

GADAMER'S FUSION OF HORIZONS AND INTERCULTURAL
INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

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Taking as its central motif Hans-Georg Gadamer's claim that "the true locus of hermeneutics is [the] in-between," this thesis defends Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons as radically interstitial against recent allegations that link his project to Romantic interpretive commensurability. Distancing Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics from both the Romantic hermeneutical approach and the incommensurabilist alternative proposed by John D. Caputo, this study reassesses Gadamer's contributions toward understanding the other in a manner that avoids both imperious reductions and hyperbolic valorizations of the other's alterity. Extending this discussion to cross-cultural interpretation, this thesis concludes by arguing for the fusion of horizons as a model for conceiving a new postcolonial space, irreducible to the commensurabilism of colonialism and the incommensurabilism of nativism. To this end, Gadamer is brought into discussion with Homi K. Bhabha, whose work on cultural hybridity offers a striking parallel with Gadamer's fusion of horizons.

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Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons and Intercultural Interpretation

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Introduction

“Viel hat erfahren der Mensch...
Seit ein Gespräch wir sind
Und Hören können voneinander”
- Hölderlin

In the introduction to his *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer notes that the notion that one's own insights might be vulnerable or even inferior to the insights of others is one that must be acknowledged if there is anything to be genuinely understood through the task of interpretation. To set one's interpretation off beforehand, guarded from the risk inherent in any encounter with another, and to, thus, rely on illusions of self-sufficiency is the stance of “the naïve self-esteem,” as Gadamer calls it. Rejecting the limitations to self-sufficiency, this stance fails to recognize that “it is undoubtedly a far greater weakness for philosophical thinking not to face such self-examination but to play at being Faust.”¹ The intended targets of Gadamer's word of caution, those susceptible to this “naïve self-esteem,” are both the methodological spirit of the natural sciences and those human sciences, including philosophy, which depend upon this methodology for interpreting phenomena (in the latter case, two particular examples that Gadamer has in mind are the theories of interpretation proposed by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, which will be examined in Chapter One). Within their

1 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd Revised Edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xxi.

specific areas of research into the natural and human sciences, undeniable insights have, of course, been offered by certain methodology-bound approaches, insights Gadamer's own philosophical hermeneutics credits where necessary and occasionally develops, but their failure to consider their own limitations is their greatest limitation.

Throughout his work Gadamer sustains a concern with encountering and learning from the other. Gadamer sets out his approach in distinction to misdirected and quite possibly arrogant approaches to understanding the dynamic between the self and the interpreted other (or, worse yet, attempts to transcend the necessity of interpretation altogether in the name of Faustian mastery). It is curious, then, that despite this move Gadamer himself is often accused of a similar oversight. Despite having moved the task of hermeneutics beyond the limitations of its methodological, “classical” [*klassische*] instantiation – and consequently toward the task of understanding the nature of understanding itself, understanding *qua* understanding, via an inquiry into its dialogical nature – Gadamer's own philosophical hermeneutics has nevertheless fallen victim to criticisms that question the validity of its proposed differences with older methods of interpretation, most persistently with Romanticism.² The issue at hand is whether or not Gadamer's critique of the “naive self-esteem” has been inadequately applied to his own philosophical hermeneutics, resulting in an insufficiently radical theory of interpretation.

2 In the essay, “Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik” in *Lesebuch*, ed. Jean Grondin (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), pp. 32-58 (translated in English as “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” in *The Gadamer Reader*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 41-71) Gadamer briefly describes two historical developments in the history of hermeneutics: classical and philosophical. Gadamer uses the first category, classical, broadly here to encompass both pre-Schleiermacherian hermeneutics, whose purposes were relatively *ad hoc*, disciplinary, and lay no claim to universality, and the Romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher forward, which departs from the specific or occasional nature of past interpretive efforts. These two streams are gathered under the name classical to distinguish them from the philosophical hermeneutics that is already evident in the early Heidegger and developed by Gadamer himself. Classical, here, roughly means a traditional concern with textual interpretation, whereas philosophical hermeneutics indicates a new existential concern with the nature of understanding itself (which still, but not exclusively, concerns the interpretation of written texts).

For the purposes of establishing the necessary background context of the hermeneutical tradition that preceded Gadamer's hermeneutics, Chapter One examines the Romantic imperative as set out in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. In this chapter it is argued that Romantic hermeneutics represents the dream of a total commensurability between the interpreting self and the interpreted other. But, as our analysis shows, one major presupposition of this endeavour is that such commensurability denotes a position beyond mediation and that it is both possible and desirable for interpreters to attain such a position. Our investigation illustrates the implications of the Romantic interpretive approach and concludes with an account of the ways in which the alterity of the other is sacrificed under this approach.

John D. Caputo has understood Gadamer as a late representative of this approach and has consequently positioned his own hermeneutical approach in opposition to Romantic hermeneutics and, thus, Gadamer. The second chapter addresses Caputo's criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutical approach and, here, of special concern is an inquiry into the degree to which Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has in fact departed from its Romantic hermeneutical progenitors on specific, critical points of contemporary philosophical (but also socio-political) concern related to preserving the alterity of the other. This inquiry provides us with the arguments necessary to defend Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons' (viz., the eventful moment of understanding at the heart of a genuine encounter between the self and its other), a concept that has recently attracted some serious criticism, as constitutively open and sufficiently comprehensive to account for such criticisms. This defense of Gadamer also accompanies a critique of Caputo's incommensurabilist alternative to Romantic hermeneutics, where we argue that

the incommensurabilist defense of the idea of a wholly other counter-intuitively amounts to cutting this other off from all dialogical mediation – an unintended but nevertheless ethically dangerous consequence. In this sense, it is suggested that the hyperbolic reaction of incommensurabilism to Romantic commensurabilism ultimately lacks a sufficient account of interpreter-interpreted relations. A defense of Gadamer’s hermeneutics in light of Caputo’s criticisms founds the basis of a further exploration into what Gadamer means when he writes, “the true locus of hermeneutics is [the] in-between”³ and how this idea of the in-between informs the entirety of his hermeneutical project. This discussion serves to situate Gadamer’s project in between both the commensurability proposed by Romantic hermeneutics and the incommensurability proposed by Caputo’s radical hermeneutics.

Finally, in the third chapter, our discussion moves from this hermeneutical in-between to a concrete example of its operation. The political schemas of colonialist occupation and anti-colonial, nativist resistance are shown to employ commensurabilist and incommensurabilist interpretive approaches, respectively. After drawing a parallel between Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity and Gadamer’s hermeneutical in-between, we conclude our study with a consideration of how Gadamer’s fusion of (intercultural) horizons offers us a model upon which we can conceive postcolonial space, a site of political mediation irreducible to colonialism or nativism, commensurabilism or incommensurabilism.

3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 295.

Chapter One

The Commensurabilist Endeavour of Romantic Hermeneutics

In the literary archetype of the Romantic hero we find a character who rejects the structural limitations of her surrounding environment and the rationalist restrictions that determine her subjective condition. In a similar manner, philosophical Romanticism usually connotes a movement toward the transcendent and a deep longing to reveal the unfamiliarity one finds there. The Romantic's fascination with the other, her sense of wonderment with what lies outside her own domain of familiarity, amounts to a desire to go beyond the limitations of humanity's finitude and into infinity, to touch the divine, as it were. Of concern for the Romantic philosopher is that this pursuit to touch and reveal will result in a greater self-understanding. Thus, this pursuit heralds the discipline of Romantic hermeneutics, which studies the conditions under which such an understanding is possible. But the conclusions of this exercise betray an internal conflict at the heart of the Romantic endeavour. In this chapter I will argue that Romanticism's methodological demand for a transposition of the interpreter into the other is in fundamental disagreement with Romanticism's ambition to account for the dynamic creativity of the other. With this contention, this chapter will critically appraise the interpretive approaches and philosophical characteristics of Romantic hermeneutics' two

greatest representatives, Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and, in this way, prepare the historical context for an assessment of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

1.1 Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher, arguably the most important proponent of what Gadamer calls Romantic hermeneutics, represents a certain approach to understanding the other that equates the achievement of understanding with the attainment of a Cartesian certainty. To this end he employs two methods of interpretation. In the first section of *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, Schleiermacher suggests a grammatical method that would analyze the structure of the language used in a text to establish its intended meaning. This method would analyze a text in terms of genre, form, style, etc.⁴ In the next section, however, Schleiermacher proposes a second, more controversial method, one based on a psychological interpretation which attempts to discover the *Keimentschluss* or, roughly, the key to what stirred the author to write the text.⁵ The idea of understanding as the discovery of a key that could unlock the secret of an interpreted text and thus eradicate all aspects of disagreement that are responsible for misunderstanding is by no means unique to Schleiermacher and can already be seen in Matthias Flacius Illyricus's *Clavis scripturae sacrae* of 1567.⁶ What is different here,

4 See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 30-58 for Schleiermacher's "grammatical" argument.

5 See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, pp. 90-117 for Schleiermacher's "psychological" argument.

6 The process of discovering or unlocking the authorial individuality in the composition is undertaken for the purpose of removing misunderstanding (which is the cause of disagreement, either as the contestation between two misunderstandings or between a correct understanding and a misunderstanding), as Schleiermacher explains: "[t]he procedure is as follows: The unity of the whole is

however, is the manner in which Schleiermacher suggests we discover this key and thereby eradicate unintelligibility: namely, through *divination*.

