In any encounter with theoretical texts there seems to operate a set of rules, stipulated in the performance of reading, that point toward a configuration able to account for a certain number of textual details: teleology. This can be discovered in radical forms of deconstruction as much as in traditional philosophical inquiry. In its simplest form *telos* may appear as the deductive mechanism of subsumptive reason purveying a system of closure. Teleology in this sense has been under attack in recent literary theory. Rarely does this kind of attack address the notion of teleology in the more sophisticated version in which it appears in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1968: Section 61), where he applies the distinction between determining and reflective reason:

If we were to ascribe to nature intentionally effective causes, we would give *teleology* as a foundation not only a *regulatory* principle for the mere judgment of appearances, according to which nature can be thought to be following its specific laws, but also a *constitutive* principle for the deduction of its products from their causes: thus the concept of a purpose of nature would no longer be part of the *reflective* but of *determining* faculty of judgment.

If we align this with Kant's insistence on the merely heuristic character of all concepts, according to which 'the concept therefore never stands between secure boundaries' and 'the completeness of the analysis of my concept is always in doubt' (Kant 1956: A728/B756), *teleology* becomes a much more exciting affair.

In a rich survey of recent literary theory offered by Marcel Cornis-Pope under the title *Hermeneutic Desire and Critical Rewriting: Narrative Interpretation in the Wake of Poststructuralism*, the frame of the discussion is marked by two boundaries: the search for a secret *in* the text and a sociocultural form of critical rewriting. Cornis-Pope's study is instructive

in its encyclopedic assembly of a large number of theoretical positions as well as in its attempt to assemble these theories, roughly at least, along the heuristic trajectory of a movement from a hermeneutics of telos in the narrow sense toward a reading/rewriting practice outside the text in the politics of culture. The author addresses issues close to the heart of literary theory and criticism, such as narratology, deconstruction, feminist literary theory, and critical rewriting. At the same time broader questions are broached, as for example the problematic relation of literary theory and its critical practices to hermeneutics, phenomenology, and a semiotics beyond the linguistic. It is here that Cornis-Pope touches on the precarious intimacy that exists between specific disciplines on the one hand and their philosophical backgrounds on the other, and on the difficulties we encounter when we merge the two in the same discourse.

**Sociocultural criticism: Critical rewriting**

What is it that Cornis-Pope wishes the reader to gather under this heading? The answer is given in a series of hints and descriptions throughout the book, as well as by way of a focused summary of critical readings of James’s ‘The figure in the carpet’ toward the end of his study. His theory of sociocultural, politically oriented and critical rewriting emerges from the discussion of a broad range of contemporary literature. As Cornis-Pope sees it, ‘critical reading in many of these models’ not only produces its own objects, but also displaces alternative methods of interpretation, ‘its revisionistic impact’ not being restricted ‘to the world of texts’ but being at the same time directed at ‘the institutions of interpretation as well’ (p. 4). As such the new reading practice has drastically altered ‘the terms that define the transaction between author and reader, textual figures and critical response’ by substituting ‘a broadened focus on the discourse-producing interspace of reading’ for a ‘narrowly interpretive paradigm’ (p. 5). Nor does this new methodology rely on a single discipline. To do its ‘revisionistic’ work it needs to be ‘endorsed from varied theoretical perspectives (reader-oriented, deconstructive, feminist, psychoanalytic, semiotic)’ (p. 6), and so the new perspective encourages ‘a rewriting of literary texts from alternative points of view’ (p. 11).

Critical rewriting challenges referential-mimetic as well as expressive models of interpretation and their ‘search for objective or subjective signifieds’ (p. 9), and yet at the same time is argued to be able to refocus interpretation ‘from the question of what makes literature literary, to the sociocultural apparatus that takes charge of literature, organizes, translates and refracts it’ (p. 11). Following Lefevere’s terminology,
Cornis-Pope tells us that rewriting as 'refraction is a powerful means of cultural dissemination and transformation, infusing an element of dynamism in our traditional definitions of literature' (p. 11). The political import of this reorientation is shown to result in a shift from 'formal poetics and an immanent analysis of narrative articulations, to an evaluation of the sociocultural investments that inform the production and reception of narratives' (p. 12).

The program that thus emerges is 'a literary pedagogy premised on the concept of rewriting' which addresses both the mechanisms that inform interpretive paradigms and the tools that 'enable readers to perform them problematically, with a critical awareness of their underlying agendas and grammars of moves' (p. 15). Cornis-Pope gives three reasons for this new focus: (1) Re-reading by itself does not necessarily result in 'a high critical performance' (p. 25); (2) 'Critical awareness and self-knowledge' depend on readers being self-reflexively engaged in an activity of critical restructuring (rewriting)' (p. 26); and (3) the conviction that 'a critical practice emphasizing rewriting' is in itself a political act (p. 27).

How rewriting constitutes a politics is not altogether obvious, although at the end of the book the reader has a much better idea what the political amounts to. Yet without an actual politics in the broad sense of an agenda concerning matters of state and social goals at large, any specific politics of reading lacks orientation. And without orientation, there is no politics. That is why it is surprising that Cornis-Pope does not draw on works which have paid special attention to questions of the politics of reading and questions of ideological effects of discourse. In this respect I note the absence of Pêcheux (1986) and Frow (1986). Or, if the emphasis of a politics of interpretation is on the institutions of reading, a more serious attempt at reference to Foucault's work would have been helpful. In particular, the critical tool kit supplied in The Archeology of Knowledge (1978), with its discussion of the 'enunciative function' and its consequences, is a gold mine for the kind of task that Cornis-Pope has set himself. In addressing such aspects of discourse as the 'surface of emergence' of specific 'discursive formations', their 'grids of specification', and their 'authorities of delimitation', as well as the question of who speaks, who is entitled to fill the 'vacant subject position', and what sort of discursive formations are employed, Foucault provides a rich starting point for a critical rewriting. Perhaps the most important emphasis as far as Cornis-Pope's project of an interpretive politics is concerned is Foucault's rejection of the idealization of language into an isolable scientific item. Instead, he broadens the traditional language-theoretical focus to include its 'exteriority' — that is, all those features outside language itself but instrumental in positioning ideologically what appears to be
said. The result is a notion of 'statement' which includes of necessity the broad political frame which we can construe for any language use. Likewise, the kind of post-structuralist practice that Cornis-Pope wishes to be political requires an 'exteriority' of the Foucauldian kind. Without this sort of backup, attempts at making literary criticism look political, a difficult proposition under any circumstances, remain somewhat shaky.

