

Discursive Difference: Toward a Correlation of the Scientific and the Aesthetic

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ABSTRACT

New Historicist critics have a certain fondness for comparative analyses of scientific and aesthetic texts, although the complex theoretical premises of this approach have rarely been discussed. This essay proposes an interdisciplinary approach which—in contrast to the New Historicist approach—accounts for discursive difference, i.e., achieves a correlation of different discursive fields without simply equating them. This approach consists of a combination of the epistemological and the hermeneutic method, since only by way of the critic's awareness of universality and specificity, of interdiscursive conditions and discursive peculiarities, is his or her desire for absolute and universal knowledge to be contained.

The project of interpretation has always been shaped by a desire for unity and wholeness, which eventually became an important impulse for epistemological inquiry. Nevertheless, this desire is at odds with the irrepressible evidence of difference and discontinuity. As different modes of cognition or discontinuous casts of experience often appear to be irreconcilable, the old belief in the underlying principle or “common ground” has been confronted with philosophical and epistemological theories that assume discursive variety and discontinuity to be constitutive for human cognition. Thus, poststructuralist philosophy has in the last decades dismissed the idea of an all-pervasive theory capable of embracing, likewise, aesthetic and scientific concerns. With poststructuralist skepticism, however, there also grew the urge to collate different discursive fields and so to bridge historical distance without denying it categorically. I understand the New Historicism as one of the most interesting attempts within the New American Studies to transfer poststructuralist and Foucauldian thought to literary criticism and to avoid the dangerous impulse to isolate the literary text from its sociocultural context or, conversely, to conceive of this context merely as a web of “influences” on the author. The New Historicist critic Louis A. Montrose, for instance, speaks of “the social production of ‘literature’ or of any particular text [which] is to signify not only that it is socially produced but also that it is socially productive—that it is the product of work and that it performs work in the process of being written, enacted, or read.”¹ Because of this very “work” or “negotiation” that connects literary text and cultural context, both appear to

1 Louis A. Montrose, “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture,” *The New Historicism*, ed. H. A. Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989) 23. For a “history” of New Historicism and a critical reading of its main representatives, see Brook Thomas, *The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

relate to one underlying principle, as they are seemingly shaped by the same ideological premises. Consequently, Stephen Greenblatt takes modern "aesthetic discourse" to be "bound up with capitalist venture," while he understands "social discourse" as "already charged with aesthetic energies."²

This process of "negotiation," motivating all sorts of cultural work, is not as harmonious as it may sound; critical readings from ethnic, feminist and historiographic points of view (to name only a few) have shown its inherent problems which exist in the tendency to subjugate the "other" by relating it to a hegemonic and patriarchal tradition.³ I share this critique of the totalizing tendencies of New Historicism as my reading of two New Historicist essays, Stephen Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" and Joel Fineman's "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction,"⁴ will show. Both essays are likewise concerned with scientific and aesthetic positions, and both assume an underlying common ground which always contains every specific utterance already, be it scientifically or aesthetically orientated. While these two essays happen to relate to the European Renaissance, the theoretical debate involved refers to the problem of interdisciplinarity in general. It is this aspect which is of interest for American Studies, as their concern with both literary and non-literary discursive fields demands, and depends upon, methodological differentiation rather than mythical unification.⁵

In spite of both Greenblatt's and Fineman's frequent references to Foucault, the authors do not really seem to be aware of the epistemological consequences of his thought. This may be due to a general neglect of the French history of science in the United States. While the complex reflections on epistemology, history of science and hermeneutics that had been articulated in France since the 1940s form an inestimable background to Foucault's approach, these traditions have gone widely unnoticed in the United States: thus, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* seems to have displaced Gaston Bachelard's work, which nevertheless had anticipated Kuhn's own in many respects, and Paul Feyerabend's "anarchic philosophy of science" was obviously catchier than Georges Canguilhem's more differentiated epistemology.⁶ Whereas Kuhn

2 Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," *The New Historicism* 11.