The success of the psychological method of interpretation for interpreting a text, where one “transforms oneself into the other person and tries to understand the individual element directly,”⁷ corresponds to the accuracy of the interpreter’s divination efforts with respect to the author's original (albeit, oftentimes unconscious) intentions. This divination process, what Schleiermacher sometimes calls a 'positive formula,' is defined by the attempt to *go behind* the text by intuiting the original mental state of the author responsible for the creation of the text in order to excavate the text's meaning.⁸ Schleiermacher claims that, if successful, the interpreter will reconstruct the author's intention and understand the text's meaning “as a 'fact' in the thinking of the speaker”⁹ or author. For Schleiermacher, this fact, this original, creative 'germinal decision,' can be entirely recreated and thus completely ascertained through the art of interpretation; that is, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics implicitly, when not explicitly, take the form of an aesthetic recreation of the artistic genius.¹⁰ As Schleiermacher moves toward conceiving understanding in the terms of a divination of the author-genius, he tends toward an

grasped and then one sees how the individual parts relate to it overall.” Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, p. 98. The task, as Schleiermacher sets it out, is to grasp the unity of the whole text, and if the whole meaning is grasped and the individual parts are shown to relate in their specific ways to this meaning, then, it is argued here by Schleiermacher, there can be no further cause for dispute.

For Flacius Illyricus’s contributions to hermeneutical theory and his concept of a key that would unlock the secret of a text see Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (Villeneuve d’Ascq Cedex, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009). For an assessment of Flacius’ contributions see Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 42-45.

7 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, p. 92.

8 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, p. 23.

9 Schleiermacher as quoted in Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 88.

10 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 286.

account of interpretation where the text is “not to be understood in terms of its subject matter but as an aesthetic construct, as a work of art or ‘artistic thought.’”¹¹ This focus on the artist’s interiority (rather than on the subject matter of the text) comes to figure as the chief concern throughout Schleiermacher’s study of textual hermeneutics.¹² In keeping with this emphasis on the psychology of the author, Schleiermacher writes that “Every utterance corresponds to a sequence of thoughts of the utterer and must therefore be able to be completely understood via the nature of the utterer, his mood, his aim.”¹³

Consequently, the ability to objectively ascertain meaning in this manner sets the measure against which all interpretations will be judged.

Conceiving the task of hermeneutics as such provokes at least two obvious criticisms. First, one might be hesitant to follow Schleiermacher's move to downplay the subject matter of the text in an attempt to emphasize the author’s inner mental processes as the site of a text's meaning – an attempt to go beyond the phenomena in search for an underlying ideality. As Gadamer states, “what is understood here [in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics] is not a shared thought about some subject matter, but individual thought that by its very nature is a free construct and the free expression of an individual being.”¹⁴

This emphasis on the author's interiority understands the salient feature of each text as synonymous with the spark (the definitive feature, the germinal fact) of that residual

11 Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 187.

12 Gadamer contends that this psychological (technical) interpretation is Schleiermacher’s most characteristic and persistent contribution to the field of hermeneutics and, as such, plays the dominant role in the development of his hermeneutical theory, ultimately overshadowing his own conception of grammatical interpretation. Although this depiction of Schleiermacher’s contributions as predominantly psychological has been contested (see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 247n22 for the citations of his debate on this very issue with Manfred Frank), it seems that Gadamer is correct when he writes that, at very least, the lasting, influential concept of Schleiermacher’s was, indeed, his “psychological interpretation [which] became the main influence on the theorists of the nineteenth century – Savigny, Boeckh, Steinthal and, above all, Dilthey.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 186.

13 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, p. 229.

14 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, p. 187.

archetype, the creative genius. Divination requires the interpreter to restrict the text's scope to that of its original conception in the author's mind and to conceive understanding as a re-experiencing of this originary moment of conception through the reconstruction of the author's very mindset. Gadamer writes that this

sounds at first like a sensible hermeneutical rule – and it is generally recognized as such – that nothing should be put into a text that the writer or the reader could not have intended...[But] texts do not ask to be understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers... What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as an author's meaning or the original reader's understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding.¹⁵

The meanings that hermeneutic endeavours attempt to understand are often if not always capable of change, of being “stated anew.”¹⁶ The text's movement within a linguistic structure, the focus of Schleiermacher's first grammatical, interpretive approach (i.e., the “play” of the text, the play between the interpreted other and its interpreter, as Gadamer will describe it in his own work) is overshadowed by the emphasis on a fixed meaning relegated under the authority of the author.¹⁷ The text's linguisticity, the site where an interpreter encounters the dynamism of the text's subject matter, is reduced to its supposedly exclusive origin, the mind of the author. Schleiermacher's method of

15 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 396-97.

16 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings* p. 395.

17 The authorial intention is, for Schleiermacher, understood as a single entity, considered in its specificity and in opposition to something with dynamic possibilities (i.e., if the text is restricted to the author's intention, the text is restricted to what the author thought it meant at a certain place and time). When the text is understood in this manner, as tied to the intention in the mind of the author, its meaning is understood in a nonlinguistic manner.

divination implies that a text cannot be understood except by its author or through a certain type of appropriation, that is, an interpreter assuming the *exact* position of the author; a total commensurability between the author and the interpreter. Rather than insisting on an encounter open to the dynamism of the text, what is demanded is a type of spiritual 'Oneness,' a seamless unity with the author. Divination, then, effectively overturns the language-based, grammatical approach which sought to account for the multiplicity of voices a text could take, overturning the possibility of understanding language as dialogue, as Gadamer will later argue, and, instead, imperiously invades the subjectivity of the other in order to expose this secret. Alternatively, language understood as dialogical movement presents itself as an impasse to such divinatory pretensions insofar as one understands language as not insular but necessarily extending beyond the reach of any one interpreter and developed via communication; as Wittgenstein has shown us, the very nature of language excludes the possibility of a private language.

Very briefly, Wittgenstein's argument is that any such non-dialogical, non-public language would be intelligible to no one outside of the originator. But since language is used for certain purposes and taken up within certain contexts the creation of any private language would need to concern itself with the possible senses in which its words could be used.¹⁸ That is, this private language would not even be intelligible to its originator, for

18 Wittgenstein's later work takes up this relation between the meaning of a word and how it is taken up and argues that meaning of a word is actually in its use and that there is not a single definition for a word that would contain all of its possible uses. Through a series of arguments Wittgenstein demonstrates that words cannot be reduced to single definitional purposes nor understood via appealing to some transcendental standard. We will return to this type of argument and how it concerns Gadamer's philosophy in the section entitled "The Space of Meaning" (2.2.1) at the end of Chapter Two. For Wittgenstein's argument see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), §§244–271 and also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960). For a review of the similarities and differences between Gadamer and Wittgenstein the reader is advised to see David E. Linge's Introduction, especially Section III, of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California

its words would be without meaning unless the originator appealed to external (i.e., public) usages against which she could establish her lexicon's meanings, at which point the language would be intelligible but would be forced to give up its claims to insularity. Language understood as necessarily dialogical avoids this contradiction. In dialogue we cannot completely substitute the other for ourselves or ourselves for the other, since dialogue resists such a tautological drive with the opening of a greater arena defined by the back-and-forth movement between the self and the other. As Gadamer puts it, "in dialogue ... the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us."¹⁹ Unfortunately, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics does not proceed in this direction and stiflingly prevents the other from talking back, from ever challenging the position of the interpreting self.

Related to this point regarding the attempt to assume the author's position is the further matter of Schleiermacher's commitment to the dream of completion inherent in the idea of an objectively valid, direct correspondence between the interpreter's interpretation and the meaning of the text. Such an idea effectively removes the very relational interplay that is at the heart of the task of interpretation. By conceiving a text's meaning as a single fact in the author's mind that must be intuited, thereby conceiving understanding as the establishment of a one-to-one correspondence between the interpreting self and the author/other, in order to be completely uncovered, Schleiermacher imagines the text as something conquerable and fully presentable, able to be mastered through the right application of certain ahistorical methodological laws. Yet a text is not restricted to speaking in a single, definitive voice; there always exists a new way in which a text might be taken up, in a different context, and for different reasons,

Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 352

reasons usually unforeseen by the author who, basing the predicted possibilities of a text on contexts familiar to her, necessarily overlooks future contexts or those interpretive vantage-points that could be provided by other cultural horizons. The attempt by the interpreter to gain a direct, unmediated identification with the thoughts of the other mistakenly assumes that the interpreted product (e.g. the text) is univocal, the perfect result of a specific intention, and that a total knowledge of these intentions is possible. But insofar as you are not the other and it is impossible to be even eventually aware of all her influences, her entire history of effects, that contributed to even a single intention of hers, the dream of direct apprehension of the other's intentions is problematic. Apprehension of another's intentions is thus never direct and always mediated by this history of influence as well as the interpreter's own history of influence. But Schleiermacher's approach also assumes that the interpreter could suspend the very context of her own investigation if she so desired, so as to gain unmediated access to the text. But if this were even possible, the interpreter would be interpreting from outside of the horizon of signification and contextualization, so how would the intentions of the other mean anything? Schleiermacher's task here is an empathetic, entirely congenial identification with the author, a move toward exhaustive encompassment. And the appeal to ahistorical methodologies (here, divination) in order to avoid mediation and secure objectivity betrays the very real historical context of the interpreter's own investigations.