And yet Cornis-Pope is by no means naïve when it comes to the relationship between critical practice and other bodies of knowledge. 'Critical choices', he observes, 'are connected to a theory of language, a philosophy of representation, a politics of interpretation' (p. 28). In the end, it may come down to a question of what in the United States tends to be regarded as political in comparison with the cultural expectations of European writers on the subject. As it turns out in the end, there is very little politics in the readings of James's story, with the notable exception of the discussion of one of the graduate student essays, the only feminist reading and also, perhaps not surprisingly, the only reading with a strong politics of interpretation. Ann Elsworth's analysis of, among other things, the phallocentric representations in 'The figure in the carpet' transcends a reading of Henry James and potentially also the practice of literary criticism by pointing to the ideological effects of such figures in all discourse.

It does not come as a surprise, then, that it is Cornis-Pope's discussion of feminist literary theory which provides the sort of political ingredient promised but not quite fulfilled in his critical rewriting practice. Commenting on the recent work of Barbara Johnson, Cornis-Pope notes that 'her essays have now overt political and pedagogical implications' (p. 119), though what he means by political is still restricted to classroom practice. 'Like response theory and deconstruction', he writes, 'feminist criticism has pursued a reader-oriented, revisionistic interpretive practice, as well as a rigorous critique of the ideological infrastructures of interpretation' (p. 121). Perhaps one could qualify this by adding that reader orientation has no doubt left its mark on feminist literary theories, as has deconstruction and, more importantly, the Lacanian revision of Freud, but there seems to be a crucial difference that is undermined in the discussion. There is no political agenda to speak of for reader-response theory outside the classroom. Feminist literary theory, by contrast, draws powerfully on the political discourse of feminism at large.

Having said this, the reader acknowledges the very useful overview of a broad range of feminist positions and the critical debate within feminist literature as to where feminist theory should be heading. Judith Fetterley (1981) is shown to advocate the transition from searching for meaning to controlling meaning, from hermeneutics to power (p. 122), while
Elaine Showalter’s ‘Feminist criticism in the wilderness’ (1985: 246f.) is noted for referring to the “feminist obsession with correcting ... male critical theory”, a stance which “keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems” (p. 122). Cornis-Pope also observes a shift from the critique of the patriarchal canon and theory toward the shaping of a theory able to account for ‘questions of feminine specificity’ (pp. 123f.). In this he quotes in detail Paula Treichler’s summary analysis of eight major positions: (1) sex and gender; (2) the binarization of biological complexities into two genders; (3) feminism and class struggle; (4) female difference and the construction as the Other; (5) the female body and the politics of social construction; (6) the inscription of female subjectivity in language; (7) the rewriting of history from the perspective of women; and (8) the ontic and epistemic foundations of these approaches (pp. 125f.).

One of the tasks for feminism is seen to be the countering of the tradition of women as ‘self-effacing semiotic objects’ (p. 132) visible only as ‘reductive signs’ under the ‘domination of the male gaze’ (p. 133). With reference to the work of Laura Mulvey, Cornis-Pope lists three possible consequences of working within the frame of the ‘gaze’: (1) collusion (i.e., taking part in male gaze control as objects of desire); (2) feigning the stance of the male gaze; and (3) resistance to both (p. 133). A third task for feminist writers is to address the problem of mastery through language. Here he quotes Barthes: “The master is he who speaks, who has all of the language at his disposal; the object is he who remains silent” (1971: 36). On this topic the work of Jean-François Lyotard on the ‘differend’ would be helpful. Lyotard’s theory of the conflictual nature of language as discourse could be used to shore up the claim of competing demands on the reader made by the differential nature of literary tropes.

Following Donna Przybylowicz (1986: 18), Cornis-Pope suggests that the later work of Henry James, his ‘autoanalytic narratives’, contains a critique of nineteenth-century fiction. This seems a good observation in the sense that self-reflexive writing tends to be strongly intertextual and so is aware of relations between itself and its precursor texts. However, we should also register that the specific points of scrutiny discoverable in James are only visible given the angles which a certain literary theory — in this case, a feminist theoretical practice — has supplied.

As to the work of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray, Cornis-Pope feels that its utopian tendencies could be improved by radicalizing its poetics with the help of ‘cultural and political analysis’ (p. 132) along the lines of Teresa de Lauretis’s ‘materialist, semiotic theory of culture’ (p. 132) as outlined in *Alice Doesn’t* (de Lauretis 1984: 15). But Cornis-Pope is
always on dangerous ground with phrases such as 'These revisions should ... A more fruitful approach would ... feminism can function ...’ (p. 128) which would direct feminist theory in some way or other. On the other hand, he supports the success of feminist theory in highlighting two related phenomena: the phallocentric nature of represented male experience in fiction and the subordination of women’s experience in the form of an object position (p. 129). For example he appropriately quotes Marge Piercy (1973: 267): ‘“I only want to use words as weapons because I’m tired of being beaten with them”’ (p. 130).

Piercy, as many other feminists, puts her finger on the difference between actual politics and a pedagogy as political statement with minimal reality effect. The argument is not that we should no longer read Henry James; rather, the point is that we should be cautious when we claim that we are now engaging in a specific political practice. After all, the test is the answer to the question: What sort of sociocultural politics has now been accomplished?

**Deconstruction**

One could not agree more with Cornis-Pope when he writes that ‘the problems of deconstruction’ are the consequence of ‘a simplified application of Derrida’s radical critique of the logocentric tradition to the dynamics of reading’, which turns reading into a mere ‘rhetorical perusal of textual indeterminacies and dislocations’ (p. 39). Instead, Cornis-Pope proposes a ‘resocialised theory and practice of reading that would take its critical strategies outside the “safe” area of literature, to other categories of cultural texts’ (p. 39).

The question suggests itself as to what those other cultural texts are and whether they are able to retain their ‘realist’ status or are homogenized in the classroom into yet more fictions. Deconstruction here faces a dilemma: we know the world only in terms of texts since ‘there is no outside-the-text’. Nevertheless, one does not have to turn empiricist to suggest that there are at least some texts that we sense have more reality force than others. Being shot or tortured is a different sort of text than activating indeterminacies in ‘The figure in the carpet’. Note that I have not abandoned the textualist stance in this criticism. What I suggest is that we need more than language-oriented theories to interpret this problematic.

