linguistic signifiers are not in essence phonetic' and that 'langue is a form, not a substance'.

To clarify what has been said so far, the linguist John Lyons's concept of *expression-element* may be of some assistance. In order to illuminate the thoughts behind this concept, Lyons draws a parallel with Saussure's well-known example of the chess game (cf. Saussure, 1988:23, 87f, 108), where the point is made that the working of the game is not dependent upon how the pieces of the game are made; neither their shape, nor the material they are made of influence the game. I.e. the *substance* of the pieces is immaterial to the possibility of playing; it is only the formal rules that are of interest. This is, then, Saussure's '*langue* is form, not substance' in a nutshell. Now, Lyons continues to argue that writing is 'essentially a technique for transferring the words and sentences of a language from the substance in which they are *normally* realized to the secondary substance of shape' (Lyons, 1968:60, italics mine). The fact that this can be done shows that 'the structure of the expression-plane of language is very largely independent of the substance in which it is realized' (Lyons, 1968:60; but cf. the quotation above). This allows Lyons to introduce the distinction *between formal units* of language on the one hand, and their *substantial realization* on the other, where the latter may be, for example, sounds or shapes (vowels, consonants on the one hand, letters on the other, for example), and he concludes that

> we can interpret this to mean that neither the sounds nor the letters are primary, but that *they are both alternative realizations of the same formal units,* which of themselves are quite abstract elements, independent of the substance in which they are realized.
>
> (Lyons, 1968:60f, italics mine)

A similar conclusion is drawn by Colin MacCabe:

> Linguistics is not concerned with the positive characteristics of particular realisations of language but with the differential structure which allows those particular productions.
>
> (MacCabe, 1985:123)

And Jakobson makes an analogous observation when he describes the opposition between *langue* and *parole* as one between 'potential values and their realizations' in a reciprocal dependency, where the one presupposes the other (Jakobson, 1990: 90, 109; cf. also Ricoeur, 1974a:63, along similar lines).

Now, these formal units are *'expression-elements'* (Lyons, 1968:61), i.e. elements to be expressed, to be realized. It is also clear, Lyons continues, that these expression-elements may be realized in other kinds of substance than sound or letter (Lyons, 1968:61). With this in mind, a leap from Lyons's 'expression-elements' and the Saussure that emerges from the quotation above to Derrida's *différance,* and the perhaps provocative and playful 'arche-writing' is then not as bold as it might seem at a first glance; this is how Derrida describes 'arche-writing':

> This arche-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of non-graphic expression. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the moment of the sign-function linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not.
>
> (Derrida, 1976:60)

To my mind, the parallel is striking. Disregarding differences in terminology, both Lyons and Derrida have reached a conclusion where *form*—not sound or any other substance—is seen as the essential element in language, as the general form or logic of language making possible *any* specific realization, and which may be argued to lie at bottom of (one reading of) Saussurean linguistics, notwithstanding statements to the opposite effect.

And if we follow this line of thought, it seems that we are inescapably led to accept Derrida's conclusion, i.e. that we have to reckon with speech and writing as two intercommunicative species of *langue*, as 'two orders of expression' (Derrida, 1976:63), having both their conditions of existence in *différance* (Derrida) or expression-elements (Lyons), but taking, as it were, separate paths, *not* never to meet, however. Rather, it seems as if, as Saussure observed, there is a constant but irregular interpenetration between not only these two orders that cannot, contrary to what Saussure says, be considered 'pathological' or 'abnormal' occurrences (Saussure, 1988:31), but also between these orders of expression on the one hand and substance-less *langue* on the other (cf., for example, Derrida, 1990:90– 5 and Culler, 1987b:173–84).[45]

In passing, this actualizes Ricoeur's distinction (in, for example, Ricoeur, 1971) between oral and written discourse because of a *fixation* that takes place in the latter:

What in effect does writing fix? Not the event of speaking, but the 'said' of speaking, where we understand the 'said' of speaking that intentional exteriorization constitutive of the aim of discourse thanks to which the *sagen*— the saying—wants to become *Aussage*—the enunciation, the enunciated. In short, what we write, what we inscribe, is the *noema* of the speaking. It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.

<div align="right">(Ricoeur, 1971:532)</div>

Thus, in oral discourse, Ricoeur argues, the 'subjective intention of the speaking subject and the meaning of discourse overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means', whereas it is the case that in 'written discourse, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. *This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention is what is really at stake in the inscription of discourse*' (Ricoeur, 1971:534, italics mine); i.e., a problem has been raised, assignable to a double absence in the text, i.e. the absence of the reader when the text is written and the absence of the author when the text is read.

Thus, oral and written discourse may be seen as two categories of language practices, where in the latter case, as we have seen, intention is—so to speak— effaced. And we are confronted with a question that has to be posed, although it cannot be answered within the limits of this book: can a theory of speech acts, without any problems, as a theory of *speech* acts, be transposed into *written* discourse which is quite another language-practice category where 'meaning', following Ricoeur, functions differently. One must, at least, put the question since J.L.Austin himself *hints* at the problem (but leaves it at that) —in words that are similar to Ricoeur's: *'written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are'* (Austin, 1980:61, italics mine).

Leaving this sidetrack, we are back to the arbitrary sign, which—we have seen this above—is thus constituted by a signifier, understood in a way that has been freed from the acoustic, and a signified, a 'concept'. However, a sign or word is something more, in itself it has no meaning—it would be, says Saussure,

a great mistake to consider a sign as nothing more than the combination of a certain sound [read, for example, 'expression element'] and a certain concept. To think of a sign as nothing more would be to isolate it from the system to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with individual signs, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the contrary, *the system as a united whole is the starting point,* from which it becomes possible, by a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements.

<div align="right">(Saussure, 1988:112, italics mine)</div>

In this system, each sign is a *value,* and one can remember that Saussure has written about *langue* as an algebra (Saussure, 1988:120) and as a 'system of pure values'

(Saussure, 1988:110). It is here, in the system and through its relations to all other signs or words, that the word gets its identity:

> A language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and in which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others.
>
> (Saussure, 1988:113; cf. also, for example, Hawkes, 1983:27f)

The signs or words that are related to each other in this value-producing system are related to each other in two ways: syntagmatic and paradigmatic. As parts of the system, both these relations take part in the establishment of the value of the word (Saussure, 1988:112f; cf. also Harris, 1987:124 and Holdcroft, 1991:109, 112). The question now arises whether *value* and *meaning* are identical. Saussure answers that value is *part* of meaning (Saussure, 1988:112) and this answer is built upon an analysis of the sign in both its aspects, as an element in a system and as an isolated unity.

Concerning the first aspect, i.e. the sign as an element of a system, Saussure writes, discussing the meaning of the french word *juger* (to judge), that

> it must not be supposed that the concept in question has any kind of priority. On the contrary, that particular concept is simply a value which emerges from relations with other values of a similar kind. If those other values disappeared, this meaning too would vanish.
>
> (Saussure, 1988:115f)

As value is a *systemic quality,* it *cannot* be part of an isolated sign, consisting solely of the relation between signifier and signified, where signified for Saussure is equivalent to 'concept' (perhaps an unfortunate term in this connection).

It is possible by analogy to relate this view on meaning and value to what has been said above on terminologies in common. An isolated term or word has no *value* although it has potential meanings; it receives its specific identity, its specific value and function and specific meaning only when it becomes a concept, i.e., when it is related to other concepts in a language practice or school of thought. Until then, its meanings are plural and its value is nil: 'It is useless, evidently, to look upon the word as a concrete unit' (Saussure, 1988:104), it is in need of contextualization. But even then, when it is situated in a system, it is still paradigmatically related to those other systems to which it, *as a term,* also belongs.