3 See Carolyn Porter, "Are We Being Historical Yet?" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (1988): 744-86, and "History and Literature: 'After the New Historicism,'" *New Literary Review* 21 (1990): 253-72; David E. Johnson, "Voice, the New Historicism, and the Americas," *American Quarterly* 48 (1992): 81-116; Brook Thomas, "Greenblatt and the Limits of Mimesis for Historical Criticism," *The New Historicism* 179-218.

4 Stephen Greenblatt, "Fiction and Friction," *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986) 30-56; Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction," *The New Historicism* 49-76.

5 This is precisely Philip Fisher's claim in his attempt to define the present state of American Studies as opposed to past schools of criticism. His plea for rhetoric rather than myth emphasizes the need for pluralistic and diversifying perspectives on culture and history: "One way to characterize this new generation of American studies would be to say that interest has passed from myth to rhetorics. Myth in this perhaps too simple formula is always singular, rhetorics always plural" (Philip Fisher, "Introduction," *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher [Berkeley: U of California P, 1991] vii).

6 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anachronistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: Verso, 1978). On the different positions in the history of sciences and their interrelations see John Neubauer, "Models for the History of Science and Literature," *Science and Literature* (Lew-

and Feyerabend have certainly influenced New Historicist conceptions of science and history, important aspects of the work of their French "counterparts" have been ignored. In this paper, I shall call them to mind in order to propose an alternative model for the interdisciplinary concerns of American Studies.

While Bachelard and Canguilhem have set forth methods to grasp the specificity of scientific discourse, another member of this French "school," the physician and literary critic Jean Starobinski, has outlined a hermeneutics which describes the function of the aesthetic in relation to other discursive structures. I shall draw extensively on his ideas in my attempt to reflect critically on the New Historicist conception of the aesthetic. While the New Historicists' attempts at interdisciplinarity show—like Starobinski's approach—the urge to relate different fields of human experience, they often fail—unlike the French critic—to characterize the specificities and differences that, in the first place, organize discursive interrelations.

For the purposes of my inquiry, I shall focus on two specific areas of inquiry: medical or biological theories are here to stand for scientific discourse and literary texts for aesthetic concerns. This choice is due to the fact that medicine and literature are intimately connected because of their common interest in the human body. Whereas medicine has always had a special position among the scientific discourses because the human body is not as easy to objectify as other natural complexes, literature has often tried to overcome its own incapability to approach the body directly by way of adapting medical terminology.⁷ The corresponding similarities of contemporaneous medical and literary texts have inspired interdisciplinary approaches for a long time, but often enough the fascination with the striking metaphorical congruity has repressed the equally important aspects of the discursive function of those texts, their cognitive interest, and their historicity.

I

In the year of 1601, a physician called Jacques Duval determined the hermaphroditical nature of a certain Marie le Marcis who had been trying to establish a social existence for her/himself under the name of Marin le Marcis—that is, as a man. Steven Greenblatt makes use of this anecdote in his essay "Fiction and Friction" in order to prove the untenability of Jacob Burckhardt's assumption that the modern conception of individuality derived from the Renaissance and, ultimately, to introduce a fundamental revision of Shakespearean drama. According to Greenblatt, Shakespeare's plays set

(cont.)

isburg: Bucknell UP, 1983) 17; Wolf Lepenies, "Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Wissenschaftsgeschichte: Das Werk Gaston Bachelards in Gaston Bachelard, *Die Bildung des wissenschaftlichen Geistes*, trans. M. Bischoff (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1987) 7-34.

7 On the interrelations between literature and medicine and their specific interest for interdisciplinary projects, see David Michael Levin and George Solomon, "The Discursive Formation of the Body in the History of Medicine," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 15 (1990): 515-37; G. S. Rousseau, "Medicine and Literature: Notes on their Overlaps and Reciprocities," *Gesnerus* 43 (1986): 33-46; Elaine Scarry, introduction, *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) vi-xxviii.

forth precisely the same problematic constellations as the medical theories of those days: both theatrical and medical discourse represent sexual difference as unstable, individual and communal existence as intertwined, and sexual reality as male. Consequently, medicine and literature appear in Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" as, in fact, mere aspects of a given historical situation, which is ideally epitomized in the correlating anecdote.