As it is designed, the critical practice of rewriting draws on ‘sociosemiotics’ and a ‘recontextualised Derridean deconstruction’ which chooses as its target ‘the sociocultural and institutional infrastructures of inter-
pretation' (pp. 39f.). As such, critical rewriting would 'demystify the mechanisms of figural and hermeneutic desire', and so offer a methodical appraisal of the conventions and discursive strategies underlying 'textual practice' (p. 40). Cornis-Pope sees a number of advantages in this approach: (1) freedom from pressures of 'hermeneutic desire and textual consumption' for 'more active modes of critical analysis and construction'; (2) correction of one's own 'reading habits and assumptions'; and (3) foregrounding of hidden naturalizations which affect our meaning-making processes and the way we construct the world.

Reading and writing are now interchangeable not only in the Derridean sense of reading being a kind of writing, but also in the practical sense of reading being already performed from a perspective of rewriting: the two are 'inseparable' (p. 40). Given the strong sympathies for Derrida's work expressed in his early comments on deconstruction, it comes as a bit of a surprise that in the remainder of the book Cornis-Pope does not in some way avail himself of the technical instruments which Derrida has introduced to interpretation. Instead, Cornis-Pope takes his main cues from the more literary-rhetorical form of deconstruction developed by Paul de Man.

Deconstruction, as Cornis-Pope sums it up, makes 'unreadability the focus of its painstakingly minute rhetorical analysis'; it 'continues and subverts a formalist “close reading”, that derives meaning from the structural properties of a text' (p. 83) and mediates between subjective response criticism and semiology with its 'interpretive conventions and grammatical codes'. Deconstruction is presented as a 'mode of radical, polemical reading' whose role it is to 'uncover the rhetorical forces of a text, its problematic figural mastery'. In so doing deconstruction is able 'to expose, by re-enacting it in its own discourse, the text's effort to transcend difference and set snug boundaries around meaning' (p. 84). Cornis-Pope cites de Man's formulation of the supplementarity of all texts, including those of our own readings (1979: 205). "The paradigm of all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration" (p. 83). We are dealing here with a kind of Gödel procedure in literary theory whereby every system always contains propositions which cannot be explained in terms of its rules. So we have to move to a metalevel of explanation, a system which is bound by the same law as the previous one and so on for at least a very long time. Derrida specifically defers to Gödel on this point (1981: 219). Perhaps one could even say by way of rough shorthand that
Derrida has performed for philosophy what Gödel had earlier done for formal logic.

As a result of Derrida’s critique of the ‘metaphysical investments’ on which rest the ‘hierarchical separations’ between text and reader, reading and writing, literature and non-literature, the traditional differentiation between what is literature and what is literary criticism has turned into ‘a responsive membrane’ permitting ‘textual resonances to carry both ways’. Thus literary criticism, in its deconstructive versions, has become ‘an endless retracing of textual figures from alternative viewpoints, an activation of the text’s own differential potential’ (p. 86). With reference to Hillis Miller’s reading of James’s ‘The figure in the carpet’, Cornis-Pope observes that now ‘a logic of differentiation and supplementarity, rather than one of identity, sustains these chains of figural substitutions’ (p. 87). What Cornis-Pope perhaps should not say is that ‘deconstruction has turned for inspiration to a radical hermeneutics like that of Jacques Derrida’ (p. 84). It is reassuring that hermeneutics is allowed to live on in the guise of deconstruction, but what sort of deconstruction was this that was able to turn to Derrida? Hartman’s, Miller’s, de Man’s? Before Derrida’s translation of Heidegger’s term *Destruktion* as deconstruction there was neither such a term nor any identifiable mode of writing known as deconstruction (Derrida 1982: 118). Barring the possibility of ‘origin’, Derrida’s writing established the very signifier by means of which later deconstructive criticism was to flourish. De Man himself sees this (1983: 111) when he says that ‘“Derrida’s work is one of the places where the future possibility of literary criticism is decided”’, including de Man’s own (p. 85). There is also of course the fundamental difference between Derrida’s enterprise as a primarily philosophical critique and its later applications in a variety of disciplines, of which literary theory was no doubt the most adventurous first.

It is from this perspective that we should also see the work of Hillis Miller, whose reading of James’s story reflects the ‘paradoxical logic’ of deconstruction by following ‘two alternative paths’ at the same time — one which ‘retraces the text’s process of self-interpretation (self-deconstruction)’, while ‘the other subverts more radically the text’s (and its own) effort at figural mastery’ (p. 88). With reference to a paper by William Cain, Cornis-Pope rightly stresses about Miller’s reading the unacknowledged ‘role that critical control plays in deconstruction’ (p. 89), which brings out the heterologic movement of the text’s rhetoric — but only in the hands of a critic with a deconstructive plan to do so, I would add. Cornis-Pope is also pretty accurate in describing Miller’s practice as ‘an activity of *refiguration*’ in a ‘restrained concept of deconstructive reading’ (p. 91). More than previous critical traditions, decon-
struction is argued to exploit the fact that 'narrative texts are unable to contain their semiosis, deferring the problem of interpretation to the reader' (p. 91). But Cornis-Pope suggests further that 'Miller's critical narrative does more than just thematise undecidability in the form of an allegorical plot that replaces the linear, referential teleology of a classic text with a deconstructive teleology'. By focusing on the 'theme of logocentric seduction' he achieves both a 'critical articulation' and its 'provisional, unfulfilled status'. Now unreadability is readable as a result of 'textual re-enactment that induces in us a desire for the possession of the logos, only to frustrate it "in a torsion of undecidability which is intrinsic in language"'. Where Cornis-Pope parts company with Miller is on 'the larger sociocultural questions that such a re-reading of tradition can implicate' (p. 93), which Hillis Miller, unlike Derrida, does not pursue.

The kind of critical reading Cornis-Pope absorbs into his own rewriting practice is de Man's 'strong, performative response to the figural nature of texts, conveying an illusion of totality through its own tropological procedures, but "arguing" against that illusion as it uncovers the gap between figure and meaning, linguistic articulations and their rhetorical effects in the text it interprets'. At the heart of a theory of reading, for Cornis-Pope as for de Man, lies "a theory of tropes" (1986: 45), of 'rhetorical manoeuvres that posit and displace meaning' (p. 95) such as catachresis, prosopopoeia, apostrophe rather than those 'unifying figures of metaphor and symbol' (p. 96).