Now, if this—in its general outlook—may be seen as preconditions for meaning production, and if we want to move towards something less abstract, i.e. the production of meaning in theoretical texts, the question arises which components in the text are meaning producing, which in turn brings us to the question of the context and contextualization of words.

Now, I will suggest that *context* can be looked upon in analogy to Wittgenstein's logical space: 'A tautology leaves open to reality the whole—the infinite whole—

of logical space: a contradiction fills the whole of logical space leaving no point of it for reality.' (Wittgenstein, 1974:35)

That is: for a word to be *without context* or, better, for a word to be *de-contextualized* will mean that, since the 'meaning of a word is the entirety of its possible relationships with other words' (Todorov, 1972:129), it leaves itself open to *all* these possible meanings, to 'the infinite whole' of possible contexts, as it were. Actually, we may not even know what word it is that is non-contextualized since there is no way of escaping the possibility that it represents a misprint. So, for example, could the string of letters *and be* a misprint of the word *band, land* or *sand*. There is *no way* for us positively to exclude this possibility.

On the other hand, in the case of *complete contextualization,* when context fills the whole space, it leaves no point open for the word:

> at this point something…will have happened to it: it will have become completely redundant. The context will now allow only one meaning to be perceived in the gap which it occupies, and anything—or nothing at all— will be interpreted as providing that meaning.
>
> (Attridge, 1988:142)

This is also, as far as I can see, in full agreement with Lyons's observation that the condition for meaning is the *absence of complete contextual determination* (Lyons, 1968:418), exemplifying: 'If the word *teeth* never occurred in sentences other than those in which it is completely determined by its context, it would not have meaning in English; and the semanticist would have nothing to say about it' (Lyons, 1968:422f).

Thus, it is possible to paraphrase Wittgenstein as follows: The lack of context leaves open to the word the whole—the infinite whole—of meaning: full context fills the whole of meaning leaving no point of it for the word.

Fortunately, these two extremes do not and *cannot* close the field of context since both options, for all practical purposes, are impossible in any *theoretical* text: no such text can be uncontextualized and no context can ever be saturated, since no text can say everything. Thus, there must be something in-between, ranging from the *insufficient* to the *sufficient*.

However, there seems to be no way to know *in advance* what should count as either the one or the other. It seems only to be possible to say that there *are* sufficient and insufficient contextualizations and that the border-line between the two is unclear.

Schematically, then, for a word or a term to become meaningful, i.e., to lose most of its meanings, it has to be defined, it has to become a concept within, for example, a theoretical system. It has, in short, to become contextualized.

Now, there are other kinds of contexts and contextualizations in a text, on other levels and in other systems. Each term exists only in different textual sequences—syntagmas—such as *sentences,* which, it seems, have traditionally been regarded as the *basic* and crucial semantic unit, for example: 'If words have

meaning…it is derived from their function as parts of sentences' (Palmer, 1981: 37).[46]

Thus, in the literary sentence, writes Michael Riffaterre, the components

> are tied together by the syntagm, but these relations are repeated by other, formal or semantic, relations. Each word, therefore, appears to be necessary many times over, and its relations with the other words appear to be multiply imperative. Meaning is not based on the reference of the signifier to the signified but lies, instead, in the signifier's reference to other signifiers.
>
> (Riffaterre, 1983:43f)

Now, if we take Riffaterre's arguments one by one, beginning with the first, we will see that this holds for scientific sentences, too. A scientific sentence is held together by the syntagma, but the words are also held together by other formal and semantic relations, for example the multiple relations between concepts determined by a theoretical system, properties of which the sentence purportedly realizes, and which gives the words their semantic value. It is also held together by the logical construction of the concrete 'said' in the sentence, which may but does not have to coincide with the first kind of relation, but any way is parasitic upon it. The second sentence is equally true of scientific sentences as it just elaborates upon the first, emphasizing the necessity in the multiplicity of relations between concepts: in a theoretical system, each concept determines and is determined by all the others. In the third sentence, however, there is a difference to be detected between literary and scientific sentences: Riffaterre claims (and I am not interested in the accuracy of his claim) that in literary sentences meaning lies exclusively ('not' and 'instead' are the words he uses) in the 'signifier's reference to other signifiers', while it can be argued that in the scientific sentence meaning lies in the signified's reference to other signifieds, i.e. in references between *concepts*. However, this is not the whole truth of the theoretical text's sentences. The possibility of a 'perfect resemblance between signifiers' (Ducrot and Todorov, 1987:256) implies a power of words to refer to multiple signifieds outside the discourse within which one of these perfectly resembling signifiers exist. This possibility cannot be ignored. Whether we, for example, to the signifier 'value' refer one or more signifieds, i.e. concepts, or we claim that each signified or concept 'value' has its own signifier 'value', it is clearly possible that the signifier 'value' may refer either to other *signifieds* 'value' in the paradigmatic subfield or to other *signifiers* 'value' which, although they appear to be identical, are united to other signifieds 'value', also located outside discourse, in the paradigmatic subfield. Hence, the possibility of meaning production in a theoretical sentence seems to be *more* extended than in the literary sentence as it is conceived by Riffaterre, not *less,* as we have seen argued many times over in previous chapters.

However, this concerns *possibilities, potentials,* not necessities. In *Beyond Superstructuralism*— in itself directed against the tendency to over-estimate the importance of the paradigmatic at the cost of the syntagmatic, to concentrate upon individual terms instead of sequences

(Harland, 1993:214), in recent literary theory and linguistics—Richard Harland describes the sentence as working '*by* the principle of complementarity and subtraction' (Harland, 1993:17), i.e. words cannot combine arbitrarily and the sentence functions in relation to the words that exist in it as a *subtractor of meanings*, i.e. 'the meaning of the whole is less than the sum of the meanings of the parts' (Harland, 1993:19). This 'getting together' of words, the sentence, in other words, delimits words' possible meanings in that it makes certain meanings impossible and others more probable. True as this is, it does not—and cannot, if what is said above is true—*completely* erase the other potentials; thus Ricoeur writes that

> the rest of the semantic possibilities are not cancelled; they float around the words as possibilities not completely eliminated. The context thus plays the role of filter.
>
> <div align="right">(Ricoeur, 1974a:71)</div>

These possibilities pointed at by Ricoeur belie, it seems, Descombes's assurance in *Objects of All Sorts*. From the quite reasonable assertion that a word has 'different meanings in different contexts' (1986:181), Descombes goes on to the deceptively simple-sounding claim that

> What we cannot say is that a word in one context has the meaning it has in that context and simultaneously the meaning it has in other contexts different from the first. A word does not have several uses in *one* use.
>
> <div align="right">(Descombes, 1986:181, italics mine)</div>

Two points can be made from this. The first, which has already been discussed above, concerns the possibilities to contextualize the word. If it is not possible to fully contextualize it, there will always—in principle—be a *possible* space, a spot of indeterminacy, for the word in any context to refer to more than one concept, the decidability to which may range from the sufficiently reasonable to the undecidable. This *possibility* should not be ignored. Rather, it must be accounted for, and it seems that it is one of the clues to the understanding of multiple readings.

The second point brings *context* and *use* to the forefront again and helps to question the *sentence* as *the* context in the sequential order that is the text.

As we have seen, a word on its own is (of) no 'use'; it does not have a 'context-bound' sense or meaning, let alone a referent that can unequivocally be singled out: 'Of course a word does not have the same meaning in all its uses; a word can therefore be used in several senses' (Descombes, 1986:181). Instead, for Descombes, 'the elements of a language exists for the purpose of building *sentences*' (Descombes, 1986:174, italics mine), from within which, he claims, the word gets its meaning and possible referent. But how appropriate is this 'context' and this 'use' that Descombes refers to when he states that 'a word does not have several uses in one use'?