Joel Fineman reads Greenblatt's essay in order to develop a theoretical approach to New Historicist "methodology."⁸ According to him, Greenblatt's strategy of anecdotally collating different discursive fields presents a promising model for every interdiscursive approach. To specify this positive understanding of the genre of the anecdote, Fineman also chooses an example from the wide range of medical history, claiming that Hippocrates, with his pathological case histories, had paradigmatically recognized the power of the anecdote to determine "the destiny of a specifically historiographic integration of event and context" (56). For Fineman, the anecdote, in its continuous transgression of its own literary status, achieves an exemplary representation of the real—"the anecdote, however literary, is nevertheless directly pointed towards and rooted in the real" (57)—which predestines the anecdotal for the historiographical task of bringing together event and context. Up to the late Renaissance, the anecdotal had characterized historiography, whereas after that it fell prey to the pretensions of a new "technicist historicism" which wrongly and fatally abandoned the anecdotal and its unmediated (if limited) access to the past. For Fineman, the New Historicism (especially Greenblatt's version of it) expresses the desire to resuscitate the anecdotal form of historiographical representation which has been repressed since the Renaissance, and Greenblatt's critics appear as the perpetrators of the Renaissance restrictions, driven by the "anti-historic impulse" (64) to retreat to a closed and ideologically untouchable position. In an extensive note, which gives a critical reading of Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction," Fineman then exemplifies his plea for a centralization of the anecdote and comes to the conclusion that Greenblatt's comparative approach is flawed because Greenblatt privileges the literary text unduly in comparison with the medical anecdote: "... it seems very clear that it is Shakespeare's literary text that controls Greenblatt's reading of the history of medicine, and that, correlatively, it is not the case that the history of medicine opens up, on this reading, a novel way to read Shakespeare" (75).

I want to argue, however, that Fineman's reading of Greenblatt is itself tainted by a problematical conception of the nature of discursive interaction. Thus, Greenblatt's "Fiction and Friction" does not fail because of its neglect of medical discourse but because Greenblatt takes medical discourse to be congruent with literary discourse. Whether or not Greenblatt unduly privileges one aspect of the anecdotal (i.e., its literary adaptation) is less relevant than his undifferentiated totalization of the anecdotal. I am perfectly aware that with this critique I seem to take sides with Fineman's "anti-historic" historians. Nevertheless, I consider the very centrality of the anecdote in both Greenblatt's and Fineman's work to be highly problematical.

The analogy Fineman draws between Hippocratic case studies and Thucydideyan historiography is perfectly convincing as long as he is just concerned with the interpretation of rhetorical, thematical, and stylistic affinities. But Fineman aims at more than a

mere comparative discourse analysis—with his concept of the anecdote he invokes a historical unity (the “historeme,” which is “rooted in the real” [57]) beyond the specific points of reference of medical and historiographic discourse. And the very claim for the anecdotal’s historical representativity implies the existence of an underlying common ground of all discursive structures which may be epitomized at will by the anecdote.

In Greenblatt’s text, the same structure of thought is even more evident since the author explicitly posits an underlying system as “a shared code, a set of interlocking tropes and similitudes that function not only as the objects but as the conditions of representation.” This system rests on the continuous “translation” of general (in this case medical) “tropes of the body” by way of the “cultural power” to the Shakespearean stage. Greenblatt’s metaphors invariably characterize this underlying process as a harmonious transition rather than a radical discursive break: “Renaissance comedy, that most artificial of forms,” “invoke[s] nature” and “nature, in the reified form of medical discourse,” “assume[s] the artificial form of a Renaissance comedy” (my emphasis).⁹ Consequently, Greenblatt does not take into account that the translation from one discourse—the scientific—to another—the theatrical—might mean more than merely a superficial variation, that the theatrical (and all other aesthetic) adaptation might as well distort or invert what has been defined functionally and pragmatically in scientific language and, finally, that scientific language—even if it draws on the same images—might construe a cognitive context which has nothing whatsoever to do with aesthetic expressions and desires.