Ultimately, Schleiermacher's psychologistic concerns, complicit with that Romantic concern with the "innerness" of the genius, do not present the text itself as continually having something to contribute in a conversation with its interpreters throughout time but, instead, presents the author as the privileged point of entry to a

single, ahistorical, unmalleable, and no longer linguistic feature of the text, a privileged site that must be usurped in order to have access to the text's meaning.

1.2 Dilthey

We find a second important example of Romantic hermeneutics in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey, the biographer of Schleiermacher, can be credited with transposing the aesthetic, individualistic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher to the historical sciences by breaking with the tradition of philosophy of history that had preceded him, a tradition which had up until that point been expressly not centered around the concept of individuality (but rather the idea of universal history). Schleiermacher's concept of individuality would provide the methodology that would enable Dilthey to establish hermeneutics as the central technique [*Kunstlehre*] of the human sciences and thereby provide the impetus necessary to liberate these philosophical and historical sciences from their reputation of derivative significance, as defined by the natural sciences.²⁰ However, as Gadamer has made clear, the manner in which Dilthey structured his investigations implied the consequence that if his hermeneutical approach failed to prove true to this emancipatory promise of liberating the human sciences from the domination of certain scientific categories of understanding, then “its liberation from the chains of dogma”

20 Dilthey describes this technique: “The rule-guided understanding of textually fixed objectifications of life[,] [what] we call...interpretation [,] is a product of personal skill [or technique] and its most perfect application is dependent on a certain kind of genius; the gift of interpretation is based on affinity, intensified by thorough familiarity with an author...the divinatory aspect of interpretation depends on this.” “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 5, 4th (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1964), p. 332 and translated in English as “The Rise of Hermeneutics” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Ewing, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 251.

would be nothing “but a transformation of its nature.”²¹ For Dilthey, the revaluation necessary to elevate the epistemological problem of how one is to gain knowledge of history to the prestige enjoyed by the problems of the natural sciences could only succeed if it arose from an inquiry into human experience.²² Dilthey's main concern throughout his philosophical work was a commitment to doing justice to life as it is experienced, the commitment to undertaking a life-philosophy [*Lebensphilosophie*]. It is this concern that motivates his further quest to secure objective knowledge of human life. Dilthey considered hermeneutics' task one of elevating something psychical, the singularity of the inner life-expressions of the subject, to the position of understandable signs, those which were universally valid and verifiable.²³ Such signs, the externalized interiority highlighted through interpretations, must be fixed and reproducible in order to be understood. Claiming a fundamental distinction between the human sciences and the natural sciences, Dilthey claims that the human sciences are unique insofar as it is through them alone that there exists the ability to connect to the inner experience of another through a mental transfer, a “living transposition.” “It is life itself that unfolds and forms itself in intelligible unities, and it is in terms of the single individual that these unities are understood ... re-experienced and understood by others through biographical knowledge.”²⁴ The direct influence of Schleiermacher is quite perspicuous here in this idea of an exact transference of inner experience. Hermeneutics, here, brings the

21 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 178.

22 Dilthey sets out his project in these terms in “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 331, 335 and translated in English as “The Rise of Hermeneutics” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, pp. 250, 254.

23 “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 318 and translated in English as “The Rise of Hermeneutics” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, p. 236.

24 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 218.

psychical intentions of the author to objectivity where it can be entirely understood, where “what is internal to a human being finds its completely, exhaustively and objectively understandable expression.”²⁵ It will be especially important to note the role that hermeneutics as defined in this manner will play in the later attacks on Gadamer’s work and even hermeneutics *sensu lato*. Interpretation in Dilthey becomes the task of attaining certainty of the particular by recreating the author in his original expression by drawing upon certain biographical information, a task that is said to be eventually perfected in the moment of understanding.

In Dilthey we can clearly see the task of understanding as defined as the uncovering of the secretive aspect of the other's individuality, an exposure of their inner alterity, just as we had in Schleiermacher. Dilthey writes that in hermeneutics, in its inquiry into the nature of the human sciences, it is “the secret of the 'person' [that] attracts [us] ... and in such understanding arises the realm of the individual, which encompasses man and his creations.”²⁶ We can interpret this passage both as evidence of Dilthey's attempt to overcome the alterity of the other by conceiving her individuality as a secret to be discovered and also, as Richard Palmer has suggested, as confirmation of Dilthey's interest in the particular.²⁷ But Dilthey’s focus on the author's individuality and his intentions (i.e., aestheticism, as defined in the first section of *Truth and Method*) comes up against the demands of a similar consideration of the general, contextualizing, or linguistic influences on the interpreted text and its further interpretive possibilities (in

25 “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 319 and translated in English as “The Rise of Hermeneutics” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, p. 237.

26 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 212-13, as quoted in Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 115.

27 Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 115.

new contexts, etc.). According to Dilthey, “the work of a great poet or discoverer, a religious genius or an authentic philosopher can never be anything but a true expression of his psychic life ... [and] it is capable of complete and objective interpretation.”²⁸ At this point one can ask: does a focus on the psychic life not need to take into account the significance of the political, social, and linguistic field of influence on the very psyche of this poet, religious genius, or philosopher? Dilthey does not ask this question. So, despite extending the task of hermeneutics to the historical sciences, Dilthey does not reflect on the ways in which the expressions of the author's psychic life are meaningful *in* certain historical contexts. For even a seemingly unprecedented insight by a philosopher will have arisen from said philosopher's reading of another text, was articulated within a certain language, and makes sense within a certain context – even if it challenges or moves beyond this context. But we do not, in Dilthey, have an account of the expression of psychological life *as arising from* certain historically situated contexts and as the product of multiple historical forces. Instead, interpretation, defined in the way Dilthey does, “transports the historian [i.e., the interpreter] to the ideative contemporaneity with his object that we call aesthetic” and understanding becomes “positively fulfilled in the ideal of a historically enlightened reason that has matured into a genius who understands everything.”²⁹ Here, the interpreter's focus on the singularity of the author's intentions causes him to fail to attend to the mediating circumstances of the text, leading the interpreter to attempt to overcome mediation itself in order to objectively understand (i.e., to objectify) the author's life in its particularity. Hermeneutics defined thus betrays an

28 “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 320 and translated in English as “The Rise of Hermeneutics” in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, p. 238.

29 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 226.

attempt to ignore the interpreter's finitude and historicity.

But in the name of objectively understanding life, Dilthey's methodologies, those atemporal, theoretical reconstructions of mental life meant to protect the spontaneous creativity of life from the strictures of natural science, actually recapitulate the scientism he sets his project against. It can be argued that Dilthey in fact extends certain scientific criteria to the human sciences rather than truly challenging these criteria itself. For example, in their guarantee of objective certainty, Dilthey's methodologies ironically impose certain, almost positivistic limits on life, requiring life to be clear and ultimately transparent, thereby denying the possibility that in life there could be moments of unsignifiable semantic excess unable to be contained by any one grand, immediate interpretation.³⁰ These standards are comparable to the manner in which the discourse of natural sciences has often understood life. In fact, Dilthey is defending something not unlike the scientific method, that inviolable axiom of scientism, when he defends conceptual methods that promise to overcome the "accidental" limits arising from our experience. This demand for conceptual clarity "is a principle entirely in the spirit of rationalism,"³¹ that same rationalism that Romantic hermeneutics had claimed to resist, that austerity that prompted Schleiermacher to appeal to living feeling, those mechanistic demands that incited Schiller's call for aesthetic freedom. And, ultimately, the tendency that is at the heart of our experience is, for Dilthey, a "striving towards stability."³² We can claim that for this reason Dilthey's methodologies, in their reliance on atemporal,

30 Note the strict methodological requirements Dilthey imposes on the interpretation of a supposedly neatly ordered, "fixed and relatively permanent" life in "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik" in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 319 and translated in English as "The Rise of Hermeneutics" in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, p. 237

31 Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Rise of Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, p. 55.

32 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Band II, (Lasson: 1934), 36f, as quoted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 229.

theoretical reconstructions of mental life, effectively undercut those characteristics of life that give voice to a certain internal messiness, a certain resistance to complete disclosure.

In light of these considerations we can conclude that, despite Dilthey's significant contribution to hermeneutics, including the extension of its scope to the area of life and experience, there are still aspects of his theory of interpretation that seem insufficiently considered. In his attempt to elevate the human sciences to the level of the natural sciences, an aim that set understanding out as verifying "objectively valid knowledge," he was unable to sufficiently free his task from the confines of the scientism that he himself had criticized. This goal of objectivity undermined Dilthey's own emphasis on the historicity of our self-understanding, a notion both Heidegger and Gadamer would later draw upon in their own hermeneutical philosophy. Similarly negligent of the historicity of understanding is Dilthey's Schleiermacherian definition of understanding as a re-experiencing [*Nacherleben*], a reconstruction of the author's experience. Dilthey's hermeneutics thereby suffer the same consequences as Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as a result of an overemphasis on the psychologistic innerness of the author. That is, this psychologism implicitly leads to a dependency on a representationalist, copy theory of a text's truth, which restricts its meaning to the objectifiable correctness of certain propositions; authorial intentions and their externalized signs are said to be understood when they are in complete agreement with the perfect, projected interpretation of an interpreter.³³

33 That is, the authorial intentions are said to be presented again in the same form in order to be experienced by the interpreter just as they were experienced by the author. By this account, the re-experience by the interpreter depends on the successful re-presentation of the authorial intentions. Certainly, there would be no phenomenological experience without the presentation of some phenomenon but the problem with Romanticism's reliance on 'representational' theories of truth is that each phenomenon is understood to be presented again in the same way, seen to be fully present, a complete copy.