Are the possibilities and impossibilities of the word to mean in the sentence enough for the understanding of texts' meaning production? I am strongly inclined

to say that it is not, and that instead the sentence as the theoretical text's basic unity must be seriously questioned. Its limitations may be approached from two angles. One of its limitations for the understanding of meanings in texts are aptly expressed by Ricoeur:

> A text is more than a linear succession of sentences. It is a cumulative, holistic process. This specific structure of the text cannot be derived from that of the sentence. Therefore the kind of plurivocity which belongs to texts as texts is something other than the polysemy of individual words in ordinary language and the ambiguity of individual sentences. This plurivocity is typical of the text considered as a whole, open to several readings and to several constructions.
>
> (Ricoeur, 1971:549)

In other words, a sentence is always an *inter-sentence,* in the same way as a text always is an *inter-text.* A sentence in a text is always dependent for its meaning upon sentences that have come before it and sentences that will come after it, including the texts first and last ones which, according to Bakhtin, 'are unique and have a certain additional quality. For they are…sentences of the "front line" that stand right at the boundary of the change of…subject' (Bakhtin, 1986a:89).

This, the sentence's dependence upon other sentences, can be illustrated by an example given by the British linguist F.R.Palmer:

> English has clear devices for dealing with the *given* and the *new,* the information that is already known in the discourse and the information that is being freshly stated…. *We can avoid restating in detail what is given* by using pronouns— the third person pronouns *he/she/it/they* instead of the already mentioned *the little boy, the man on the corner,* etc. Not only are there pronouns, there are also pro-verbs, for example *do as* in *John came early and so did Fred,* and there are, similarly, 'pro-form' adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions— *such, so, therefore,* etc. All of these refer back to something already stated, which is not, therefore, to be stated in full again.
>
> (Palmer, 1981:160, italics added)

To this can be added that there are ways of pointing forwards, to what will be said, as well; for example, 'as will be shown in greater detail below'. The implication of this is that the analysis of the individual sentence is *insufficient.* In addition, Palmer gives another example, by which he wants to show that *accent* is indispensable for the understanding of *speech.* However, the example may just as easy be used to show that *sentential context* is at least as necessary in the understanding of the *written: 'The professors didn't sign the petition'* (Palmer, 1981: 161). This sentence may mean 'that others did [sign the petition], that they [the professors] did something other than sign, or that they signed something else', Palmer points out, and if accent can help in understanding speech, I want to claim that context is indispensable for the understanding of this

sentence when it is written down—i.e. the sentence is an inter-sentence, and we do not know, as it stands, whether what helps explain its meaning has come before or will come after it. And it must be remembered, of course, that context is nothing that simply is there, it has to be theoretically constructed, and will inevitably be differently constructed depending upon the theoretical apparatus used.

However, the sentence itself may also be the site of a plurality of contexts. Voloshinov observes that 'contrasting contexts of usage for one and the same word is found in dialogue' (Voloshinov, 1986:80). But 'dialogue' does not presuppose face-to-face communication; instead it should be understood in a broader sense, as 'verbal communication of any type whatsoever' (Voloshinov, 1986:95), including the text. Now, as I have argued above with the help of Bakhtin, dialogue is constitutive of the theoretical text, and there is one element of dialogue that is of interest for the present argument, namely *reported speech,* i.e. 'speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*' (Voloshinov, 1986:115). This observation amounts to the recognition that, within a single sentence, there may be an utterance about an utterance where one word in a single sentence—used both in the reporting and in the reported speech—means differently, and that the meanings of the word are not identifiable independently of their respective contexts, i.e. they are dependent on larger units than this single sentence. Thus, a word may—in a single sentence—be doubly contextualized. Or, in other words, one and the same sentence—grammatically correct—may harbour two mutually conflicting contexts (to which might be added, of course, a third: that of the reader's) where a word is used in conflicting ways.

But not only is the sentence, and so the word, dependent upon either an inter- or an intra-sentential 'field' in the sense made above. It is also part and parcel of a wider field, a wider context. This context, within which sentences exist and from which they also receive (some of) their meaning(s) may be denoted in different fashions, all of them, it seems, equally vague or 'primitive'.[47] They may be called *utterances* (Bakhtin, 1986a:71 and Lyons, 1968:172), *statements* (McCanles, 1978:203n7) or, simply, as I am inclined to do, *arguments*. By *argument* should be understood a textual sequence with certain logical qualities consisting of a 'question' and an 'answer' (cf. Bakhtin, 1986a:72), concerning a specific object of knowledge, which may or may not include open references to others but which always and inevitably is intertextual.

Now, there are two aspects of this questioning and answering. First, the answer, concerning a specific object of knowledge, which may or may not include open references to others but which always and inevitably is intertextual, is an answer in relation to another's argument, to another's question or to another's answer— it is part of a dialogue (cf. Bakhtin, 1986a:72). However, and this is the second aspect, the answer is not fortuitous. The answer, writes Collingwood, has to be 'the right' answer to a question that has 'arisen' in relation to a complex, to a whole to which both question and answer belong (Collingwood, 1959:37): question and answer are 'strictly correlative' (Collingwood, 1959:31). This 'logic of question and answer' that Collingwood presents in his *Autobiography* (1959) as well as in

An Essay on Metaphysics (1979) —a 'logic' that also, in similar terms, preoccupies Althusser (1975, especially pp. 22–55) —radically questions the unsatisfactory 'partnership' between logic and grammar:

> If the meaning of a proposition is relative to the question it answers, its truth must be relative to the same thing. Meaning, agreement and contradiction, truth and falsehood, none of these belonged to propositions in their own right, propositions by themselves; they belonged only to propositions as the answers to questions: each proposition answering a question strictly correlative to itself.
>
> (Collingwood, 1959:33)

A proposition (or statement) is always, Collingwood maintains, an answer to a logically *but not necessarily* chronologically prior question (Collingwood, 1979: 24f). And any question has its presuppositions, directly (immediately) or indirectly (Collingwood, 1979:25), and 'Unless this immediate presupposition were made, the question to which it is logically immediately prior could not be logically asked' (Collingwood, 1979:25). Furthermore, he notes that

> As one can ask questions without knowing it, and *a fortiori* without knowing what questions one is asking, so one can make presuppositions without knowing it, and *a fortiori* without knowing what presuppositions one is making.
>
> (Collingwood, 1979:26)

It is this logical but not chronological priority of presuppositions, as well as us not necessarily knowing what presuppositions are made—knowingly or not—it is this relationship, this logic between question and answer that, incidentally, Althusser employs when he notes that Marx in reading Classical political economy finds 'the correct answer to a question that has just one failing: it was never posed' (Althusser, 1975:22), and which also prompts us to identify 'the invisible problematic contained in the paradox of an answer which does not correspond to any question posed' (Althusser, 1975:28, italics deleted). Which, in turn, amounts to nothing less than a demand to identify the answer's question and the question's presupposition in order to understand the meaning and truth of a statement.

Taken together, this means that it is—at best—only *partly* accurate to state as does Descombes, that 'it is the sum of the rules for a meaningful use of the word' (Descombes, 1986:31), i.e. *grammar,* that should constitute the perspective from which we analyse the meaning of a sentence, and that 'any proposition whose grammar is not readily discernible' (Descombes, 1986:32) may be the answer to the plurality of meanings. What is perfectly reasonable here is, of course, that non-grammatical or grammatically opaque sentences may give rise to different meanings. What seems to be inadequate, from the point of view of the 'argument', is the exclusive reliance on grammar since—if it is admitted that sentences may get their meaning(s) from other sentences, questions, presuppositions, etc. —no

rules of grammar are involved: 'The sentence is the maximum unit of grammatical analysis' (Lyons, 1968:176).