Cornis-Pope draws our attention to de Man's rhetorical-linguistic method, which borrows 'certain concerns from other modes of reading, particularly phenomenological', yet 'distributes the accents very differently, emphasising the time-bound, error-prone dynamic of interpretation' (p. 102). As with all strongly relativist positions, the notion of 'error' is problematic in deconstruction; it suggests that we have something against which to say that something else is an error. No such security of judgment is afforded the reader in deconstruction as Derrida has launched it. Likewise, the notion of 'completeness' sits oddly with deconstructive theorizing. And yet de Man (1983: 32) suggests that 'critical "understanding can be called complete only when it becomes aware of its own temporal predicament and realizes that the horizon within which the totalisation can take place is time itself"' (p. 102). The idea of a 'complete' understanding as well as the very possibility of totalization even within the open frame of time is far removed from the Derridean view of things.

Of course Cornis-Pope speaks of de Man rather than Derrida, but he also speaks of deconstruction. He describes well how deconstruction has
been transformed in the United States from its much more philosophical European version. 'Introduced in North America by excellent rhetorical readers such as Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller or Geoffrey Hartman' (p. 103), 'Derridean deconstruction was successfully rehashed into a mode of close reading', (p. 104). This is a fair and important point, underlined by Cornis-Pope's reference to Barbara Johnson's critique (1987: 14) about a situation for which the reasons are buried deep in the very different intellectual makeup of Europe and the United States.

Yet Cornis-Pope's preference for de Man's version of deconstruction is not altogether in his own interest. This becomes evident when we note the absence especially of Derrida's infrastructural tools: difference, metaphoricity, trace, supplementarity, margin, hymen, pharmakon, and others. And yet it is in Derrida's writing rather than in de Man's that Cornis-Pope discovers ingredients for a socioculturally committed politics of reading able to offer 'an examination of a culture's master tropes' (p. 109). As he cites Derrida (1988: 648, 640), 'deconstruction is "destined ... to the analysis of the conditions of totalitarianism in all its forms ... [such as] continuitism, analogism, teleologism, hasty totalization, reduction, and derivation"' (p. 112). A little later Derrida is quoted again on the politics of deconstruction. Deconstruction, writes Derrida (1980; quoted in Leitch 1986: 47), "is also, at the very least, a way of taking a position, in the work of analysis, concerning the political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practice" (p. 113). And much later in the book we find this useful reference to Said (1983: 5), who insists that "the realities of power and authority — as well as the resistance offered by men, women and social movements to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies — are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics" (p. 186).

If we compare this with Cornis-Pope's description of his own politics, we note a marked narrowing of scope. He distinguishes three trends: 'textual semiosis' (response to textual signs); 'narrative reconstruction' ('naturalisation, reframing, fiction-making'); and a 'politics of reading' (negotiations between 'gendered, socially-positioned "meaners"' — p. 176). As it turns out, Cornis-Pope's critical pedagogy in the end produces only the mildest form of such a politics.

Throughout the book and its rich array of quotations there is a Relevanzangst, an anxiety that interpretive practices are too hedonistic, merely playful, rather than sociopolitically engaged. It is not that this fear is unjustified, but rather that it comes with expensively trained minds having chosen professions the social benefits of which are not easily demonstrated in a commercial climate characterized by the sales pitch of
secondhand car dealers and the accountability demands of managerial quality controls. What are strong, bright minds like yours doing in as unproductive a business as literary criticism? Well? Perhaps the short answer is that a society is as smart as it is self-reflexive. In this, socially oriented theorizing is certainly a *conditio sine qua non*. But perhaps the fear of critical uselessness has to do also with a very North American phenomenon, the marginalization of speculative philosophy and ideological critique in the public sphere. And if we consider what sociocultural criticism actually amounts to in the end, we note that both choice of literary text and critical apparatus are not well suited to make the claim stick. The artistic-aesthetic preoccupations of Henry James’ is not the easiest topic to render socially fertile, though no doubt this can be done. Much more seriously, the most powerful theories to quench the author’s desire for social impact are absent or sidelined. And yet Habermas, Lyotard, Pêcheux, Frow, Jameson, Eagleton, Hodge and Kress, or Felski in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, for example, offer very much what Cornis-Pope appears to be looking for.

Where *Hermeneutic Desire and Critical Rewriting* is impressive is in the detailed work that has gone into recording and editing examples of actual critical practice. Leaving the half-fulfilled promise of a politics aside, a number of things that Cornis-Pope does are particularly attractive. He speaks of an ‘interpretive community’, a notion that seems to have its roots in Peirce’s community-defined semiotics (*CP* 5.311), according to which ‘the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase in knowledge’. Likewise, Cornis-Pope’s interpretive community can be understood as going beyond the classroom, a historically dynamic sphere that sanctions signification and in so doing alters the community’s constitution.

Another point worth pursuing is Cornis-Pope’s detailed reading ladder, on which the interpretive community occupies the last rung. He distinguishes seven steps: (1) Reading: vulnerable to the ‘plot of hermeneutic desire’; (2) Narrative Comprehension: realization of ‘the process by which an enigma is constructed’; (3) Critical Response: being attracted to specific figurations such as the limited narrator, or ideological limitations of the story; (4) Interactional Plot: breaking the narratorial contract by reformulating its rules; (5) Refiguration: from the narrator’s puzzlement by the figure to a number of alternative themes; (6) Rewriting: placing the author’s language into the *intersubjective context* of the classroom; and (7) The Function of the Interpretive Community: to create a ‘sense of generic and rhetorical complementarity’ between text and reading (pp. 223–231).
The book closes with two useful chapters, a demonstration of student readings and Cornis-Pope's own from a number of perspectives: a critique of archetypical reading, a deconstructive reading, a game-theoretical approach, a feminist challenge to stipulated male reading positions, etc. and a concluding section on a post-structuralist literary pedagogy. In Cornis-Pope's own deconstructive reading we find an almost New Critical interpretation, which he calls 'rhetorical-deconstructive', of the 'narrator's varied activities in the story' (p. 245) in eight steps: (a) narratorial presence; (b) narrator's limitations; (c) narratorial self-reflexivity; (d) changing status of narrator; (e) the making of figural secrecy; (f) narrator's gradual understanding of the 'subversive dynamics of figuration'; (g) figure and desire; and (h) figure and game motif (p. 246). Now we know what the sociocultural message is: 'the pluralistic ideology of writing/reading', a well-informed, flexible and liberated rhetorical creativity in the community of the classroom — a modest political result.