It is not, here, necessary to undertake any lengthy examination of different theories of the nature of truth but, for our purposes, let me quickly note that beyond the empirical problems that arise from this representationalist approach – e.g., without actually being the interpreted other, the accuracy of the interpreter's approximation to the interpreted other's intellectual state is not likely to be verified – we can further add that the deficiencies of this representationalist position were demonstrated by Heidegger in his Freiburg lectures of 1932.³⁴ In these lectures, Heidegger argues that underlying the representationalist conception of truth is the *decision* to only count as true that which meets a standard of correctness, as defined as the correspondence of a proposition to the unchanging properties of a fact. But as Heidegger shows us, this is not the only manner in which we can speak of truth. In fact, the proponents of limiting 'truth' to a representational correspondence ultimately lack a sufficient account of those everyday occurrences when one uses the 'truth predicate,' not to identify a proposition *about* something but to name the being of this thing. In this latter sense, Heidegger gives the example of when one says that something is "true gold" rather than "false gold." In this case the being of the thing *shows itself* as what it is and "true" does not here refer to the correctness of a proposition in light of its representation of some thing (e.g. true gold or false gold).³⁵ To relate Heidegger's argument back to Romantic hermeneutics' dependency on a representational theory of truth, we can see that "true," taken in the sense Heidegger is proposing, as unhiddenness, cannot be limited to the correctness of a re-presentation (via interpretive divination) of some unchanging authorial intentions lying

34 Published as Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, 1988) and translated in English as Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002).

35 Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, pp. 118-19 and translated in English as Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, p. 86

beneath surface of the text. Instead, as Heidegger writes, “true is primarily a characteristic of the beings themselves [since] the proposition is true [only] in so far as it conforms to something already true” and, in this sense, “truth as correctness presupposes unhiddenness”³⁶ of the beings themselves (rather than the correctness of a proposition about such beings).

1.3 The Romantic Approach to Interpretation

This brief overview of the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey can serve the purpose of defining a particular Romantic interpretive enterprise shared by these two philosophers. And to this end, we will now examine what underlying characteristics and philosophical commitments consolidate these two philosophers under this term – Romanticism – with respect to their theories of interpretation. From this short aperçu we can identify at least four related tendencies of the Romantic approach to interpreting the other:

First, we might define Romanticism as Jean Grondin has, as a “longing for completeness.”³⁷ At the heart of the Romantic approach is the desire for a direct correspondence between interpreter and interpreted, between self and other, the establishment of an entirely commensurable relationship without excess; a commensurability that does away with the very need for relationality, a relationship *without* relationship – there is but one side and, thus, there are no sides. A proper interpretation would on this basis be able to completely understand the meaning of the

36 Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, pp. 118-19 and translated in English as Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, p. 86

37 Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 63.

other, thus considered to be entirely in possession of the meaning. This longing for completion finds itself as a messianism, where the promise of purity of meaning is held out and upon which the interpreter might believe that the perfect interpretation is not in and of itself impossible but, rather, that given the right circumstances or approach does exist. This messianical promise of the complete interpretation of a pure meaning represents the promise of a salvific position where the interpreter might exist beyond all possible error and misinterpretation, beyond the need to interpret. As noted earlier, this drive toward complete infallibility is what provoked Gadamer to compare Romantic hermeneutical approaches with the naiveté of Faust in his own longing for the completeness of knowledge. This is the dream that one also finds, among many other places, in the character of Edward Casaubon and his task of writing the definitive “Key to all Mythologies” in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.³⁸ According to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, this 'key,' namely those 'right circumstances' needed for the arrival of a completed product – a perfect interpretation that will bestow pure understanding upon the interpreter – is found via a psychologistic method, which leads us to the second characteristic of Romanticism.

Second, Romanticism is marked by a concern with the expression and emotion of the text's author (a reaction against the austerity and determinism implicit in systematic approaches to the natural sciences) which leads to understanding interpretation as necessitating a psychologistic approach, the goal of which is to articulate the meaning of a text by appealing to the “creative genius” behind it, its author. The author is in

38 This is a dream whose realization runs up against the finitude of any one account. As Casaubon's cousin Will Ladislaw suggests, what Mr. Casaubon must account for is “as changing as chemistry: new discoveries are constantly making new points of view. Who wants a system on the basis of the four elements, or a book to refute Paracelsus?” George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 184.

possession of an instant authority because of her personal creative powers and these powers award her the privileged status of genius. On this account, it is the task of the interpreter to predominantly focus on these supposedly authoritative intentions of the author-genius. This preoccupation with the biographical details of the author's life and the author's singular authority posits the task of interpretation as that of becoming one with the author, of assuming the author's identity, once again without the allowance of any rupture or excess. This preoccupation with the inner creative impetus of the author results in an aestheticism that understands the work of the author as an unmediated burst of creativity that exists independent of historical contingency.³⁹ Meaning is here compartmentalized, free from the reach of external forces that might shape or have shaped the senses in which it can be understood by another. In the event that it can be shown that the author is not somehow outside of the everyday contingencies of historical life and that as a historical being the author is in fact influenced by factors beyond her voluntary control, perhaps beyond her own consciousness, the privileging of an author's understanding of her own work and the special authority it derives from this privileging can be deemed quite undeserved. But even if the interpreter were to analyze the external influences on the author to understand her intentions within a particular historical context, the interpreter could never account for every influence on the author's life up until her creation of the object of interpretive analysis, for, as we know, many influences that motivate our actions, and the resulting prejudices these influences have upon us, go largely unnoticed. This can be witnessed in the frequent cases of an author looking back on her own writings and being surprised by the final results of her efforts, sometimes

39 See Gadamer's critique of this aesthetic approach to interpretation in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 191-92.

even struggling to comprehend what was being initially intended or discovering heretofore unnoticed and unintended subtleties. Despite this, Romanticism's aesthetic psychologism pursues a means of accessing the author's inner subjectivity. Such is accomplished, in theory, through the help of a methodology, leading us to our next characteristic.

Third, Romantic hermeneutics can be characterized by its goal of objectivity as secured through method. While we already characterized the Romantic project as one promising interpretive completion, there is a subtle distinction proposed here. For the Romantic, it is not sufficient that such interpretations completely contain all possible senses of the meaning of the other at a specific point in time or within a certain context (if this were in itself possible), but, further, they must also distinguish this meaning as *restricted* to what the author intended at this specific time. In this case, objectivism is the demand for objectivity as defined as the identification of a single meaning that exists outside of all contingencies, outside all changing forces of history, itself verifiable only via an appeal to similarly ahistorical methods (e.g., divination). It is not, then, enough that the interpreter identify the meaning as it changes through history (as it is used in new contexts, etc.) nor that the interpreter shift along with this meaning. For if meaning is allowed this type of movement, contingency, or historicity, at a certain point in time a certain meaning is apt to gain differing senses which could challenge the author's original intent, i.e., senses which challenge the Romantic hermeneut's own demand for a psychologically consistent account of a text's meaning (the second trait we identified). Romanticism, stipulated as it is by this concern with original authorial intention, cannot accept this movement of meaning. In light of the demand to comprehend the meaning of

the other in its entirety – our first characteristic of Romanticism, the goal of a complete interpretation – the objectivistic thrust of Romanticism thus moves further to positivistically reduce a text's meaning to a single fact in order to concretize it as unchanging (indeed, unchangeable). Interpretation, then, serves the purpose of definitively verifying (once and for all time) the text's meaning as an unchangeable fact. Objectivity, in this sense, implies the rejection of multiplicity, the rejection of a text's ability to be taken up in different ways in different historical or cultural contexts. Thus, it is here where one can accuse Romanticism of an ahistorical essentialism, of identifying a single unity of meaning in the other (who is thereby no longer other) in order to secure its everlasting identity, its essence; this identification safely 'protects' it from change and future possibilities. Despite Romanticism's refreshing resistance to the stasis of dogma that it identified in the *ad hoc* hermeneutics that preceded it and the “cold rationalism of the Enlightenment's”⁴⁰ 'scientific' approaches to the understanding of texts, Schleiermacher and Dilthey, in their attempt to objectively secure the understanding of a text in the subject – even venturing so far as to replicate subjective experience through empathy or divination in the case of Schleiermacher –ironically rely on the scientific ideal of total transparency. The hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey thus result in the odd combination of positing both an exaggerated subjectivism and, at the same time, denying the dynamism proper to the subject matter at hand in exchange for an appeal to certain laws of interpretation that speciously claim a position outside of the movement of history and language in order to guarantee the objectivity of the interpretation of this subject matter.