II

Both Fineman’s conception of the anecdote as “historeme” and Greenblatt’s understanding of the “tropes of the body” as a “shared code” invoke the existence of a monolithic, always already given “cultural power,” transcending and containing diverse

9 Greenblatt, “Fiction and Friction” 46-47. How easily the assumption of a “cultural power” merges with the assumption of a congruity of medical and literary conception becomes evident when Greenblatt finally transfers the results of his reflections on medical history to the Shakespearean texts. For example, he claims that one of Shakespeare’s plays (*As You Like It*) expresses, in analogy to scientific argumentation, the consolidate power of the communal, precisely because it ignores the communal (“What begins as a physiological necessity, [the ‘chafing’ between the sexes] then, is reimagined as an improvisational self-fashioning that longs for self-effacement and reabsorption in the community [Rosalind’s return to the court]” [30]). Another play (*Twelfth Night*), according to Greenblatt, evokes nothing so much as the underlying presence of male gender precisely because it denies this certainty over and over again (“From the perspective of the medical discourse we have been exploring, this final, authentic transvestism serves to secure theatrically the dual account of gender: plays insist upon the chafing between the sexes and the double nature of individuals, but the theater reveals, in the presence of the man’s (or boy’s) body beneath the woman’s clothes, the ultimate sexual reality” [52]). Greenblatt thus does not account for the fact that both aspects (Rosalind’s return to the court, which is mentioned but not shown, as well as the actors’ “disclosure” which happens off-stage) are situated outside the theatrical reality. Neither does he consider the possibility that these marginalizing strategies might serve to imagine a differently hierarchized and organized reality. Actually the initial—underlying—assumption of an unconditional analogy of scientific ideology and theatrical expression already denies this possibility.

discursive structures. In other words, both start from the assumption of an underlying uniformity; consequently, different cognitive interests as well as different discursive functions appear as secondary (deducible) categories. To refute this idea of an all-pervading original structure of human knowledge, prior to all discursive difference, I want to introduce methodological approaches which account for, rather than ignore, discursive specificities. As a first step, I shall introduce some specific structures of "the scientific," which is, of course, exactly what historians of science have been doing for a long time. To adopt their point of view also means to consider the specific stance of the history of science in contrast to other historiographic disciplines and the possibilities stemming from the linkage of contemporary and historical scientific knowledge.

Georges Canguilhem has examined the problems and chances of the history of science in various essays. Like his teacher Gaston Bachelard, he was concerned both with an approach to historical scientific developments and to discursive structures of the scientific, i.e., with fundamental problems emerging in almost every field of interdisciplinary studies.¹⁰ Canguilhem's discussion of the concept of science rests upon a problematization of his own ambivalent position as a historian of sciences torn between the discrepant perspectives of the "objective" historian and the "evaluating" scientist. This discrepancy he takes to be represented in the different but interdependent positions of epistemology and the history of science:

The historian proceeds from the beginnings to the present, so that contemporary science is always to a certain degree anticipated in the past. The epistemologist proceeds from the actual to its beginnings, so that only a part of that which presented itself as science yesterday seems to a certain degree to be founded by the present view. In the moment of founding—never for ever, to be true, but incessantly from scratch—the science of today destroys too and for ever.¹¹

Referring explicitly to his teacher Bachelard, Canguilhem construes the history of science as an "uninterrupted revolution" which because of its very underlying successive-ness should not be conceived of as continuous but as a sequence of "epistemological breaks" (Bachelard). Both Bachelard and Canguilhem thus deny the positivistic idea of a direct and linear scientific process of cognition, not because they consider the history of science to be reversible or arbitrary but because they conceive of it as an oscillating process of concretization and dismissal, to be perceived only in retrospect. "The history of sciences is the history of the defeats of irrationality," Bachelard wrote in 1951.¹² The historian of sciences should consequently both correlate present and past scientific knowledge and account for epistemological breaks. Yet to avoid artificial continuities does not mean to analogize the thrust of the history of sciences unconditionally to other branches of historiography, i.e., to concentrate exclusively on the history of scientific

10 About Canguilhem's work, see the special issue on Canguilhem of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 90 (1985), and Michel Foucault, "Georges Canguilhem: Philosopher of Error," / & C 7 (Autumn 1980): 51-62.