Admittedly, an argument has fuzzy borders—even arbitrary, and admittedly this is so especially in the social and human sciences. An argument is, as is the sentence and the text, an *inter-*. Thus, for example, if we call Adam Smith's writings on 'value' an argument, it is but an (syntagmatic) inter-argument in his treatise *The Wealth of Nations,* and the treatise itself can be seen as an effort to synthesize a bundle of syntagmatically related inter-arguments, upon whose consistencies the coherence of the whole is dependent. It is of course possible to break down each specific argument into sentences, but in so doing the logical connection between the sentences will be lost and so will, it seems to me, the whole point in claiming that 'a meaning is a usage' (Descombes, 1986:29).

Moreover, the argument is also an (paradigmatic) inter-argument in relation to other arguments on value. Finally, an argument must not necessarily consist of an unbroken chain of sentences. It may be present, disappear and reappear again throughout a text.

Thus, contextualization in this sense should not to be taken to be identical to definition. Definition is determination, while contextualization is the actualization of a term in a sequence of the text, wherever it occurs and in whatever relation to other terms and concepts. In this way, contextualization embraces definition in a way that may be fatal.

Now, if this reasoning is reasonable, then it should be possible to argue that the argument contextualizes the sentence and, through the sentence, the word and thus that the argument is a 'use' and, if this is possible, then it follows that it is possible for a word to have 'several uses in one use'. This makes it possible to claim that these several uses do explain why it is possible for different readers to read these texts differently.

Finally, if all this is reasonable, what becomes of 'general' or 'universal' semantics, preoccupied as it is with the meanings of words and sentences, where the sentence is, as the British linguist Geoffrey Leech writes, 'at the top of the scale' of its object of knowledge (Leech, 1974:127), and where the word's meaning is either given by the dictionary (Leech, 1974:51) or by its function as a part in a sentence (see, for example, Leech, 1974:105 and Palmer, 1981:8)?

First, and with the risk of being repetitious, words are not 'just' words, they are also concepts, and as such they *belong*. They are related to other concepts in theoretical systems, which systems of concepts and conceptual relations give each concept its meaning. If this is true, how can the word's meaning 'be given by its function as a part in a sentence'? Clearly, it cannot, this is not enough—you have to know to which theoretical system the word/concept belongs before you can reasonably know what the word, the concept, means and what it—in its relational meaning—implies and is implied by. So, rather than a word's meaning being given by its function as a part of a sentence (Palmer, 1981:37), it seems more justifiable to argue that its meaning is given by its function as a part of a theoretical system.

It seems, then, as if general semantics stands to language in action as language stands to *parole* or, better perhaps, adopting Benveniste's (1971f:101–1) distinction, as the linguistics of the sign and language stands to the linguistics of the sentence and discourse, where the linguist of language sees the sentence as the ultimate level, while it is the minimal unit for the linguist of discourse (Benveniste, 1971f: 108). What Benveniste advocates is, then, a linguistics of levels (Benveniste, 1971f: 104).

However, Benveniste's claim that the sentence is not only the minimal but also the highest unit, since it cannot 'integrate any higher unit' (Benveniste, 1971f: 106), must be questioned. His argument rests on the assumption that

> A statement can *only* precede or follow another statement in a *consecutive* relationship. A group of propositions does not constitute a unit of an order superior to the proposition.
>
> (Benveniste, 1971f:109, italics mine)

However, if a sentence, or a statement, is an inter-sentence, or an inter-statement, i.e., related—in one way or another: logical, for example—to other sentences/statements, these other sentences/statements are among what give the sentence/statement its meaning. And if a statement is made in the name of a theory, the meaning of this statement is dependent upon other statements made in the name of the same theory. Thus, it seems as if Benveniste's claim is somewhat unfounded —there is at least one relation between statements/sentences other than the merely 'consecutive', there is, in short, (at least) a logical relation that has to be accounted for.

Thus, we may accept Benveniste's 'two linguistics' with this proviso, claiming that instead of the sentence/statement being both the minimal and the maximal unit, it is only the minimal, while the highest unit is a larger one, possibly the argument or inter-argument, as I have indicated above.

The two linguistics thus deal with two *distinct* levels of language; we have to deal with—in the movement from language to discourse—'emergent properties': 'new properties appear', as Ricoeur notes (Ricoeur, 1986:67). It is on the level of discourse, the level of language 'in action' (Benveniste, 1971f:110), where the meaning potentialities discussed above reside, and general semantics, as an 'abstract objectivism' in the words of Voloshinov (for example, 1986:58), cannot but ignore it, since it falls outside its scope.

In a slightly different terminology, Voloshinov has, then, reached much the same conclusion:

> The most accurate way of formulating the interrelationship between theme and meaning is in the following terms. Theme is the *upper, actual limit of linguistic significance;* in essence, only theme means something definite. Meaning, in essence, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality—the possibility of having a meaning within a concrete theme.
>
> (Voloshinov, 1986:101)

As all arguments, utterances, questions and answers, etc. are made from a point of view, from within a specific language practice, this leaves little room for a general theory of semantics as long, that is, as it sticks to its predilection for autonomous words and/or sentences.

But general semantics as 'the Science of Meaning' (cf. Ullman, 1962) is faced with yet another problem, which a theory of reading cannot ignore, and which truly ought to belong to any theory pretending to deal with meaning or understanding language in action. This problem is that of *silence,* of *omission,* of *absence,* the significance of which was already identified by Althusser while reading Capital (for example, 1975:29).

Certain omissions, absences, *silences* are *telling,* but how can they ever be detected given that the word or the sentence are considered the ultimate meaning-carrying unit? Important in this respect are not only the absences identified by Ingarden as spots of indeterminacy and potentiality and the demands for concretization that are involved, and that were discussed towards the end of Chapter 5. There is at least one other absence or silence that also has to be reckoned with.

A case in point is Vincent Descombes, whose *Modern French Philosophy* (1980) barely mentions Gaston Bachelard on the grounds that modern French philosophy is what is talked about at the time the book was written (Descombes, 1980:1–3), and Bachelard was supposedly not talked about, since he is absent in Descombes's text. However, as Mary McAllester Jones shows, his argument does not hold water. On the contrary, Bachelard *was* talked about in the mid-seventies—by Canguilhem, by Lecourt, and by others (McAllester Jones, 1991:3f). As an absence in Descombes's text, it—the absence—is obviously there, but should we conclude that it is without significance, without meaning? It would go undetected by a general semantics, concentrated upon sentences as it is. Thus, for the science of meaning it would be meaningless—the meaninglessness of silence. But it is possible to read this absence turning Descombes upon himself, and give it a certain significance. It is possible, in other words, to see this particular absence or silence as a manifestation of an *inverted* form of *legitimistic thinking* (mentioned in Chapter 2, above). Legitimist thought is, according to Descombes, the quest for sources, for identity: 'if my shameful origins leave me nameless and stateless, there is no place for me' (Descombes, 1986:142). The process inverted, Descombes's silence may be seen as an instance of an 'anxiety of influence' (Bloom, 1975), where 'legitimistic' inheritance is both recognized and, in the act of silence, denied.

This one instance, this one possibility of meaningful silence tells us that *silence in general* has to be taken into account, and that it is a problem of meaning that semantics as the science of meaning, as it is traditionally understood with its narrow conception of its object of knowledge, will hardly ever be able to theorize, however much silence is conducive to the production of meaning.