**Hermeneutics**

In spite of its antipositivist heritage, there is without doubt a strong conservative streak in philosophical hermeneutics. But if we equate its conservatism with positivist convictions themselves we have lost the plot, even if this plot as a historical figuration is itself the dynamic result of hermeneutic negotiation. One of the achievements of Heidegger’s hermeneutic, for example, is to show that far from logical assertion being an independent and pure chain of reasoning, it is part of the larger horizon of understanding and its reflexive form, interpretation. Apopthacatic reason, as Heidegger calls it, or the formal text are shown to be a special case of hermeneutic circularity in which logical viciousness turns into the gradual clarification of our world. Leaving Schleiermacher and Dilthey aside, apart from noting that they cannot be eliminated from a chain of writing opposed to positivist certainty and in which Heidegger is a crucial link, hermeneutics belongs to a tradition which sees cognition as interpretive work rather than as the recovery of an item buried in the past. In this, hermeneutics since Heidegger draws on phenomenological principles of the homologous and yet always different relations between horizon and theme which both author and interpreter cannot help but employ. The inevitability of the hermeneutic circle — or hermeneutic helix, to improve on the metaphor — in all signification is a consequence of the bare bones of the theory we can glean from Heidegger's work (1962: 188–214). It is here also that Heidegger refines Schleiermacher’s distinction between *subtilitas intelligendi* and *subtilitas explicandi*, to
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which Cornis-Pope refers early in the book (p. 7), by demonstrating how interpretation and understanding are intertwined.

Gadamer's considerable contribution to hermeneutics receives short shift in Cornis-Pope's account. But since hermeneutics is treated more as a whipping boy than a serious object of description this is not surprising. The closest Cornis-Pope gets to doing justice to Gadamer is a brief quote on the active ingredient in understanding, which "is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well", a new semiotic performance (p. 29).

Jauss's hermeneutic is compatible to a point with the theoretical and critical discourse we find in Hermeneutic Desire and Critical Rewriting. In his recent work Jauss distinguishes three phases of reading. One traces 'the formation of aesthetic perception in actu. It can be described in terms of poetic structure and still-undefined expectations about the meaning of the text'. In the second phase 'one circles back from the end of the poem and the whole that has been established to the beginning' so that 'the aesthetic experience of the first reading can become the horizon of interpretive understanding, an understanding that elaborates a context of meaning from the conjecture and unanswered questions that were part of that experience'. Yet this second phase has left open 'which of its elements have been engendered by the text and which have been imposed by the interpreter'. We require a third kind of reading in which 'the analysis must delineate the earlier horizon in order to bring into play the temporal distance that was at first ignored'. Jauss adds yet a further step in which an authorial meaning is construed (reconstructed) 'as a historical countervoice' in negotiation with 'the interpreter's own understanding [which] must be elucidated on the basis of the reception history that defines his horizon of interpretation' (Jauss 1989: 231ff.).

Jauss's hermeneutic makes for an instructive comparison with the moves proposed by Cornis-Pope, who likewise envisages three methodological steps: there is a first reading which deals with immediate responses as well as 'hermeneutic' clues and impediments; a rereading which achieves a critical review of phase one by identifying gaps and indeterminacies; and a third phase which rewrites the text in an activity of 'critical production' (pp. 202ff.) Apart from the post-structuralist addition of critical rewriting the hermeneutic project which informs the Jauss passage resurfaces in Cornis-Pope, except for Jauss's important emphasis on reception history. In other words, a near 'complete' hermeneutics has now been embedded in an alternative chain of interpretive reasoning. But this is not the impression one gains in reading either Cornis-Pope or a range of post-structuralist texts embarrassed at what they construe as the hermeneutic hunt for buried secrets.
Cornis-Pope invokes Henry James in pointing to the futility of the search for a 'remunerative secret, or latent intention' and 'explanations, clues and glimpses [that] won't hold', (Notebooks: 138). Once Cornis-Pope has identified this secret as 'the hermeneutic plot outlined in the Notebooks (several critics grappling with a secret authorial intention)' (p. 3), hermeneutics has taken on the description of a 'quest for a single authorial meaning submerged between print and paper' (p. 3). But now hermeneutics has become unrecognizable. This is no more than a pop version of a concept too complex for rash usage. In fact a peculiar twist has occurred. What hermeneutics used to attack as positivist is now seen as hermeneutic to make room for a more emancipated practice.

What Cornis-Pope appears to have in mind when he uses the term 'hermeneutics' are the positions of such scholars as Fry and Hirsch, who defend 'a body of evidence beyond controversy' (Fry) and 'principles that hold true all of the time in textual interpretation' (Hirsch) (p. 4). It is this sort of utterance which allows Cornis-Pope to juxtapose 'the hermeneutic desire for single, "emergent meanings"' to 'self-conscious critical production' (p. 28) and to distinguish Iser, whom he later calls 'a frustrated hermeneut at heart' (p. 169) and his 'qualified reader-hermeneutics' from Hirsch, the author of a 'prescriptive hermeneutics' (p. 52). Cornis-Pope is certainly right in criticizing E.D. Hirsch by suggesting that 'the mighty submerged area of "unwilled" meaning returns to haunt Hirsch's intentionalist paradigm, creating a split between textual "meaning" and critical "significance"' (p. 14), and he is likewise persuasive in censoring Stanley Fish's approach for 'the hermeneutic circularity of its conventionalist claims [which exclusively draw our] attention to the critic's own textual manoeuvres' (p. 14).

Yet it is only in this kind of context that we should accept Cornis-Pope's identification of the 'hermeneutic of desire' as an approach marked by 'strong generic and hermeneutic expectations, with a desire to move quickly from indeterminate, open-ended signifiers to unambiguous signifieds'. And yet Cornis-Pope concedes that even in this simplified hermeneutics matters are not that simple, for it is 'narratives themselves [that] seduce us [by] fostering in us a desire for closure', (p. 28). Now it seems that hermeneutics has been a victim of literature itself, whereas a more emancipatory reading practice would allow us to write a critical counter-narrative. This leads the author to distinguish between two kinds of desires: narrative desire in the text and hermeneutic desire as part of reading. 'Thus both texts and their critical readings participate in a dialogic process that sets narrative desire (or an endless generation of figures and events/changes) against hermeneutic desire (for figurative/interpretive closure)' (p. 29). And hermeneutic desire, we are told, is a
reading ‘for latent hidden meanings’ (p. 32). These two forms of desire are at the heart of Cornis-Pope’s argument. As he sums up the point, ‘the transgressive interplay of hermeneutic desire and critical reconstruction in the interpretive process is the unifying theme of my book’, (p. 36).

It would seem that Cornis-Pope has reduced hermeneutics to a narrow activity: the search for a hidden signified. It is an act of considerable theoretical violence to so shrink the concept that it can no longer cope with anything but the simplest idea of a buried meaning. Neither Barthes’s hermeneutic code, nor Jauss’s methodological hermeneutic, nor the elaborate procedures which Gadamer describes as hermeneutic, let alone Heidegger’s foundational claims for the hermeneutic circularity of all interpretation are recognizable in this usage of the term.