11 Georges Canguilhem, "L'histoire des sciences dans l'œuvre épistémologique de Gaston Bachelard," *Études d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1983) 173-86. Ail translations not marked otherwise are my own.

12 Gaston Bachelard, *L'activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951) 27.

institutions, technical developments, and isolated biographies. It is much more important for the historian of sciences to investigate the epistemological process as a specific and independent field: "The scientific activity emerges only at the level of questions, methods and terms."¹³ The dialectical movement between an evaluating epistemology and an "objective" historiography (or "archaeology") epitomizes the exceptional status of the history of science:

The time of the appearance of scientific truth, the time of verification, has a different liquidity or viscosity for different disciplines in the same periods of general history. ... Thus, the history of sciences, the history of intelligence's progressive approximation to the truth, develops its own time and it does so according to the moment of progress which it examines in order to resuscitate that part of a former theoretical discussion that the language of today still permits to comprehend Only out of the contact with current science can the historian of sciences develop the feeling for breaks and historical filiations. This contact is established by epistemology, provided that it be as circumspect as Gaston Bachelard has taught it.¹⁴

As Bachelard before him, Canguilhem vehemently opposes an attitude that assumes different scientific paradigms and different epochs to be complementary or teleologically consecutive, instead of regarding them as mere terminological or conceptual analogies. Explaining his concept of the epistemological break, Bachelard demonstrated the absurdity of equating diverse historical configurations of scientific thought and marked the fundamental difference that separates the scientific from all other modes of cognition. Thus, epistemological breaks appear both on the level of "vertical" (i.e., diachronic) and "horizontal" (synchronic) historiography:

There is ... no continuity whatsoever between the conception of temperature in the laboratory and the conception of "temperature" of a nucleus. Scientific language is invariably a neo-language. In order to be understood by the scientific community you have to use scientific language scientifically by translating the terms of common language into scientific language. Once you focus on this activity of translation which is so often masked you notice that, in scientific language, there are a great number of terms in quotation marks As soon as a word of the old language is thus put in quotation marks by scientific thought, it becomes the indication of a changed method of cognition which approximates a new field of experience.¹⁵

While Canguilhem concentrated on the "vertical" analysis which scrutinizes structures of scientific argumentation in order to set forth the formation and decline of scientific concepts, Michel Foucault, another successor of Bachelard's, focused on the investigation of "horizontal" relations. More so than Canguilhem, Foucault drew on the Bachelardian idea that relations between different contemporaneous discourses often prove to be tighter than relations between one discipline's successive historical manifestations. Concentrating on a limited and well-defined period, Foucault tried to grasp the manifold terminological and conceptual variations which organize scientific disciplines and eventually discursive fields. Negating an underlying pattern or an all-pervasive "interdiscursive framework" and arguing for an uncategorical, proliferating variety of discourses,

13 Canguilhem, "L'objet de l'histoire des sciences," *Études d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* 19.

14 Canguilhem, "L'objet de l'histoire des sciences" 19-20.

15 Bachelard, *Le matérialisme rationnel* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1953) 217.

Foucault echoes Bachelard's warning to consider the act of "translation" carefully and suspiciously:

The horizon of archaeology ... is not a science, a rationality, a mentality, a culture; it is a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single operation. Archaeology is a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must totalize them, but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures. Archaeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying effect.¹⁶

As a theoretical reflection, Foucault's "archaeology" is inestimably important for every comparative approach to scientific and aesthetic discursive fields. I do not want to discuss here whether Foucault actually managed to realize his theoretical project or—as has been argued—whether he failed to do so because of argumentative weaknesses which might result from the fact that the desire for norms and frames often proves to be stronger than the knowledge about the chaotic variety of discursive constellations.¹⁷ For my purposes I cannot really rely on Foucault's work anyway, as he was primarily concerned with scientific and socio-cultural discourses and unfortunately drew on aesthetic concerns at most as evidence for, or testimony of, historical needs and fears. Since it is my purpose here to emphasize the inherent ambivalence of aesthetic discourse as set against other modes of articulating experience, I want to supplement Foucault's "archaeology" by a literary theory that accounts for the exceptionality of aesthetic experience without ignoring its correlations with epistemological principles.