Paradigmatic leaps

I would like to argue here that one of the more important mechanisms that is at work when a text is multiply read is the leap between modes of thought. It bears

a certain resemblance to the relation between the Saussurean notions of the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. It seems, indeed, to parallel this relation to such an extent that I would like to call it a *paradigmatic* leap. This leap will also clarify why I am reluctant to call divergent readings mis-readings. The notion of mis-reading presupposes that there is a gap between text and mis-reading, such that the mis-reading *differs* from the text, that it misses the text and that the text is missing in the reading. Much of what is commonly collected under this heading are, on the contrary, in a sense that is related to the paradigmatic leap, *accurate* readings, namely in the sense that they follow certain directions determined by the text.

An example comes to mind that may illuminate my point, i.e., the 'Derrida—Searle debate', initiated by Derrida's essay *Signature Event Context* (1988d) on J.L.Austin and the fundamentals of speech-act theory.[48] In Derrida's reply to Searle's *Reiterating the Differences* (1977), in turn a response to Derrida's *Signature Event Context* (1988d) which opened the discussion, we may encounter a strong response to 'mis'-readings that is not altogether convincing, although Derrida provides some important arguments.

While Derrida's critique of Sarl (or Searle; cf. Derrida, 1988c:36) is effective as it stands, what is striking is perhaps not so much the presence of a certain ironic, sarcastic or even moralistic tone, as a puzzling non-presence: why does he never *really* ask why Sarl 'mis'-es him? Despite, that is, that his complaints against Sarl are as strong as, for example, the following:

> the *brutality* with which, beneath an often quite manifest exterior, Searle has read me, or rather *avoided reading me and trying to understand.* And why, perhaps, he was not *able* to read me, why this *inability* was exemplary and symptomatic.
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:113, italics mine)

Despite this, then, we do not get any *specific* explanations or attempts at explanations, but generalities, not wrong as far as they go, but they do not seem to go far enough or, perhaps, they go too far:

> The relation of 'mis' (mis-understanding, mis-interpreting, for example) to that which is not 'mis-', is not at all that of a general law to cases, but that of a *general possibility inscribed in* the structure of positivity, of a normality, of the 'standard'. All that I recall is that this *structural possibility* must be taken into account when describing so-called ideal normality, or so-called just comprehension or interpretation, and that this possibility can be neither *excluded nor opposed.*
>
> (Derrida, 1988a:157n9)

So far, so good, but it cannot be due to language's iterability, instability, etc. that 'mis'-es occur, as seems to be the case when he argues, for example, the following:

the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication; in writing, which is to say in the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its 'original' desire-to-say-what-one-means and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited,* put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.

(Derrida, 1982d:12)[49]

Was it only due to languages iterability, instability, etc., was this the only reason, the 'mis'-es of Derrida would, likely, be random, when in fact it seems as if the 'mis'-es—or at least those that really seem to count, so to speak—can be located in certain quarters not 'sympathetic' to Derrida's 'project' (compare, for example, the Derrida readings by Searle, 1977 and Habermas, 1987, especially pp. 185–210[50] on the one hand and those by Norris, 1987 and Spivak, 1976 on the other). Now, if this is so, some other explanation, in addition to Derrida's own, must be given for the forces at work. And if we want, momentarily at least, to stay within the realm of the text and its closer context, i.e. that of its immediate production and consumption; that is, if we do not want to explain the 'mis'-es by psychological, sociological or political acts although such considerations should not be disregarded (and Derrida actually discusses *these* questions; see Derrida, 1988a *passim*); then it seems to me that we have to take into account modes of thought or paradigms (to keep the terminology) as both governing the production of the text as well as its consumption, i.e. the *specific* structures of writing and reading the *specific* text that is under consideration. And here enters, I suggest, the possibility of paradigmatic leaps.

Now, it seems to me that Richard Harland has a point when he notes that much of linguistics and literary theory has been overly fascinated by the paradigmatic to the extent that the syntagmatic has been almost neglected (for example, Harland, 1993:3–5). What, then, is the justification for yet a paradigmatic 'something'? In *Beyond Superstructuralism* where Harland presents his 'syntagmatic theory of language' and 'subtractive idea of meaning' (Harland, 1993:225), he demonstrates how meaning is constituted within the syntagma, where each term with an unlimited meaning potential gets this potential radically restricted by every other word in the sentence or utterance. Ultimately, this means, as we have seen above, that the meaning of the whole (the sequence) is less than that of its parts (the words). However, as we know, no text can say everything, and it seems to me that Harland does not take this into sufficient consideration (actually, I cannot find him discussing the problem) —there are *always and necessarily* gaps or holes, contradictions and indeterminacies in the syntagmatic structure of any text.

I have tried to argue above that the theoretical text can be seen as an articulation of meaning-producing systems, an intertextuality, where meanings are multiply-produced in different dimensions and at different levels, from polysemous words to polyvocal intertextual relations, from the contextualization of sentences and arguments, from spots of indeterminacy, from contradictions, etc. All these meaning-producing systems intersect and fuse in the text, all of them contribute to its 'multiplicity of meanings' (Macherey, 1978:78), all of them are conducive in its fundamental instability, subverting the dominant theoretical system in the text.

I have moreover argued that the text is not simply a 'gathering' where different meanings are juxtaposed; rather, it 'is a plurality of relations, not just a cacophony of different voices' (Holquist, 1990b:89). That is, meanings do not simply exist side by side in the text—it is a hierarchized place where different meaning-producing elements 'enter into a *semantic bond*' (Bakhtin, 1984:189, italics mine). In the words of Barthes, to say that the text is plural,

> is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning. The text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.
>
> (Barthes, 1982b:159)

This plural is produced by a simultaneous destruction and re-production of meaning. By the appropriation of other texts, statements, terms, etc. from the intertextual field or discursive space, meaning is destroyed but simultaneously produced anew in a transformed manner, owing to the new context into which the apprehended, the quoted, cited, etc. is positioned: 'every quotation distorts and redefines the 'primary' utterance by relocating it within another linguistic and cultural context' (Still and Worton, 1991:11). A mutual 'contamination is taking place, a fusion and dispersion of meanings and voices—even in theoretical texts.

This existence in the text of contradictions, of holes constituted by 'spots of indeterminacy', of a semantically fused plurality of meanings, where nevertheless traces exist from those other contexts, from those other texts that exist outside *this* text, make possible what I would like to call—inspired by Saussurean terminology and quantum mechanics—*paradigmatic leaps*.

The text is a syntagmatic sequence that is related to a discursive space (McCanles, above). I have advanced the idea that this space may be divided into two *subfields,* the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, respectively. As McCanles suggests, this space, with its concomitant subfields, I would add, is always related to a *specific* text. Now, in order to elucidate, let me propose that it is not only texts that are syntagmatic sequences. Theoretical systems as meaning-producing mechanisms may in an analogous fashion be so depicted. In accordance with McCanles's notion of the discursive space, I would like to suggest that those semantic interrelationships, those texts, statements and concepts in this space that are in conceptual *agreement* with the dominant theoretical system of the text to which the space is related to,

constitute that text's *syntagmatic* subfield, while those that are *at odds with* or openly *contradict* it, belong to its *paradigmatic* subfield. The paradigmatic subfield can then be seen as constituted by fragments of *other* syntagmatic sequences or, in a word, of other, opposing theoretical systems that are in one way or another related to the text. It is this paradigmatic subfield, I propose, that is of particular interest if we want to understand the phenomenon of multiple readings.