Fourth, the essentialism implied by Romanticism's demand for ascertaining

40 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 55.

objectivity leads us to identifying a fourth characteristic: Romanticism as appropriation. Romantic hermeneutics understands the other as possessing a secret that is its fact, its meaning, its essence (as described above), wherein its foreignness lies. If understanding is viewed, as it is in Romanticism, as a complete removal of otherness in the direct and successful attainment of a single, pure, inner, and objective meaning, then the aim of understanding is to successfully unlock this secret. Under this model, the interpreter understands the other when he identifies this secret, requiring the other to give up any and all claims to alterity. This identification is, in fact, a publication, a making public of that otherness which prevents the other from further identifying with this alterity *as* alterity, as her own difference that defines a place of distinctiveness outside the horizon of the interpreter. This publication, executed in the name of understanding, is assimilation: the forced entrance of the other into the public space familiar to the interpreter. Such assimilation is based on the conception of alterity as a single fact that is containable and tractable. With this assimilative goal in mind, the task of interpretation becomes the task of an interpreting subject appropriating the position of the other as her own and consequently marking it entirely familiar (entirely assimilated, entirely publicized), thereby forcing both the other and the self into the territory of the same. This is not a hermeneutics where the other has anything to give at their own discretion; it is not a patient hermeneutics but a calculated science of exposure. This is not a hermeneutics that is open to receiving the meaning of the interpreted phenomenon in its own givenness, but instead one that bypasses the *Sache*, bypasses the things themselves as they are manifested, and chooses “to impose upon becoming,” impose upon the dynamic nature of our experience with the other, “the character of being – that is the supreme will to

power,”⁴¹ as Nietzsche writes. Full disclosure, total presence, motivates this metaphysical attempt to understand meaning as constituted by the self and only by the self, blind to the fact “the truth cannot remain the property of the unique absolute-subject. It is in order to be given.... The truth is a gift”⁴² from another, and to acknowledge this other is to acknowledge one’s own contingency and vulnerability, to surrender this will to power.

These characteristics of Romanticism are not completely separable from each other insofar as we note that the dream of completion is also often the dream of establishing a single unit of meaning that can be objectively verified by appealing to the author’s intentions, and that the combination of these aspirations, completion and objectivity, can result in the idea of some secret that can be appropriated for our own purposes. The distinction above, then, is to show the different degrees or moods in which the goal of exposing the other’s otherness is taken up in Romantic hermeneutics. In fact, it is misleading to consider these characteristics as overly autonomous since for Dilthey and Schleiermacher they serve the same end: the combined thrust of these characteristics forms the task of interpretation for Romantic hermeneutics which, simply put, is to appropriate the single, unchanging meaning established by the author of the text by appealing to said author’s inner psychological life in order to secure a completed understanding of every facet of the text.

Now, quite obvious is the fact that we have not here comprehensively attended to the immense, even revolutionary, change Schleiermacher and Dilthey had on the face of hermeneutics, nor have we emphasized their influence on or similarities with Heidegger

41 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1968), §617, p. 330.

42 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, trans. Adrian van den Hoven (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.

and Gadamer in this preliminary discussion of their hermeneutical endeavours. Indeed, Tom Nenon and Frithjof Rodi have suggested that an overly Romantic reading of Dilthey is, in fact, mistaken, and Andrew Bowie has made a similar argument in defense of Schleiermacher.⁴³ Such defenses have their individual merits but cannot concern us here insofar as our explication is expressly intended to serve the purpose of establishing the connotations of the term Romanticism or, more precisely, Romantic hermeneutics when it is used, most often pejoratively, to describe the hermeneutics of Gadamer by the critics of Gadamer and his philosophical hermeneutics. And so it has come to pass that when a philosophy of interpretation is considered Romantic or positioned as uncritically continuing the tradition established by Romantic hermeneutics it is most often meant that such a philosophy has as its concern a longing for completion and purity, an overly psychologistic or aesthetic orientation, is guilty of methodologism, objectivism, and essentialism, or serves as a method of appropriating the other's alterity. One such criticism comes from John D. Caputo.

43 Tom Nenon, "Hermeneutical Truth and the Structure of Human Experience: Gadamer's Critique of Dilthey" in *The Specter of Relativism*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1995), pp. 39-56; Frithjof Rodi "Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Life: A Critique of Gadamer's Interpretation of Dilthey" in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (Albany: SUNY, 1985), pp. 82-90; Andrew Bowie's introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, pp. vii-xxxii.

Chapter 2

John D. Caputo and the Incommensurabilist Critique of Gadamer

In *Radical Hermeneutics*, John D. Caputo outlines his project of radicalizing hermeneutics, a project that has as its “turning point” the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, a figure Caputo positions in marked contradistinction to the hermeneutical philosophy of Gadamer. Caputo describes Gadamer (and *a fortiori* Paul Ricoeur) as offering “a reactionary gesture, an attempt to block off the radicalization of hermeneutics and to turn it back to the fold of metaphysics.”⁴⁴ Caputo sees Gadamer as another representative of the usurping, hegemonic metaphysics of presence, albeit in the clothing of openness, that Derrida had decried. Implicitly agreeing with Richard Kearney’s distinction between the “romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Gadamer” on the one hand and “the more radical hermeneutics of deconstruction (Derrida, Caputo)”⁴⁵ on the other, Caputo positions Gadamer as sharing at least some of the Romantic commitments of Schleiermacher and Dilthey as examined above, the commitments of the “idealist

44 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 5.

45 See Richard Kearney, “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation” in Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. viii. Kearney specifically overlooks the influence of Gadamer on Ricoeur in his sweeping identification of the tasks of Gadamer and Schleiermacher. Kearney argues that Ricoeur occupies a middle position between Romanticism and Caputo’s radical hermeneutics as I am attempting to do on behalf of Gadamer. I am inclined to position the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer in closer proximity than Gadamer and Schleiermacher or, for that matter, Ricoeur and Schleiermacher.

romantic self, sovereign master of itself and all it surveys.”⁴⁶

Charles Taylor has written that “the days are long gone when Europeans and other Westerners could consider their experience and culture as the norm toward which the whole of humanity was headed, so that the other could be understood as an earlier stage on the same road that they had trodden.”⁴⁷ It cannot be assumed that the Western interpreter is inherently already equipped with the tools necessary to understand all cultures and times, all others, in their entirety. Nor can it be assumed that the interpretive, ethical, and political framework of any given Western interpreter is *a priori* superior to its other, that it has at its discretion the means to make the other’s meaning perfectly and immediately present without misrepresentation. Nor is it the case that this Western horizon already encompasses the entirety of all other perspectives, as if it were one step closer than the other to some overarching *telos*. If anything is to be achieved in the act of interpretation, our interpretations of the foreign, the texts and events of other times and other cultures, must not be unilateral attempts to rob the other of its alterity, of that which makes it what it is, that which distinguishes it. And this is the great challenge of hermeneutics, that Hermes was not only the Greek god of communication but also the god of thieves. In contrast to the deep-seated tradition of attempting to rob the other of her alterity, Caputo challenges our interpretations to be radical. But it is, of course, so much simpler (but naïve or, worse, imperious) to pretend to have removed such differences and prematurely claim victory, claim the completion of interpretation. Caputo considers Gadamer to have taken this easy and traditional route: theft via appropriation in

46 Richard Kearney, “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation” in Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. xix.

47 Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes” in *Gadamer’s Century*, eds. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsward, and Jens Kertscher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 279-297.

the name of communication and interpretation.

To Caputo, the job of a responsible hermeneut, the job that makes her task so incredibly radical, is the endeavour to “restore life to its original difficulty,”⁴⁸ to tarry with, rather than mask or attempt to eliminate, the challenges and aporiae that arise from our limitations as interpreters, from the fact that our 'factual life' is a life shared with others. In Heidegger's terminology, this is Dasein's condition of Being-in-the-world [*Inderweltsein*] that, insofar as our world is also one shared with others, is equiprimordially the condition of Being-with-others [*Mitandersein*]. It is this ontological *condition* of negativity or limitation that denies us the dream of totality, that renounces all illusions of omniscience.

Given Caputo's emphasis on this inherent limitation in the hermeneutical project, it would be well for us to immediately acknowledge and applaud the powerful ways in which Caputo enjoins us to be humble interpreters and treat the other with a respect that is mostly absent in Romantic interpretive approaches. The persuasive force of his argumentation and ethical sensitivity to the topic of otherness is a testament to his worthiness as an interlocutor here and the reason his critique of Gadamer figures so prominently in this chapter.

Although Caputo is quick to distance Gadamer from one particular characteristic of Romanticism, that of the psychologistic methodologism we described earlier, crediting him with developing a useful critique of “method” in *Truth and Method*, he still believes Gadamer to be too closely tied to this Romantic (indeed, Faustian) dream of omniscience,

48 This is the title of the Introduction to *Radical Hermeneutics* and, as Caputo points out, can be identified as a concern that especially occupied the work of both Aristotle and Kierkegaard.

of the total commensurability between the self and the other.⁴⁹ And while Gadamer's reservations about approaching the question of understanding methodologically might be unequivocal, Caputo insists that a truly radical hermeneutics will provide a similar critique of the notion of understanding as the site of truth. The idea Caputo has in mind when criticizing the notion of understanding as the site of truth is that notion, mentioned in our earlier discussion of Schleiermacher, of truth as a single, ahistorical, unmalleable, and no longer linguistic feature of the other, and understanding as that privileged site where this truth can be completely understood without the possibility of error, excess, and alterity. This perfected feature is what Caputo is calling "truth," here summarily used in the sense in which metaphysics has often conceptualized it in the past. In other words, Caputo uses the term truth as a perfect synonym for the combination of the characteristics of Romantic metaphysics that we identified: an essential, objectifiable aspect of the other that can be appropriated through interpretation for the sake of the interpretive goal of a pure, completed understanding. It is in this sense, as *tout court* restricted to its Romantic depiction, that Caputo describes in the opening pages of *Radical Hermeneutics* the hermeneutical pursuit to understand the truth (or meaning) of a text. And the blackmail of this conflation enables Caputo to conclude that a radical hermeneutics has no other choice but to move away from the subject of truth by serving as the principle threat to the "metaphysics of truth."⁵⁰ In the following defense of Gadamer against the accusations of Caputo, I will argue that Gadamer has developed an alternative, phenomenological account of understanding the truth of the foreign text and has thereby conceived the task of interpretation in a way that bears little resemblance to the old "fold of metaphysics,"

49 Caputo perspicaciously analyzes this illusion of omniscience as it relates to theology in his latest book, *The Weakness of God* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

50 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 6.