III

Canguilhem and Foucault have elaborated methods to comprehend scientific structures and constellations which are certainly important for every approach to cultural history. Yet once aesthetic concerns are brought into the complex web of interdisciplinary studies, the question arises whether an epistemological perspective is actually appropriate for aesthetics or whether the concerns of the history of science are at all relevant for aesthetic conceptions. As Jean Starobinski feels at home in both the scientific and the aesthetic field, he has approached this question in a unique way. In the first place, he has never simply put his psychoanalytical and medical knowledge against the hermeneutic project but has always tried to develop a dehierarchizing and yet not universalizing approach to discursive structures. Like Stephen Greenblatt, he has read canonical authors in a new way, taking into account the historical context of their works in order

16 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) 159-60.

17 This is the objection Manfred Frank raises in his critical reading of Foucault's *Archaeology*; see his essay "Was ist ein 'Diskurs'? Zur 'Archäologie' Michel Foucaults," *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare: Studien zur deutsch-französischen Hermeneutik und Texttheorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990) 424. With the concept of the "archive" reappears, in fact, a conception that Foucault has vehemently fought against earlier on without then even mentioning the logical inconsequence. It seems to me that at least Greenblatt's reception of Foucault (if not that of the New Historicism in general) is controlled by an idea similar to the "archive" when Greenblatt time and again emphasizes the all-pervasive and encompassing organization of the cultural.

to develop new and often amazing constellations; but much more convincingly than Greenblatt he has construed the literary text as both an adaptation and a transformation of its contemporary contexts.¹⁸

Arguing for a careful characterization of discursive specificities, Starobinski does not reject the comparative approach as such. On the contrary, time and again his work testifies to its author's familiarity with discursive structures as different as medicine and literature. But instead of stopping short after an analogous reading of different texts, Starobinski always emphasizes the indispensability of a second reading to complement and qualify the first one. The structures of such a twofold reading he describes in his essay "The Interpreter's Progress," which itself contains a meticulous textual interpretation (of the "The Dinner at Turin" in Rousseau's *Confessions*).

According to Starobinski, the project of interpretation is invariably shaped by the "desire for coherence and continuity" and the "ambition to pursue implications step by step," and thus by sentiments which always demand an interpreter's suspicious and careful control mechanisms. For Starobinski, the reader's desire for "Absolute Knowledge" expresses itself in the common interpretive move of simply adapting scientific cognitive methods to the reading process and thus of giving way to the old "theological" impulse to control the text absolutely. In this way, one discourse keeps affirming its own representational nature in a "tautological circle":

... the striking thing about the new discourse, the new "interpretive circle," sometimes presented in a utopian perspective, is the curious way in which it combines a scientific ideal with a theology that no longer dares to speak its name. The reductionism of natural science, eager to establish the unambiguous trace of physical causality, leads to a monism that is subject to misinterpretation and lends encouragement to the residual pantheistic tendencies of natural theology ... Interpretation became indispensable at the moment when a unique and exclusive faith wished to see in the world, in history, and in texts nothing but proof of its own validity, its own préfigurations, tribulations and triumphs. Ultimately, theological interpretation relates all things through their common dependence on a single "principle." Its proofs are based either on analogy or on the concatenation and filiation of events.¹⁹

As the desire for coherence represented by the quest for analogies and affinities is inextricably linked to the project of interpretation, it is unrestrainable and can at most be reflectively controlled. In order to establish a qualifying control "mechanism," Starobinski proposes an interpretive device—the hermeneutic circle, the tradition of which he explicitly evokes ("from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, Spitzer, and Gadamer"²⁰). While

18 See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957) as well as *Starobinski, Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). Manfred Frank's reading of Starobinski's "La relation critique" summarizes this interrelating movement of Starobinski's hermeneutic approach; see "Das 'einzelne Allgemeine' des Stils: Anmerkungen zur Hermeneutik Jean Starobinski's," *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare*: "Rousseau is not simply the dis- course of his own time, reproduced in a particular work; his writings are to the same degree transformations of what his time has tried to make of him into and what, in turn, Rousseau has tried to make of his time. It is precisely in this discrepancy between the ideas Rousseau shared with his contemporaries and what he added to this fund of shared ideas that his work becomes that of an individual" (251).