Those holes and indeterminacies, etc., that exist in a text will (have to) be realized in one direction or another by the reader, as we have seen Ingarden argue above, and contradictions may be 'solved' by ruling out certain options that they present. This 'concretization' may be done with, for example, a not fully contextualized term, a spot of indeterminacy or a contradiction as starting point, and if it is the case that this term is not unique, that this spot of indeterminacy or this contradiction makes the text aim in two directions or more, it opens up the possibility for a paradigmatic leap; i.e. a leap from one linear sequence, from one syntagma, from one school of thought, i.e., that of the texts dominant position, through the text's paradigmatic subfield into another linear sequence, another syntagma, another school of thought. These are the text's subversive implications conjoining the reader— this is what I mean by the paradigmatic leap.

By stressing the text's intertextuality and its unfulfilled nature there is thus introduced, as Laurent Jenny has observed,

> a new way of reading which destroys the linearity of the text. Each intertextual reference is the occasion for an alternative: either one continues reading, taking it only as a segment like any other, integrated into the syntagmatic structure of the text, or else one turns to the source text, carrying out a sort of intellectual anamnesis where the intertextual reference appears like a paradigmatic element that has been displaced, deriving from a forgotten structure.
>
> (Jenny, 1982:44)

The possibilities for a paradigmatic leap exist already, as I have indicated, at the level of the sentence but it seems as if the possibilities increase, contrary to what Richard Harland assumes, at more complex levels, for example, that of the argument. Harland's argument, which I question, runs as follows:

> the meanings of individual words are wide open with possibilities compared to the meaning of a sentence. We use words as markers precisely in order to delimit and narrow and specify our meaning. The fewer the markers, the less the delimitation; and the less the delimitation, the greater the spread of possible meaning. There is nothing miraculous in getting a small number of words to call up a vast quantity of meaning—on the contrary, this is just what we should expect from language.
>
> (Harland, 1993:184)

Now, I have no quarrel with Harland about the sentence's delimiting effects on meaning. However, his claim that the spread of meaning is dependent upon the *number* of markers seems dubious. If I have understood him correctly[51] and if his reasoning were to be accurate, it seems to me that then a stretch of sentences such as an 'argument' would delimit the 'spread of possible meaning' even more than the single sentence. However, such an argument seems to be built upon an unwarranted assumption that blinds—that of consistency—and which if removed makes the thesis, at best, only a half truth.

It is certainly true that the context at the level of the 'argument' may become more filled but it is also true that the possibility for *holes* in the 'argument', spots of indeterminacy, etc. grows as does the possibility for contradictions. And with each hole it is possible, as it is with each contradiction, with each polysemous word, with each voice, to move from one syntagma to another, from one school of thought to another.

Every spot of indeterminacy, contradiction, etc. has the *inherent possibility* to direct the reader in a direction that is not in accordance with that of the text's dominant theoretical system, *either* because it *potentially* does not only belong to that system *or* because it *actually* does not belong to that system. Now, the reader appropriating the text will, I will assume, *spontaneously tend* to read the text according to the theoretical system from within which he 'sees'. This means, among other things, that the points in the necessarily incomplete text, where its relations to elements in its paradigmatic subfield are to be found, and where these elements coincide with elements in the reader's own theoretical system or its discursive space or syntagmatic subfield (because there is of course a discursive space connected to the mode of reading which we can consider a syntagma in its own right, as well), will make the reader, spontaneously and unreflecting, read the text according to the possibilities offered and do this in accordance with the principle that 'what we see is governed by how we see' (Holquist, 1990b:164).

Accordingly, each reader will be prone to *discover* indeterminacies, etc. according to what is visible to him and not discover others since these will be *invisible* to him (and the seeing is in *his* theoretical system), and then to realize these indeterminacies according to his theoretical premises (and it should be noted that an indeterminacy, a polysemous word, etc. may be realized—in principle—in more than two ways).

Wherever the text makes it possible, through its multiplicity of meanings, the reader will spontaneously *tend* to make a paradigmatic leap, leaving one syntagmatic sequence for his own theoretical linearity, and read the text, strengthened by this leap, in the light of his own theory. If this spontaneous tendency to paradigmatic leaps is related to an equally spontaneous urge to search for the text's unity and thus to a reading practice that 'purifies' the text, then it should not surprise anyone that different modes of reading produce highly different knowledges of the text.

Strange things may then happen when the writer is confronted with the reader's reading of the writer's writing. Neither of them understand the other. The writer cannot understand why he is not understood and the reader cannot understand

that he has not understood. There is a clash of logics that actually are there in the text but which have been transposed to two equally surprised parties, the writer and the reader. Thus, as Jonathan Culler so aptly has phrased it,

> Critical disputes about a text can frequently be identified as a displaced reenactment of conflicts dramatized in the text, so that while the text assays the consequences and implications of various forces it contains, critical readings transform this difference within into a difference between mutually exclusive positions.
>
> (Culler, 1987a:215)

The discovery and 'concretization' of or 'solution' to indeterminacies, contradictions, etc. will then, as a rule, be theory-laden (just as any observation is) and differ among readers. *But,* as Norwood Hanson has already been quoted to say, 'wherever it makes sense to say that two scientists looking a*t* x do not see the same thing, there must always be a prior sense in which they see the same thing' (Hanson, 1981:5), and:

> Unless both are visually aware of the same object there can be nothing of philosophical interest in the question whether or not they see the same thing. Unless they both see the sun in this prior sense our question cannot even strike a spark.
>
> (Hanson, 1981:7)

These same objects, seen in this prior sense, that are there in the first place, are the spots of indeterminacy, the terms in common, contradictions, or whatever else the case may be.

   This last point is denied by Tony Bennett in his proposal for a Marxist literary theory, which reads as follows, and I quote at some length:

> the proper object for Marxist literary theory consists not in the study of texts but in the study of *reading formations*. By a reading formation, I mean a set of discursive and inter-textual determinations which organise and animate the practice of reading, connecting texts and readers in specific relations to one another in constituting readers as reading subjects of particular types and texts as objects-to-be-read in particular ways. This entails arguing that texts have and can have *no existence independently* of such reading formations, that there is *no place* independent of, anterior to or above the varying reading formations…neither [text nor reader] can be granted a virtual identity that is separable from the determinate ways in which they are gridded onto one another within different reading formations.
>
> (Bennett, 1987:70f, italics mine)

That texts could 'have no existence independently of reading formations', that they could not be 'granted virtual identities' seems highly questionable. Even if

Bennett admits the close relation between text and reader, it is one thing to say that texts do not exist *as such* and quite another to claim, as I do, that the text and its properties are differently *discovered* by different modes of reading, in which case the text's independent existence is presupposed. It seems as if Bennett's proposal leads to an unwarranted and unnecessary relativism in order to account for the relation between text and reader, where the reader has the upper hand and where the text is left to the whims of accidentally existing modes of reading. The respect for the text will be replaced by a reader's privileged position, and we will be back, it seems, where we started having opened the field for, for example, readings of the text not as how it is but as how it ought to be.

On the other hand, to assume that it is the texts' independent properties that make possible the possibility of different modes of reading to succeed in their different analyses and in their different interpretations, to accept, that is, that there are gaps, ambiguities, indeterminacies, undecidabilities, etc. that really are there, in the text, and that the different modes of reading, each in its specific way, takes hold of and processes in its specific and more or less unique way, is to take the text seriously—on its own terms, as a hierarchized order of multiple voices and meanings where the position of a dominant theoretical system is constantly challenged, unperceived by the writer, by subversive elements that demand, *outside* the dominant system, their own fulfilment, and which demands readers may be prepared to respond to in different but determined fashions.

Concluding remarks

What I have tried to accomplish above is to show how the text is made up of determined and structured meaning elements that mean differently in different modes of reading.