Romantic hermeneutics, and other caricatures that Caputo has attached to his work.

Caputo's entire objection to Gadamer's approach to hermeneutical understanding lies in the claim that in Gadamer we find "a kind of Heideggerianism without the scandal of the *Ereignis* (event) and the play of the epochs."⁵¹ There are two important questions raised in this accusatory statement about Gadamer and his particular brand of Heideggerianism, the responses to which shall enable us to better situate Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (to say nothing of Heidegger's own work) in relation to the metaphysical commitments of Romantic hermeneutics: 1) The question of appropriation and of the removal of the scandal of the event: Does Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons' represent an attempt to predict, account for, and thereby remove all alterity from the other in the name of bringing the foreign to the interpreter's understanding? 2) The question of the truth or meaning understood and the consequent removal of play: Does Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' serve as a way to neutralize the dynamism of the other by depicting what she has to say as admitting a certain truth, whereby truth is defined as something completely presentable, as a stable presence? Caputo answers both questions with a damning "yes," drawing Gadamer within the fold of the Romantic metaphysics described in the previous chapter.

2.1 The Accusation of Appropriation

Let us deal with the question of appropriation first. One significant way Gadamer pushes past his predecessors is by breaking open what is worthy of interpretation, opening up the possibility of engagement to other others, extending its categorical limits

51 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 115.

to include those forms that have been traditionally ignored by hermeneutics. The question, then, is what can be included in the category of the other that were previously not considered worthy of interpretation and how can we include these things in a manner which opens them up to interpretation but does not render them mute in the process by eradicating their differences from the interpreter? How might we listen to the voices we have ignored in the past and *include* them as others without forcing them into assimilation? How does one engage with respect to difference, understand the other *as* other? Gadamer extends the idea of the interpretable text to include different historical periods, other people and their cultural practices, and anything else capable of linguistically communicating and conveying some meaning to an interpreter. That is, Gadamer's idea of the other-text extends beyond, while still including, the physical text written by some author. But, while Gadamer's hermeneutics may not delimit the form or genre the other might take, Caputo's contention, as we will show, is that it removes the very eventfulness and thus import of these texts, these others, by anticipating their meaning, by anticipating a shared consensus between the self (the interpreter) and her other (the text): appropriation via anticipation. It is this anticipation that will allow Caputo to position Gadamer's fusion of horizons amongst the Romantics and against radical, deconstructionist approaches to hermeneutics.

2.1.1 Horizons

To understand Gadamer's fusion of horizons we must first understand what Gadamer means when he adopts the phenomenological concept of the horizon for his

project of philosophical hermeneutics. For this, we must take as our starting point our life-world, those experiences that make up our world prior to any explicit analysis or self-reflection; that is, we must begin with our involuntary condition of being-in-the-world. From the standpoint of our life-world, we possess many everyday customs and prejudices that serve to shape our anticipation of what the unfamiliar might mean. Our horizon consists of these tacit, anticipatory, and prejudiced interpretations that aid us in making sense of that which lies at the limit of our life-world's understanding. In the example of my own visual horizon that is limited by, say, a mountain range, beyond which I cannot perceive, I must draw upon the familiar, what lies within my visual scope, to anticipate what might lie on the other side or, pertaining to interpersonal interpretation, what the other might mean.⁵² Different horizons correspond to their different prejudgment-producing life-worlds, i.e., each horizon speaks to a different context from which I can approach the other, differently. In other words, the environment within which I live, on my side of this mountain range, will have a direct effect on the way I anticipate the unperceived contour of another environment on the opposite side of said mountain range. This horizon in which we make sense of our world acts in a very important way as a limit to what we can understand but, as Hegel shows us in his discussion of the limit in his *Science of Logic*, each limit ends at (i.e., is limited by) its outside and thereby points to

52 A critic might counter, "But are our imaginative anticipations really restricted to our prejudices? Is it not the case that when I imagine what exists on other planets my imagination extends beyond my previous perceptions and experiences?" To this one can respond that, indeed, even in such cases the imagination is structured by our prejudices. Is this fact not made manifest when one finds imaginative accounts of possible extraterrestrial life to almost always be anthropomorphic or merely combinations of traits identifiable in our own material world (vegetation is hypothetically compared to our own vegetation, etc.)? And can we not further insist that even the commitment to remain open to something unimaginable derives its sense from our own ideas about what is imaginable and what is not, from some reason that we have given to conclude that the other might be something we have not yet imagined (e.g. previous experiences of predictions that end up wrong, previous encounters with others whose form surprises us, etc.)?

what is other, beyond its demarcation, beyond my horizon at the limit of my life-world.⁵³ In being limited by something, we are invited to see what limits. We are allowed to catch a glimpse of what limits us and in this sense we can understand such a limit as a possible entrance to further understanding. No wall is ever exclusively the possession of what lies inside of it nor is it the exclusive possession of the outside but, in fact, it draws the inside to recognize the outside and the outside to recognize the inside (albeit this form of recognition, when we think of those walls surrounding countries, is surely not always amicable, which is to say that communication and understanding are not always amicable and usually admit to some disputation).

Our horizon, that set of traditions, cultural orientations, and backgrounds that orient us, points toward what is not ours, that which is to us indeterminate and not entirely constituted by the self. Husserl describes the horizon in this manner. He writes that, on the one hand, the horizon is of “indeterminate actuality,” and is “an empty mist of obscure indeterminateness.”⁵⁴ But just as it is not fully determinate, Husserl continues that, on the other hand, it is not fully undetermined:

This horizon, however, is the correlate of the components of undeterminateness essentially attached to experiences of physical things themselves; and those components...leave open possibilities of fulfillment, which are by no means completely undetermined, but are, on the contrary, motivated *possibilities predelineated with respect to their essential type*.⁵⁵

53 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969), pp. 134-35.

54 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), § 27.

55 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas I*, § 47. Husserl's specific example refers to our phenomenological horizon as it experiences physical things. In this manner he refers to the possibilities predelineated with respect to the type of phenomena encountered. But I do not think it is going too far to suggest that when we adopt his analysis of the horizon for our hermeneutical purposes we can also extend these possibilities

The limitation of the horizon represents an open possibility inasmuch as it represents a predelineation, the outline of its boundaries. Gadamer's use of the concept of horizons is derived from these two accounts insofar as they both understand horizons not merely as closed barriers to an interpreter's understanding, but also as potentialities, invitations for our understanding.⁵⁶ They are sites from which the interpreter can project his interpretation and anticipate the other's meaning as well as sites of engagement with another, where the other's meaning is manifested in a way just beyond the reach of the interpreter's demands. That is, insofar as the horizon remains the site of possibility, it admits to no total delineation. The limit must be acknowledged but, for Gadamer, it does not have the characteristics of a pure negativity, of an insurmountable impasse. To be sure, this description of the horizon admits to no type of totality or purity. The border between our life-world and what lies outside of it is a gateway to the beyond, which the interpreter, through his projections, attempts to, however slowly and incrementally, move through, but from any single position, any standpoint, we are limited by our horizon. To draw upon an everyday example from our sense-perception, when I stand face-to-face with another I cannot see the back of her head. But this limitation, this horizon, is not closed in the sense that it cannot, through the anticipations that originate from within its boundaries, be expanded and move to grasp what is beyond that which is immediately present to it and venture to verify this anticipation. Because of my familiarity with my own human body and those I have perceived in my past experiences, I can anticipate that my interlocutor has hair at the back of her head (and that such will prove to be true in the

(predelineated but not completely determined) to the content of the phenomena.

56 For an account of his indebtedness to Husserl see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 237-39; For an account of his indebtedness to Hegel see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

time it takes to verify such anticipations, i.e., in the coming future) and I can then move around her to prove these anticipations true or false in the present. Or, if prevented from moving around her, I must rely on her own testimony (rather than my own sense-perception) for verification. So, it is argued that the idea of a fusion of horizons is not a move to escape or transcend one's own life-world (i.e., to attempt too much, interpretive arrogance) but rather a move to expand one's horizon of understanding. In this way horizons are conceived as open trajectories toward understanding the other, and the model of the fusion of horizons is proposed as the event of this understanding.