19 Jean Starobinski, "The Interpreter's Progress," *The Living Eye*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989) 226-27.

20 Starobinski, "The Interpreter's Progress" 227.

the first reading of a text invariably sets forth correspondences and affinities, a second (and yet simultaneous) reading emphasizes distinctions and individualities and prevents the simplistic equation and thus dismissal of discursive differences:

Instead of an "assumption" of the object in a universalizing discourse, there is a "descent" of the universalizing discourse into the particular object, into otherness. ... What preserves us from tautology is no doubt the fact that there are two circles, not just one. We may say that interpretation seeks both to abolish difference (through an inclusive and totalizing discourse) and to preserve distance (by understanding the other as other). More generally, interpretation aims to achieve both maximal coherence and maximal individual specificity.²¹

In another context, Starobinski himself has used this twofold circular movement for the comparative analysis of medical and literary texts. In his essay "The Natural and Literary History of Bodily Sensation," he sketches the historical formation of the philosophical and medical term "cenesthesia," i.e., body-feeling or perception of the body, and in the essay "L'échelle des températures" he draws on these conceptions for a brilliant interpretation of some texts by Flaubert, which culminates in the question of how to evaluate corporeality:²²

One question remains in suspense: how important is the part of "established ideas" (*idées reçues*), of ready-made formulations, in the words and images that express corporeal sensations? Another question, inversely, comes to mind as well: now that stupidity intermingles with all attitudes, with all discourses, couldn't there be a realm which remains intact and which would be precisely sensation, the cenesthetic apprehension of the body itself; doesn't bodily language perhaps precede words (*en deçà des mots*) and isn't it perhaps because of its very inarticulateness the only human expression not contaminated by platitude and ineptitude? But in which form is this truth of feeling to be grasped, which is so close to the mute truth of things, at the border to nothing, and how can it be communicated to the others beyond the borders of the individual body?²³

The issue of "established" images of the body invariably calls to mind the issue of their literary function. The physician's language (i.e., his images of the body) may reemerge in the poet's language, but not merely as flat repetition but strangely broken and refunctionalized. Both the physician and the poet are confronted with an inherently subjective and private experience which they nevertheless try to grasp and to communicate. But while the scientist tries to objectify the subjective experience of his own body terminologically because he knows about its anthropological commonness, the poet Flaubert thematizes his own experience and the scientific representation of this experience in order to approach a non-scientific concept of truth as the original and authentic one.²⁴ Thus literature, time and again, proves liable to turn scientific results against the

21 Starobinski, "The Interpreter's Progress" 227.

22 These two and various other essays have been collected by Hans Robert Jauss in a German edition: Jean Starobinski, *Kleine Geschichte des Körpergefühls*, trans. I. Pohlmann (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1991). The essay "The Natural and Literary History of Bodily Sensation" appeared in English in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. M. Feher, R. Naddaff, and N. Tazi, 3 vols. (New York: Zone, 1989) 2: 350-93; the essay "L'échelle des températures: Une lecture du corps dans *Madame Bovary*" was published in *Le temps de la réflexion* 1 (1980): 145-83.