There is no self-evident unity of the text; although it is systematic and structured, it is unfinished and open and 'maintains a relationship with that which it is not' (Macherey, 1978:79). The concepts through which it lives and which originate from different theoretical systems, from ideological systems or from answers to questions never asked, are responsible for contradictions, tensions, etc. that are present in the text. Thus, there is no qualitative difference between theoretical texts and 'literary'. They are 'both' characterized by a polysemous language where 'reference' is problematic, they are 'both' polyvocal and they are 'both' characterized by multiple meanings. The two 'kinds' of text are, from this point of view, one and the same. It seems rather that the difference that does exist is historically contingent, socially determined and, possibly, one of degree.

There is no arbiter between these multiple meanings which are *produced* and *carried* by mechanisms ascertainable in the text as *being there*. *Any search for the meaning of a text is thus futile. The search for the meaning-producing mechanisms and structures is, however, not.*

A criticism along these lines makes certain questions superfluous, i.e. 'what did the *author mean*?', 'how does the *reader experience* the text?', 'what does *this* mean?' since they would fall outside the scope of criticism. What should be done is instead

to lay bare the structures and mechanisms that produce and carry meanings, *denying* the presence of one and only *one* meaning in a text as its necessary prerequisite; *asserting* instead the possibility of a plurality of meanings of which no one has priority over any other.

Such a criticism would show the text as an alleged unity of meaning to be a myth; such criticism would rather seek

> the element in the system studied which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building. The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated that ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air.
>
> (Miller, 1986:423)

The text could, then, be considered a whole which is erected upon wholes that stand in a contradictory relationship to each other and which, in themselves, contain holes that are responsible for a possibility of multiple readings. Criticism conceived in this way would draw attention away from the sterile and futile discussions about whose interpretation is the accurate one, a problem impossible to solve in any definite way anyway, and from all kinds of pseudo-debates on who has the right to this or that inheritance. This kind of judicial claim, all too common in the social sciences, loses in a stroke all meaning, the texts suddenly becoming open to all, not only to some guardians of this or that school of thought. For is it not, after all, the text, its *arguments,* that should be of interest to the scientific community and not *who wrote it and why*? The fetishism of the author's intentions and/or the reader's experiences can be allowed to fade into the background.

Notes

1 The epigraphs are taken from Barthes (1990b:5) and Culler (1988b:49).
2 Limiting myself to anthropology and sociology, we may depict functionalism, Marxism, and structuralism as such different ways of apprehending reality.
3 For the sake of clarity, it should be pointed out that while it is possible to positively determine what assumptions, etc. a school of thought excludes, it is not possible to determine in the same way what it includes; thus, according to Coniavitis, 'Different ontological and epistemological assumptions may…result in identical methodological rules and instructions' (Coniavitis, 1984:50, translation mine).
4 Although there is, strictly speaking, a difference between *polysemy* on the one hand and *homonymy* on the other, where the former means that one word has more than one meaning and the latter means that different words that have the same 'sound image' in Saussure's terminology but that *may or may not* be spelled differently, differ in meaning, I will keep to polysemy. The borderline between the two is, anyway, both fluid and shifting according to Stephen Ullman (1957:127f; cf. also Lyons, 1968:406). However, it is perhaps possible, from a strict Saussurean point of view to question, as does Ruqaiya Hasan, the concept of homonymy (and by implication

that of polysemy, I suppose) by stressing that for Saussure in a sign the signifier and signified are *indissolubly* linked:

> In the case of homonymy, are we hearing the same signifier? In the case of synonymy, are we faced with the same signified? Neither signifier nor signified indicates the identity of the sign …The identity of signifiers, signifieds, and so of signs, is their relationship to signifiers, signifieds and signs.
>
> (Hasan, 1987:115)

The confusion will not diminish for a reader of a text, however, if he *cannot identify what* signifier, *what* signified, and so *what* sign he is confronting.

5   It should be observed that Skinner's discussion on this matter is closely connected to the discussions on *essentially contested concepts* on the one hand (see, for example, William Connolly, 1983:10–44, for an introduction), and Bakhtin's on *authoritative discourse* on the other (Bakhtin, 1981b:342–5). It should also be observed that both these discussions are absent from Skinner's, the latter perhaps not so surprisingly, but the former…?

It would in this context, were it not for lack of both time and space, be desirable to integrate these discussions with my own.

6   Except in very particular although common cases; that is to say, in cases that do not go beyond everyday polite conversation and everyday phrases such as, for example, 'How do you do?' and the like (Malinowski's 'phatic communion' comes to mind; see Malinowski, 1952:314ff). I will thus not deny that there are normal uses of and agreed upon criteria for certain terms (or expressions), but it seems to me that these terms (and expressions) are considerably less numerous than Skinner wants them to be.

7   That appraisive terms belong to such systems is quite clear from Skinner's arguments: 'A term such as *virtù* gains its "meaning" from its place within an extensive network of beliefs, the filiations of which must be fully traced if the place of any one element within the structure is to be properly understood' (Skinner, 1988b:253; cf. also Skinner's discussion on the relation between Newton and the Anglican Church, 1988b:248; see also 1988d:125).

8   This point is also made by Donald Davidson (1990d:278f).

9   Cf. also Davidson's analysis of the '"platitude" that the meaning of a word is conventional' (Davidson, 1990d:276–80), which through a different route questions the whole idea of conventions helping us understand communication:

> There is no known, agreed upon, publicly recognizable convention for making assertions. Or, for that matter, giving orders, asking questions, or making promises. These are all things we do, often successfully, and our success depends in part on our having made public our intention to do them. But it was not thanks to a convention that we succeeded.
>
> (Davidson, 1990d:270)

10   This is not to argue that non-absolute knowledge may not 'work', only to claim that such knowledge is provisional.

11   From a slightly different angle, Mikhail Bakhtin expresses a similar thought in *Discourse in the Novel,* where he pictures the author as a mere intermediary using words populated by others that, due to this populousness, refract his intentions (Bakhtin, 1981b:299f).

12   I am aware of the possibility to detect certain similarities with Popper's World 3-theory. To discuss these similarities and, by implication, differences would, however, lead too far in the present context (cf. Popper, 1974:115–19).

13   Which means that I am not unaware of other possible readings of Wittgenstein. However, I would like to argue that Skinner's reading ignores the points I am about to make.

14   As Roy Harris points out, Wittgenstein later abandoned the term 'calculus' in favour of 'game', see Harris (1990:41). Cf. also Wittgenstein (1975b:25), where reasons for this change in terminology are developed.

15 I will not enter the discussion here, but the reader should be made aware of another possible interpretation of Wittgenstein's language games, emanating from §23 in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, Wittgenstein seems to make each kind of sentence a language game of its own:

> how many kinds of sentences are there?…There are *countless* kinds…this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence.
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1968:§23)

But there is a problem of incompatibility here. Sentences and complete systems of communication or calculuses do not square, they are not on equal footing. Taking as a starting point for one's understanding of language games the sentence must mean, as far as I can understand, that one has to discard the system or calculus aspects of the language game.

16 Cf., for example, Wittgenstein (1968:§241, §202). See also, for example, Fogelin (1976:154).

17 See, for example, Saul A.Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982), and Fogelin's *Wittgenstein* (1976:153–71).

18 This is but another version of the 'private language', which we are thus led back to again and where can be found

> the assumption that it is easy to assign a meaning to a word. One merely allocates the word an object and that is the end of the matter. If I have a particular kind of twinge, I can assign it a name, and then undertake to call twinges of that kind by the same name in the future.
>
> (Fogelin, 1976:155)

19 Cf. also Balibar and Macherey (1981:84ff), de Certeau (1986:22f), and MacCabe (1987b:293–300). Also, but from within other contexts, Jakobson (1987c:65) and Voegelin (1960).