But Caputo's challenge to this anticipatory projection that is inseparable from the notion of the horizon springs directly from his resistance to the idea that limitations are also invitations. Caputo assumes that any attempt to conceive limitations as entrances to understanding the other opens us up to using such inlets (no matter how narrow), such bridges (no matter how unstable), for the purposes of structuring the content of the other's voice, for safeguarding all interpretations from potential surprise, from the unprecedented event; these interpretations are "successful" because they cross over into the territory of the other too easily insofar as they admit to any "crossing" at all.⁵⁷ One senses behind Caputo's protestations a genuine concern that when extended to arenas such as intercultural interpretation anticipatory pursuits often risk an interpretive dominance over the other: the concern with colonialism and/or ethnocentrism. In the name of openness, of being receptive to the other, what Caputo senses in philosophical hermeneutics is what Charles Taylor has described as the disguised attempt to dominate:

The problem is that the standing ethnocentric temptation is to make too

⁵⁷ Caputo understands the other to be always beyond any bridge we are able to build, beyond any of our attempts to cross-over, and never meeting at the bridge. See John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 58, 211.

quick sense of the stranger, that is, sense *in one's own terms*. The lesser breeds are without the law because they have nothing we recognize as law. The step to branding them as lawless and outlaw is as easy as it is invalid and fateful... a quiet confidence that the terms the [interpreters] need are already in their vocabulary.⁵⁸

In the spirit of avoiding this ethnocentric temptation Caputo's argument runs thus: When the other is defined in the terms of the self, when our interpretations start and end with those anticipations that derive exclusively from our own horizon, then the task of understanding is unilateral and unidirectional, coming only from the self and directed only *toward* the other, refusing to recognize the alterity of the other that refuses to fit into a prefabricated anticipatory structure. Having already established the parameters of the other, any given interpretation will then be nothing more than an attempt to have the other's horizon become one with the interpreter's horizon, 'fusing' with the already established space set out in advance. While such an approach acknowledges the existence of the other, the crux of Caputo's argument is that the anticipatory structure cuts off the very possibility of this other being anything *other* to what is anticipated, thereby rejecting the possibility of the existence of any real other – who or what this other is or what she/it might mean is relegated to the ipseity of the interpreter. Caputo's consideration of this anticipatory structure relies on positioning Gadamer's hermeneutics with the subject-centered interpretive efforts of the Romantics, where understanding was (said to be) secured in a moment of certainty, the moment that the interpreter concluded the meaning of the other was identical to her interpretation of it: the dream of total commensurability.

58 Charles Taylor, "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes" in *Gadamer's Century*, pp. 295, 292; my emphasis.

Caputo counters this commensurabilism by demanding an interpretive openness that allows the other's coming in all of its unexpectedness. To Caputo, interpreters must prepare for anything, for anyone, that is, no one in particular, without specifications. The question of preparation is inseparable from the question of hospitality: How do I prepare for the coming of the other and her meaning? The conditions Caputo sets out for being hospitable to the other are such that hospitality must be unconditioned and all preparation must be without specification, precisely unpreparedness (for anything specific).⁵⁹

Caputo insists that for Gadamer the accomplishment of understanding, the fusion of horizons, is little more than *making* that which belongs to the other my own (*anzueignen*) – certainly without the method of divination, as we saw in Schleiermacher, but to the same end. Derrida is offered as an alternative since he is said to “let the other break into what is our ‘own,’ which means that for Derrida the other would breach, not fuse with, our horizons.”⁶⁰ The lines Caputo draws are very tidy: Gadamer’s approach is assimilative, Derrida’s is hospitable (by the standards described above); Gadamer’s approach gives full power to the efforts of the interpreter, Derrida’s approach gives full power to the other. And, it is said, Gadamer has a misplaced confidence in the abilities of the interpreter, a confidence, an ideality, that excludes an analytic of the interpreter’s finitude. Of course, Gadamer *does* emphasize the interpreter’s finitude in his discussion of Dasein’s prejudices as those conditions for all understanding, those formative influences or history of effects [*Wirkungsgeschichte*] that have structured our horizon of expectations, and ultimately argues that there is no possibility of removing oneself from this horizon and occupying a neutral and omniscient Archimedean point. As mentioned,

59 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 41.

60 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 42.

for Gadamer these prejudices, or pre-judgments [*Vorurteil*], are the anticipations that we project onto the other in order to approach it and understand it; this is his move to expand the limitations of our horizon. But it is this move from prejudice to understanding that is the point of contention with Caputo. Prejudices are supposed to be finite, epistemic limitations to any interpreter's claim of total understanding but Gadamer seems to want to claim that one can only come to an understanding of something outside of the terrain proper to these prejudices *via* these prejudices. That is, Gadamer understands the manner in which we anticipate the other and expand our horizon as influenced by a history of specific influences that have come to shape these very pre-judgments. When Gadamer understands the horizon of our experience as equally a limitation and an invitation, as an impasse and as a point of entry, Caputo sees a Romantic structure hyperextended to transcend the condition of limitation and difference. And in this way Caputo considers Gadamer's attempts to show understanding as finite to be at odds and ultimately subservient to the logic of the fusion of horizons, a logic which, in Caputo's own estimation, represents a breaking-through into "the inexhaustible depth of the historical material."⁶¹ Caputo continues that for Gadamer each interpretation that results in an understanding, each fusion of horizons that "breaks-through," represents an attempt to turn the inexhaustible alterity of the other into something that exists within the interpreter's horizontal limits of prejudicial anticipation and is thus unveiled and understood only insofar as it has already been assimilated by the interpreter.⁶²

In his discussion of the role of the horizon in interpretation, Caputo rightly notes

61 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 46.

62 It would seem that for Caputo it would be most respectful to the other to leave her isolated and untouched and await her initiative, wait for the other's coming. See John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 211. We will return to some possible problems with this one-directional movement shortly.

the influence of Heidegger on Gadamer's conception of horizontal expectation, the "anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text."⁶³ But Caputo traces Gadamer's Heideggerianism exclusively to the hermeneutical thrust of *Being and Time* and his early lectures, which, in Caputo's own estimation, comes at the expense of the more radical impetus of Heidegger's later work.⁶⁴ To Caputo, "Gadamer's hermeneutics is an insightful repetition of the standpoint of *Being and Time*, that is to say, of a hermeneutic centered on horizon-intentionality and *Verstehen/phronesis*."⁶⁵ This stark distinction between what Caputo will call Heidegger's "transcendental" and assimilative early work, where one finds a substantial discussion of Dasein's projective efforts, and his later work, which emphasizes openness, is an important aspect of Caputo's critique of Gadamer.⁶⁶ This is also the central distinction he makes between the work of Gadamer and the work of Derrida, a distinction he will elsewhere awkwardly entitle the division between right-wing and left-wing hermeneutics.⁶⁷

Heidegger gives a detailed description of Dasein's attempts to project the possibility of understanding and of "this development of the understanding [which] we call 'interpretation'"⁶⁸ in §32 of *Being and Time*:

In [interpretation] the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it...In every case this interpretation is grounded in

63 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 293.

64 One must admit that any depiction of Gadamer as exclusively a reader of the early Heidegger gravely overlooks the substantial work Gadamer has written specifically on the writings of the later Heidegger. For example, see "The Truth of the Work of Art," "Martin Heidegger – 85 Years," and "The Way in the Turn" in *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany: SUNY, 1994), pp. 95-111; 111-21; 121-39.

65 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 110.

66 Against this, I am defending the position, alongside Gadamer, that Heidegger's *Kehre* cannot be judged as an abandonment of his earlier work but rather as a "change of perspective." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Griechen," in *Heideggers Wege* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), p. 119.

67 John D. Caputo, "Telling Left from Right: Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, and the Work of Art" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 83, no. 11 (1986), pp. 678-85.

68 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) §32, p. 188.

something we have in advance – in a fore-having... When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted... An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.⁶⁹

But Caputo's contention is that Heidegger shifts gears in his later work away from these fore-structures of the understanding, away from projection, or *Vor-Stellen*, a term Caputo etymologically associates with technological encompassment and domination [*Ge-Stell*]. Caputo suggests that in its place Heidegger moves toward what he calls the Open [*Gegnet*].⁷⁰ Since interpretations are never without presuppositions, and presuppositions are said to lead to interpretive imperialism, it would appear that Caputo is defending some alternative way apart from the anticipatory structure of interpretation that we might come to experience the other.⁷¹ "By projecting a horizon," Caputo writes, "we shrink the open [the realm of possibilities, the voice of the other] down to our size, so that it contains objects made to fit our subjective-human limitations."⁷² Caputo sees projection as nothing more than a subjectivist strategy to control, whereas the idea of the Open is, roughly, that idea of another coming to us on her own. The Open is the *Ereignis* (the event) over which we have no control, by which *we*, the interpreters, are owned [*ge-*

69 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 191-02.

70 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, pp. 100-01.

71 Given our account of the problematic, the only alternatives are a) Caputo softens his position and admits that the other is not so wholly other, that there is some encounter, that there is some fusion of horizons possible, or b) the other remains isolated and unrecognized. It would appear that Caputo wants the latter without the inhospitable isolation and the former without a (supposedly Romantic) horizontal encounter with the other. We argue below that this latter position is untenable.