Another dubious description of hermeneutics is to associate it with ‘end-stopped’ readings. Only hard-headed empiricists who conceive of objects as given in the finality of their properties and positivists who assume the possibility of a matching of world and language can stipulate ‘end-stopped’ procedures. Cornis-Pope quite happily turns hermeneutics into this kind of theoretical stance. ‘Poststructuralist and reader-oriented criticism have questioned the hermeneutic, end-stopped mode of interpretation, recommending instead a process approach that promises to convert an economy of hermeneutic desire into one of rewriting/remodeling of texts’ (p. 36). There are important differences between hermeneutics in its Heideggerian and Gadamerian and Jaussian applications, on the one hand, and post-structuralism as well as reader-oriented theory on the other. Yet it is not that the former is ‘end-stopped’ while the latter are continuous. Whatever the differences, ‘end-stopped’ criticism is not so much hermeneutic as positivist.

So what is Cornis-Pope’s hermeneutic? Through much of the book it acts as a scapegoat for conservative, naive, theoretically uninformed, and authoritarian reading habits conducive to an ‘essentialist hermeneutics’ (p. 50). However, we also find a more neutral use of the term, allowing for different interpretive pursuits. As he puts it at one point, ‘literary pedagogy can fruitfully exploit the tension between different modes/phases of reading, moving from a naturalised first reading, to a self-conscious secondary hermeneutics that will call for the “text’s difference”, its capacity to overstep its own articulatory system’ (p. 23). Cornis-Pope even discovers the hermeneutic in deconstruction, which, ‘as a reading strategy concerned with the dismantling of “traditional models and habits of interpretation”, has adopted as “radical [a] hermeneutics” as that of Jacques Derrida (p. 84). Later in the book Cornis-Pope once more speaks of a hermeneutic in deconstruction and its ‘hermeneutic and instructional
promise’ (p. 109) Such equivocation is welcome since it concedes that there is nothing in principle in the hermeneutic tradition that would disallow the further methodological step of rewriting. Indeed, earlier Cornis-Pope had made the hermeneutic concession that ‘every theory of interpretation ... is still bound to a specific mode of seeing and articulating, to strong interpretive frameworks, mediating concepts, and strategies of emplotment’ (p. 15). Unfortunately, the description given of traditional hermeneutics is misleading for readers unable to balance their judgment by way of a more sophisticated version of the tradition from Schleiermacher to Jauss.

Phenomenology

In spite of a sympathetic attitude to some features of phenomenology, Cornis-Pope also perpetuates a number of fairly widespread misunderstandings concerning its procedures and in particular the pioneering work of Roman Ingarden. When he speaks of ‘the later theories of semantic indeterminacy’ (p. 44) he fails to mention Ingarden’s elaboration of Husserl’s notion of ‘appresentation’ in terms of ‘concretization’ and ‘lacunae of indeterminacy’. In *The Literary Work of Art* (1973 [1930]) Ingarden argues the details of what sort of indeterminacies are bound to occur in the schematic structure of the literary work as realized in the reading performance. Significantly, Ingarden’s distinctions differ, for example, from William Empson’s ‘ambiguities’ in that they are not restricted to the level of linguistics. This has implications for a broad intersemiotic theory able to enrich the verbal by way of nonlinguistic signification (see below).

When Ingarden’s work is mentioned it emerges as the target of Iser’s critique. Following Iser, Cornis-Pope speaks for example of ‘Ingarden’s confidence in the successful conclusion of the aesthetic process’ (p. 46). This is a misconstrual. Ingarden emphasizes that the process of filling the lacunae of indeterminacy is always still a schematic and never a completed process. The reason for this misunderstanding is that Cornis-Pope reads Ingarden via Iser, who distances himself from his source, even though he borrows from him the mainstays of his interpretive apparatus: the schematic structure of literary language, indeterminacy, concretization, and the distinction between the artistic and the aesthetic.

Likewise the description of Ingarden’s ‘three-tiered structure (with the linguistic-thematic layer supporting a level of schematised objects and characters, which in turn generates a higher level of represented objects, a “world”) [and which] helps the reader resolve the text into a “polyphony
of aesthetically valent qualities" (p. 47) is a disastrous short-cut. What Ingarden is on about is to show how the reader's concretization results in the virtual constitution of the ontically heteronomous literary work. In performing the printed words, the reader cannot but bring into existence, in a stratified epistemic sequence, the work from its material base via syntactic, semantic, imaginational, and higher-order semantic, including non-linguistic acts. There is no argument in either Wellek, who wrongly speaks of norms, or Cornis-Pope that convinces the reader that Ingarden's description is faulty in this respect. No reading, whether psychoanalytic, feminist of any persuasion, or post-structuralist, would be able to talk about either the speech acts of a narrator or the phallocentric and logocentric vision of a signified world if it had not first performed logically prior operations and so constituted the very 'objects' they debate. It is Ingarden's remarkable contribution that starting from Husserlian principles, such as noetic and noemic acts, appresentation, and the endowment of meaning, he illustrated with the help of the literary how complex objects in the life-world are established by performance.

A critique of Ingarden should get away from charging him with something he has not done. What could be attacked is a number of gaps in his phenomenology: that it does not elaborate the ideological implications for his higher-level constructions (although this could be rectified); that psychoanalysis has no place in his theory (although such a place can be construed without fundamental philosophical shifts); that he holds unnecessarily to a high art vs. low art distinction by granting only certain works metaphysical qualities (this seems to fly in the face of his very own descriptive procedure and can be amended); that he writes in a traditional male mode (in need of revision); that his meanings have lacunae but are otherwise stable (this is a moot point: indeterminacy vs. underdetermination); that he believes in appropriate and inappropriate concretizations (there are no true concretizations, though wrong concretizations are possible); appropriate are those which construe from given foundations and do not contradict textual information (which theoretically at least leaves infinite possibilities), in appropriate are constructions which violate the material base (i.e., they are readings not of this text but of some other text; they are illegitimate not as behavior but as being regarded as readings of the materials in question); and that his distinction between the literary work and the literary work of art is established on evaluative criteria in terms of the quantity and degree of cohesion of the aesthetic value qualities which are discoverable (a trace of traditional aesthetics with its built-in value hierarchies according to principles of harmony, originality, etc.) But even without this last distinction the
descriptive part of Ingarden’s argument remains reasonably intact, still waiting to be demolished by a strong countertheory.