20 As an aside, one can note that these relations are not exclusively 'modern' phenomena. This may be illustrated by the relation of exclusion as exemplified by a rapid 'comparison' of the French educational system's hierarchization of language where certain class-based linguistic competences are withheld the lower educational levels on the one hand and 'primitive' society on the other where, in the latter, as Dan Sperber has pointed out,

> many societies have a symbolism but not a known key to it. Among those that have a key, many reserve it to a minority while the majority are witnesses of and even actors in the symbolic activity
>
> (Sperber, 1988:22; cf. also Godzich, 1987 and Voloshinov, 1986:74f).

This latter state parallels to a large extent that set out by Renee Balibar concerning the French educational system (Balibar, 1983; see also Macdonell, 1986:30f and Pêcheux, 1982:8ff).

21 As this problem in its precise nature is outside the scope of my present concerns, I will have to leave it at this.

22 Which is the term currently in use; cf. Sturrock (1986:24). On the syntagmatic/paradigmatic relations, see also, for example, Culler (1988a:48–50), Ducrot and Todorov (1987:106–11), Harris (1987:124–31), Holdcroft (1991:98–104) and Lyons (1968:70–81).

23 It is possible here to see Ricoeur discussing a Kuhnian ideal-typical 'normal science'-situation (cf. Kuhn, 1970, *passim*). However, as we know, this kind of situation does not prevail in the social sciences which are, on the contrary, characterized by the co-existence of multiple and competing schools of thought.

24 'At least', because readers' idiosyncrasies cannot be disregarded.

25 Very briefly, the term 'heteroglossia' may be defined as 'a way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal markers' (Holquist, 1990b: 69).

26 This positioning of *functions* should not be taken to imply that the functions cannot be interconnected. According to Mukarovsky, they may even be 'simultaneously fighting for the same thing or the same act' (Mukarovsky, 1978:48). However, this does not alter his characterization of the theoretical function as such.

27   Cf., for example, Ducrot and Todorov (1987:247–53) and Willer (1971:17–38).

28   This difficulty is still present even if one accepts Derrida's dictum that 'there is nothing outside the text' (Derrida, 1976:158).

29   The authorship of primarily two of the texts coming from the Bakhtin circle is in dispute. So, for instance, some commentators argue that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* attributed to Voloshinov was written (in whole or in part) by Bakhtin. Likewise, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* attributed to Medvedev is said to have been written (in whole or in part) by Bakhtin. Other commentators disagree completely, while yet others see some collaboration at work (see, for example, Clark and Holquist, 1984:146–70). I have no intention to enter this discussion about who wrote what in the Bakhtin circle, but will instead follow the practice set by Todorov, i.e. following the name under which the books have been published (Todorov, 1984:11). The literature around this subject is vast; see, for example, Morson and Emerson (1989:31–48), Wehrle (1985: xv–xxix) and Matejka and Titunik (1986:vii–xii).

30   On this opposition, see, for example, Bakhtin (1981b:264f, 285ff).

31   Due credit must also be given Michael Holquist who is responsible, alone or together with others for the introduction of Bakhtin to the English-speaking world through his editing and translating of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (Bakhtin, 1981a), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Bakhtin, 1986a) and *Art and Answerability* (Bakhtin, 1990), as well as his volumes on Bakhtin, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Clark and Holquist, 1984) and *Dialogism* (Holquist, 1990b).

32   See also, for example, Still and Worton's *Introduction* (1991:3) to the collection of essays, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*.

33   As 'dialogue' is charged with an 'I' and a 'You' in everyday parlance and this misses the point of more voices than two, I will henceforth use the term polyvocality, which actually is inherent in Bakhtin's 'dialogism' (Holquist, 1990b:38). I will also, following most commentators, use Kristeva's more inclusive terminology (see, for example, Todorov, 1984:60): the notion of intertextuality, as I take it, includes both Bakhtin's 'dialogue' and his 'heteroglossia'.

34   It should be observed that Macherey shares the same 'superstitious belief' concerning scientists and scientific 'discourse' as do almost all literary theorists or linguists that we have been in contact with above: 'they occupy the same domain and speak the same language…even in their most violent disagreements they know—because of the stability of their concepts—that they are disagreeing about the same thing' (Macherey, 1978:55). Macherey's statement here could favourably be compared to Norwood Russell Hanson's, quoted in Chapter 3. The same criticism that I have directed against, for example, Paul Ricoeur applies with equal force to Macherey with respect to this matter.

35   One such element that will not be discussed is Bakhtin's 'philosophical anthropology', to borrow a piece of classification from Todorov (1984:94–112).

36   The relevant passage in Wittgenstein runs: 'A tautology leaves open to reality the whole—the infinite whole—of logical space: a contradiction fills the whole of logical space leaving no point of it for reality. Thus, neither of them can determine reality in any way' (Wittgenstein, 1974:35).

37   An exception to *this* determinateness would be certain allusions that, consciously or not, reveal the idiosyncrasies of the author.

38   Cf. also Myrdal, quoted in Chapter 3 above on the tension in Adam Smith's theory of value (Myrdal, 1961:67, 1972:102) and, for that matter, the whole discussion on the classical theory of value in that chapter.

39   Cf. Arthur O.Lovejoy's observation:

> It is one of the instructive ironies of the history of ideas that a principle introduced by one generation in the service of a tendency or philosophic mood congenial to it often proves to contain, unsuspected, the germ of a contrary tendency—to be, by virtue of its hidden implications, the destroyer of that *Zeitgeist* to which it was meant to minister.
>
> (Lovejoy, 1964:288)

40   Some aspects, such as, for example, that of the narrative structure of the text, I have been forced to leave out of the discussion, but see on this subject, for example, Macherey (1978:35) and Todorov (1981:51).

41   The interpretation of its meaning and significance varies, however; see, for example, Roy Harris (1987, for example, pp. 16ff, 41–5) and David Holdcroft (1991:19–46).

42   For Derrida's critique of Saussure's 'thesis', see Derrida, (1976, *passim* but especially pp. 141–64); cf. also, for example, his 'Signature Event Context' (Derrida, 1982d or, in another translation, 1988d), and for condense overviews, Frank (1989:65–76), Harland (1987:127–31), Norris (1988a: 18–41) and Wahl (1987:349ff), where Derrida's position is outlined in some detail.

43   See, for example, Saussure (1988:24–8, 31, 66).

44   It should perhaps be pointed out that for Jakobson the signifier is exactly what Saussure here denies it to be, i.e. *material* (see, for example Jakobson, 1978:3).

45   In passing, it could be noted that this is in accordance with one of Saussure's more fundamental observations, namely that language is a *'social fact'* (Saussure, 1988:77, italics mine).

46   See also his whole discussion on the sentence (Palmer, 1981:37–43); cf. also, for example, Harland (1993:16, 45), Lyons (1968:170), and Ricoeur (1971:530).

47   Cf. Lyons: 'by "primitive" is meant "undefined within the theory", "pre-theoretical"' (Lyons, 1968: 172).

48   See Derrida (1988a, c, d) and Searle (1977). For comments upon this debate, see, for example, Culler (1987a:110–34) and Frank (1989:398–407).

49   To this should be added that was language not characterized by this iterability, it would—by necessity—be very private, indeed.

50   Thus Habermas's reading of Derrida abounds, according to Norris, in 'mis'-es perhaps as many as those of Searle (Norris, 1990:49–76). See also Derrida's complaints to Habermas's reading (Derrida, 1988a:156ff).

51   I.e. that he is here writing on how it *is,* in texts or in speech, and not about how a *principle* works as principle. However, if he is writing on the latter subject, he has to account for how this principle works in *practice.* Whatever form such an account would get, nothing but my criticism of the argument as *Harland's* would have to change.

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