23 Starobinski, "L'échelle des températures" 182-83.

24 On the problem of discursive differences, see also Jean Starobinski, "Poetic Language and Scientific Language," *Diogenes* 100 (1977): 128-45.

scientific project: when Flaubert describes corporeal perception, he does not wish to imply the penetration or dissolution of the subjective (as does the physician), but an- other manifestation of the enigmatic opacity of the real which can be penetrated only momentarily and occasionally (and precisely by way of the subjective). This literary move so fundamentally different from the scientific one—is epitomized in Starobinski's understanding of the symbol as a dynamic and autonomous category with a "life of its own," i.e., an energetic existence beyond the author's intention and contextuality.²⁵

A correlation of two different discourses that exceeds the mere recording of biographical influence is possible only because metaphorical and conceptual features transcend discursive boundaries. On the other hand, only the awareness of discursive specificities, as manifest on the level of cognitive interest, method, historical self-fashioning, etc., effectively prevents the mutual elimination of these different modes. The critic's very inclination to construe the literary text as a mere clarification (or simplification) of theoretical medical knowledge or to regard the medical as mere "material" for literary texts furthers the fatal collapse of discursive difference. To avoid such an elimination of difference, both the history of science and literary criticism have to be twofold projects: as a history of science needs to be essentially related to epistemology, literary criticism always needs to combine the historical (i.e., contextual) and the hermeneutic (i.e., textual) perspective.

IV

To understand interpretation, as Starobinski does, as a simultaneously totalizing and specifying movement implies the necessity to differentiate, methodically as well as terminologically, discursive structures. Consequently, in order to grasp the correlation between different realms of human cognition and human experience, we always need to analogize discursive spheres which have been construed as unrelated or oppositional before. At the same time, however, the very knowledge of the imaginary nature of the "master discourse" has to prevent our ignoring the scientific term's "quotation marks" or the literary symbol's "life of its own."

As mere contextualization neither gets hold of the discontinuous structure of the history of science nor takes account of the liability of literary texts to playfully or experimentally subvert explicit statements,²⁶ we need to combine hermeneutic, epistemological and historiographical approaches to achieve a satisfactory reading of scientific and aesthetic texts.

25 See Starobinski, "Psychoanalysis and Literary Understanding," *The Living Eye* 145.

26 There is, of course, an important historian of science, who would reject precisely my assumption of an underlying discursive difference. Paul Feyerabend's "anarchic philosophy of science" is, after all, based on the maxim "anything goes" and claims the fundamental undirectedness and irrationality of all scientific processes and the congruity of aesthetic and scientific structures; see Feyerabend's *Against Method*. It would be interesting, yet impossible within the scope of this paper, to go into the interrelations of Feyerabend's theses and new-historicist approaches to science and history.

Both aspects I find to be neglected in Greenblatt's and Fineman's essays as they confine themselves to the first phase of interpretation (Starobinski's "tautological circle," as it were). Thus, the anecdotal correlation of medicine and literature may disclose startling and instructive analogies, but it always tends to present the sphere within which the analogies appear (the trope, the metaphor, the anecdote) as a "distillation" of the historical. Such a "distillation" in turn always implies the idea of every specific reference being a mere superficial addition to an imaginary "interdiscursive framework."²⁷ The New Historicists' confidence in the representative function of the extract corresponds to their confidence in a fundamental compatibility and in an all-encompassing congruity of different discourses. Both Canguilhem and Starobinski have demonstrated the dangerous consequences of this confidence. Thus, regardless of declarations to the contrary and regardless of the often-stressed skepticism about the accessibility of historical conditions or the possibility of "speak[ing] with the dead,"²⁸ Fineman and Greenblatt's New Historicist project, while it promises total transparency and comprehensibility concerning a given historical situation, nevertheless always remains fatally entangled in tautological self-reference.

27 Greenblatt draws direct conclusions from his readings of medical texts for an understanding of the entire early modern period: "But the material we are considering here suggests that individual identity in the early modern period served less as a final goal than as a way station on the road to a firm and decisive identification with normative structures" ("Fiction and Friction" 35). The scientific necessity to establish normative structures, however, need not be culturally representative just as the scientific need for clear and unambiguous categories can very well run counter to contemporaneous socio-cultural modes of expression.

28 See Stephen Greenblatt's introduction to *Shakespearean Negotiations*, in which he denies the direct accessibility of the historical and claims that all receptions of the past are fundamentally mediated; see "The Circulation of Social Energy," *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 1-20.