At one point Cornis-Pope repeats a widespread assumption about the phenomenological notion of concretization which is supposed to be ‘predicated on an expressive concept of language, on a faith in the inner plenitude of the “work as read”’ (p. 51f.). This is right in the sense that language is conceived in phenomenology as the dominant typification system among many others (other sign systems) and so is able to ‘cover’ an infinite number of possible phenomena. In the formulation by C.M. Meyers (1958: 45) an item of perception is apprehended incompletely but is not apprehended as incomplete’. This suggests an infinite regress of reading the world.

Language as one of the schematic grids with which we do our reading, then, can never be exhausted — hence its alleged ‘inner plenitude’. But I suspect that this is an empiricist misreading of phenomenology. We must note that for phenomenologists meaning is not attached to the sentence or given by it, nor dictated by ‘the world’; it is ‘endowed by’ the user within intersubjective constraints. There is always something missing, never to be completed. Also, Cornis-Pope’s reference to Husserl’s ‘meaning precedes language’ is misunderstood (p. 52). Meaning is pre-predicative in the sense that language is only one way of carrying meaning, so that other forms of signification may precede the linguistic formulation, such as an image. Where Husserl is quite wrong is in the assumption that meaning is eidetic (Ruthrof 1992: 65–77).

Intersemiotics

There are a number of moments in the book when Cornis-Pope boldly envisages ‘a deconstructive critique’ that would question whether ‘the language-centered model is still an adequate tool for the investigation of other semiotic systems (visual, cinematic, psychological, ideological)’ (p. 164). And a little later he ends the section with the strong thesis that if linguistics is still regarded as the explanatory frame for an all-encompassing general semiotics the charge of logocentrism ‘still has a lot of actuality’ (p. 176). However short-lived these speculations, they are important and have massive implications. If Cornis-Pope’s hunch is right, and I think it is, literary theory and criticism should invest in a broad intersemiotic theory, which would account for the partial commensurability between signs and its interpretive negotiation, a theory of prelinguistic judgment, and above all a semantic more useful to literary readers than the theory of meaning prescribed to us all by analytical philosophy. The
task is huge and Cornis-Pope must be forgiven for not being able to 'go beyond' language, as his subsequent discussion of Barthes and Benveniste shows (p. 165).

What is lacking in current literary theory is an account of the relation between linguistic signifiers and nonverbal semiosis. For surely, the imagina­tional freeplay which is triggered by narrative sentences — 'explicit sexuality, scopic violence ...' (p. 30) — is not linguistic. The trigger stands in a certain relation to the ‘filling’ by visual, proxemic, kinetic, olfactory, thermal, gravitational, haptic, or aural significatory processes which the linguistic helps to set in train. If we are talking so much of desire, that which is desired is fantasied largely by nonlinguistic signs, though never fulfilled. For the nonverbal signs so produced act in turn as triggers for further and further forms of signification. There seems to be no logical, but only pragmatic limits to this process.

This kind of reasoning appears to be started but not carried through when Cornis-Pope proposes that 'meaning is not located in the given structures of the text, but in the unbounded interplay of various articulations, including the critic's own discourse' (p. 85). Is discourse only language in action or signification in general? Unfortunately, deconstruction itself is not particularly well suited to pursue this question for the paradoxical reason of its own 'logocentricity'. By this I mean that the paradigm shift that is often imputed to have been introduced by Derrida as one from a logos-informed to a non-logocentric writing is actually a shift between two forms of logocentricity: one propositional, against which he has written at length, the other modal or, more precisely in his case, rhetorical. Both are versions of the linguistic turn away from what comes 'after' or 'before' language.

Semiotically speaking, Derrida has hardly turned the corner, stuck as he is in the play pit of figural speech. To continue the non-logocentric project, which can so far only point to the limitations of the linguistic definiens as against its possible definienda, amongst which language can be one, we require an intersemiotic theory. We need a theory capable of arguing the negotiation of the relative incommensurability of different kinds of signification, including what is traditionally called 'perception'. Such a theory would distinguish Read Only Sign Systems (ROSS) from Communicative Signs Systems (COSS) in order to cater for perception as a significatory activity (Ruthrof 1994). Without such a theory, speaking of either speech acts or propositional contents, narrators or fictional world, discours or histoire, the noetic or the noematic, leads to two untenable results. One is to treat all these issues as language, and further language chains, as does most of linguistically oriented criticism, and deconstruction is no exception here; the other is to stipulate once again
empirical objects — in other words, 'the world' as the given referent of both the deictic and the diegetic. One way of getting out of this binary rut is to reintroduce the lost 'world' by way of nonverbal signification; by way of an intersemiotic theory of meaning. This can be done by combining a Peircean semiotics with a modernized phenomenological theory of the constitution of objects (Ruthrof 1992, 1993) and recent writings in social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1979).

Throughout his book Cornis-Pope speaks a great deal of figuration, but there is no argument as to how precisely any such figuration is semiotically constituted before it is once more undermined by critical production in rewriting. Is rewriting only the production of more linguistic signifiers, or does anything happen that make the signifiers signify? And when they signify, do they signify more language? Also, is it possible to reread (i.e., produce critically) without any figuration whatsoever? This is at the heart of the difference between pragmatic language use ('Open the window, please') and literary usage (focus on tropes). Literary explorations of any sort of language surely require figurations of some sort, by which one could mean the activation of potentially all nonlinguistic signification. In that case, figurations would be replaced not simply by alternative tropes, but by a sequential dialectic between tropes and figurations, whereby none could exist without the other. A consequence of this is that we can never escape figuration, nor further text variations, and so hermeneutics as a search for figurations cannot be discarded but only re-explained in terms of an infinite regress of interpretations.

Following de Man, Cornis-Pope notes that 'language can refer to experience only by means of signs that replace a phenomenal object with a rhetorical figure that does not share any of the sensory determinations of its referent (the word 'flower' does not bloom or emit perfume like a natural flower)' (p. 96). One is inclined to add that this applies to all signs, even those, like iconic signs, which appear to share certain characteristics with objects of perception. Furthermore, what a rhetorical figure is to language are the endless modalities of the visual, olfactory, kinetic, haptic, or proxemic to nonlinguistic signs. What remains unexplained in the passage is how 'a rhetorical figure' amounts to meaning. Meaning, I suggest, does not reside in language. Again, an intersemiotic explanation is warranted: meaning occurs as an interpretive event in which at least two, and usually more than two, sign systems are aligned. I have elsewhere named this description the 'semiotic corroboration thesis' (Ruthrof 1992: 102–119).

From this perspective one must take issue with de Man's failure to see the significatory nature of nonlinguistic experience. In a paraphrase by Norris, de Man attacks the false assumption "that language is a
natural, organic phenomenon; that linguistic structures are there to be perceived, like objects in the natural world; and that the process of interpreting texts is best understood in terms deriving from the activity of sensuous cognition'" (Cornis-Pope, p. 97; quoted from Norris 1988: 37). But Cornis-Pope compounds the misconception in de Man's and Norris's accounts further when he writes that 'poetic language can produce this effect only by obfuscating its own articulatory processes, by concealing the differences between natural and artificial, human and non-human, present and absent, literal and figural' (p. 97). What has gone wrong? We are dealing here with an error that is a consequence of a pop version of the linguistic turn. Of course de Man and his commentators are right in emphasizing the artificial nature of language. My objection has to do with what appears to be its 'natural' counterpart, perceptual cognition.

In de Man this error takes the form of a claim that language constructs are significatory, while nonlinguistic cognitive information processing is not. This is a return to a pre-Kantian empiricist position, a move all the more surprising since I know from my own conversations with de Man that he would not have wished to be accused of anything as vile as that. The problem lies in the significatory monopoly of language and the relegation of perception to some natural sensory process. Instead, we need a more Peircean approach. All schematization of reality is significatory. The point is that all signs, cognitive and communicative alike, have to be read and that all such reading procedures have to be learned. Without interpretive attention we could derive no meaning from any of them, notwithstanding habitual conceptualization. And what has to be read is by definition significatory.

If this is so, the task is to show how linguistic and nonlinguistic signification interact in spite of the demonstrable, relative incommensurability between not just verbal and nonverbal signs, but also amongst nonverbal signification systems. Certainly, without nonverbal signification we could not make sense of sentences at all. This is to say that we cannot simply 'read' if this means to stay within one and the same sign system. The linguistic requires activation via nonlinguistic signs. At most, de Man's recipe can achieve an emphasis of the self-referentiality of language, but only once the language schematization of our world has been activated by nonlinguistic signification. 'Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun' remains mute even at the plane of rhetorical figures without its activation by the nonverbal (visual, kinetic, proxemic, thermal, gravitational, aural, olfactory, tactile, haptic signs) — in short, without turning what is syntactic into a semantic. But remember that there is no semantic which is merely syntactic, except in formal languages. We require an
intersemiotic ascent by going outside the linguistic system to general semiosis, into which all language gears. This is the sort of intersemiotic argument literary theory, including its deconstructive versions, needs to recover from its logocentricity.

So Cornis-Pope is right in granting Peirce an important place in his discussion (pp. 179f.). One would want more Peirce, however, bearing in mind the initial promise of a sociocultural approach. Peirce has very important things to say for such a project. Perhaps one of the most important of these is his notion of the centrality of inference (p. 179). The term is mentioned by Cornis-Pope but not pursued. And yet it has weighty theoretical consequences, not the least of which is a post-Kantian move: if we cannot help but realize the world in terms of signification, whatever we know about the world beyond our signs is by way of inference. And this includes the constraints on our significations that govern what we can experience. This sort of insight supplies a sophisticated frame, neither metaphysically realist nor radically 'relativist' textualist, within which we can place a sociocultural reading practice.

Telos

Fairly early in his book Cornis-Pope defends his self-reflexive task against Stanley Fish's claim that critical self-awareness is 'epistemologically impossible'. According to Fish (1980: 276f.), "in every situation some or other meaning will appear to us to be uninterpreted because it is isomorphic with the interpretive structure the situation (and therefore our perception) already has". In his criticism of the passage Cornis-Pope somewhat overshoots the target. 'This anti-theoretical stance', he feels, 'rules out not only critical self-examination, but also any viable form of critical pluralism based on a knowledge of the available interpretive alternatives and their epistemological consequences' (p. 18). But Fish says that certain meanings always 'appear to us to be uninterpreted'; they seem natural, given the frame within which both observer and observed item function. This in no way undermines the possibility of 'critical pluralism'. On the contrary, it liberates interpreters from preordained semantic obligations and gives their will to interpretation a free reign — almost, that is. For whatever interpretive direction we choose, plural or monological, there are always consequences. Interpretive randomness is a difficult heuristic principle to sustain, if it is possible at all. The reason for this is that we cannot fully escape the hermeneutic telos, in Kant's speculative sense. We cannot eradicate the teleological from the text, and if we could, we would no longer have a text, as a sequence of signs that are always shifting...
of signs. What has happened is not so much the removal of telos as its shift from the interpreted text to the tools of interpretation.

This appears to be the position Cornis-Pope supports when he notes the gradual replacement of 'the linear, referential teleology of a classic text' by 'a deconstructive teleology' (p. 93). In this light his critique of Fish's anarchic plurality is well taken. 'In the absence of any theoretical evaluation of the critical beliefs and strategies brought to bear on the text, we are left with a proliferation of local narratives that turn out to be even more constraining, more enslaved to their sets of unexamined norms' (p. 19). If we cannot escape the use of interpretive frames we should at least be aware of their competing teleologies.

What has not happened, however, in the shift of emphasis from textual to interpretive telos is that the much-maligned hermeneutic desire has been replaced by non-libidinal strategies, as Cornis-Pope seems to assume when he writes, 'other projects of reading (deconstructive, feminist, sociocritical) have proposed stronger strategies for disrupting the pleasure-producing coherences of narration, and rewriting its cultural system of references' (p. 32). This is not where the desire-pleasure story ends. I suggest that with the transfer of telos the pleasure-producing mechanisms have likewise slipped into the metanarration, the narration which gives cohesion to the disruptive process. What would feminist criticism do if the telos of the deconstruction of phallocentrality were abandoned? Thus is revealed a second-order hermeneutics whose telos is in no way less powerful than its first-order cousin. The hermeneutic search is now aimed at discovering not the hidden telos of the narrative itself, but the telos which optimizes the reader's critical strategy. Far from being absent in critical forms of rewriting, hermeneutics has 'merely' exchanged levels. One could say hermeneutics has caught up with Godel's critique of Principia Mathematica and other formal systems by realizing that certain secrets cannot be resolved at the level of the primary text, but need a meta-level as well as the infinite regress of further and further systems to travel the trajectories of the undecidables of interpretation. Yet without telos, no narrative at all.

'Why is Hawthorne's Georgiana willing to submit to the knife?' (p. 278). What else but hermeneutic desire would ask such a question?

References


Hermeneutics in critical rewriting


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