72 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 100.

eignet] and subjected to the coming of the other.⁷³ It is then claimed that anticipating the event prevents the event from eventing, from taking us [*geeignet*] by surprise. Caputo values the unanticipated aspect of the surprise insofar as it is a mark that indicates the lack of control on the side of the interpreter, which further marks a distance from certain hegemonic interpretive approaches that reduce the other to the same. According to Caputo, in this openness, in the event of the *Gegnet*, “we experience the ‘unencompassable’ character of that which horizontal thinking wants to surround, encircle and encompass by its horizontality. We are ourselves encircled and encompassed by the open; we cannot horizontally encircle and encompass it.”⁷⁴ Said differently, Caputo is claiming that Heidegger’s supposed move away from anticipatory projection is simultaneously one toward the hearing of a message (*ein Botschaft zu hören*), a message from the other that cannot be heard over the interference of the interpreter’s own projections.⁷⁵

With Graeme Nicholson, we can concede that Heidegger’s later work does indeed place a certain emphasis on the open, on the waiting in a clearing for the event of the other, but nevertheless must depart from Caputo’s allegation that a philosophy of the open has “no room for a theory of projection.”⁷⁶ We must also hesitate at Caputo’s depiction of Heidegger’s later thought (e.g. *Gelassenheit*⁷⁷) as exclusively the task “to get beyond the horizontal dimension and constriction to the regioning [i.e., opening] of the

73 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 102.

74 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 102.

75 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 104.

76 See Graeme Nicholson, “Dialogue or Deconstruction” in *Man and World*, 19 (1986), p. 267.

77 Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 2 ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1960) and translated into English as Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. Hans Freund and John Anderson (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

[open] region.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, we must disagree with Caputo’s further claim that Heidegger abandoned all concern with the task of hermeneutics in his later work, that ““Hermeneutical phenomenology” retains a residue of transcendental ontology and so must, for the interests of thought itself, be surrendered in order to approach that for which metaphysics has no name.”⁷⁹ Nicholson’s disagreement with Caputo on this point resembles our position here; that is, I submit that Caputo overplays the incommensurability between the horizontal projection of the interpreter and the open, unanticipated terrain of possible injunction from the side of the other. Discussing *Gelassenheit*, where Heidegger’s treatment of horizons and the open together is the most explicit, Caputo references a hypothetical dialogue Heidegger had constructed between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Teacher. At one point in the dialogue, the Teacher claims that “what is evident in the horizon... is but the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us.”⁸⁰ Caputo takes this to mean that the “horizon is the closing off of the Open, the attempt to shrink the Open down to human size. The horizon is but the face which the Open, the *Gegnet*, shows to us.”⁸¹ But, as Nicholson notices, Caputo mentions only the Teacher’s comments and takes them as indicative of Heidegger’s later position. If one were only to continue the remarks of the Scientist, one would see that another account is given where the horizon is not simply a side of the Open, but also that the Open appears within the horizon.⁸² Since it is not clear that Heidegger takes one position of the two he presents here (the Scholar does not introduce a third position here), it is

78 Graeme Nicholson, “Dialogue or Deconstruction” in *Man and World*, 19, pp. 267-68.

79 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 103.

80 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 64.

81 John D. Caputo, “Horizontal Hermeneutics and its Delimitation,” in *Man and World*, 19 (1986), p. 246.

82 Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 64. See also Graeme Nicholson, “Dialogue or Deconstruction” in *Man and World*, 19, p. 268.

arguably the case that, if this work is any indication of a shift in the later Heidegger, it is toward conceiving the Open and the horizon as intertwined. To disagree with Caputo on this point is to disagree with how he makes the ostensibly radical differences between the interpreting self and the interpreted other absolute and unmediated by one another.

Nicholson articulates the important fact that to understand *Gegnet* as a pure replacement for and in pure opposition to the horizon, as some new, pure condition that will remove us from the enframing condition of *Ge-stell*, is to misread the nature of the *Gegnet* and to conceive the (projecting) horizon as optional, that is, not necessarily constitutive of our Being-in-the-world.

But it might even be going too far to suggest that, although it is not obvious that Heidegger turns from a philosophy of the horizon to a philosophy of the Open, as Caputo seems to claim, there is definitely a turn from a horizontal hermeneutics (without consideration of openness) to a later philosophy of the horizon and openness intertwined. Indeed, Heidegger complicates any clear-cut distinction between openness and the horizon by introducing this intertwining as early as *Being and Time*: “our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.”⁸³ It is this attention to the terms of the things themselves that already shows an emphasis on openness, but again only insofar as the *Gegnet* and the horizon interpenetrate each other, only insofar as it is through the Open that the horizon is understood and, likewise, the

83 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 195. Compare with Heidegger’s remark that “A boundary is not that at which something stops but...the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*” in Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1977) p. 356.

Open is understood from the constitutive confines of one's own horizon; the horizon is delimited by the *Gegnet* just as the *Gegnet* appears within the horizon.⁸⁴ Yet, contrary to his own demands of attending to the difficulties of our hermeneutic situation, Caputo's either/or distinction, this clean break between late Heidegger or early Heidegger, *Gegnet* or horizon, and, *ipso facto*, his further distinction between the incommensurabilism of radical hermeneutics and the total commensurabilism of "Romantic" Gadamerian hermeneutics, demonstrates nothing more than an exaggerated simplification.

As much as Gadamer's project has set out the ways in which understanding and interpretation are limited by our own prejudices and has shown how all attempts to secure the position of the disinterested investigator are attempts made in vain, this does not in and of itself restrict interpretation to mere boomerang approaches. That is, although the interpreter cannot interpret the other from a terrain outside of her own prejudiced horizon, this need not exclude the possibility of the interpreter engaging with what lies outside of her horizon. Interpretation has failed if it is limited to a comfortable stroll to the limits of our comprehension, whereupon one simply turns back and returns unchanged by what has been found (or ignored) at this limit. We might imagine an interpreter who exclaims that she attempted to understand the other but the other had nothing of interest to teach her and no challenge to offer that was not already known; the other's culture had nothing to offer that was not more articulately addressed in her own culture – this indicates a failure to recognize one's prejudices as prejudices. For Gadamer, the task of the interpreter is one that must resist the temptation to treat such prejudices as non-contingent, to take her own standpoint for granted, and ignore the risk interpretation poses to this standpoint. In this way Gadamer warns against treating one's own horizon

84 Graeme Nicholson, "Dialogue or Deconstruction" in *Man and World*, 19, p. 268.

as representative of all possibilities; he warns against the total, objective commensurability between the interpretation and the meaning of the other (that chief characteristic of Romantic efforts) as we might, to differing degrees, accuse Schleiermacher and Dilthey of claiming, for he is, like Caputo, also suspicious of any hermeneutic philosophy that does not stem from a *recognition* of our finitude. In setting out the conditions of the experience of understanding another, Gadamer's "efforts were directed toward not forgetting the limit that is implicit in every hermeneutical experience of meaning. When [he] wrote the sentence 'Being which can be understood is language', what was implied thereby was that that which is can never be completely understood."⁸⁵ But then how exactly is this fusion of horizons, this point of contact with the other, not merely a self-interested attempt to completely understand the other and in our own terms? How is the fusion of horizons more than merely a "becoming one with," a "rendering what is past [and other] contemporaneous with the present [or the same]"?⁸⁶ And how does such a fusion of horizons resist becoming the "comforting doctrine of...the wedding of the epochs,"⁸⁷ the Romantic and prearranged matrimony where two become one?

2.1.2 The Fusion of Horizons

Having described the sense in which Gadamer uses the term 'horizons,' these questions can only be addressed by attending to how Gadamer uses the term 'fusion'

85 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation" in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard Palmer (Albany: SUNY, 1989), p. 25.

86 Richard Kearney, "Between Oneself and Another: Paul Ricoeur's Diacritical Hermeneutics" in *In Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, Ed. Andrzej Wiercinski (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003), n6.

87 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, pp. 5-6.

[*Verschmelzung*]. If we turn to the way in which the original German term has been often applied in matters of business and finance, specifically in the area of mergers and acquisitions, the term signifies a merging through absorption [*Verschmelzung durch Aufnahme*] as in the everyday cases where we might speak of *der Verschmelzung einer Gesellschaft*, the merging of businesses. In this sense, *Verschmelzung* becomes synonymous with *Zusammenschluss*, fully admitting the closure and finality [*Schluss*] that this term of domination carries. Does this not speak directly to the Romantic dream of total commensurability? Indeed. But Gadamer clearly understands how this term could be misinterpreted and clarifies another sense:

[The fusion of horizons does not consist in] subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of the “horizon” suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have.⁸⁸

This fusion is thus understood as a “higher universality” that is irreducible to either’s particularity but in their meeting opens up, even generates, new histories, new events, new influences at the borders between the self and the other.⁸⁹ And this, in short, is the answer to the question of why the ‘fusion’ does not represent for Gadamer a total commensurability nor does it retreat into incommensurabilism. The fusion of horizons is a point of contact, an encounter; a place of limbo that represents the absence of any purity. This contact is a new, in-between space where I see myself in the other and the other sees herself in me. But since the identities of both my self (what I bring to this

88 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 304.

89 For an account of the conditions of such border-crossing see Jay Lampert, “Gadamer and Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics” in *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXVIII, No. 4, Summer, 1997, p. 353.

encounter) and the other's self are far from static, changing with every new encounter with new others (and so the condition of each identity is participation in a plurality), such an encounter of the in-between never constitutes an equilibrium and is not a place of permanence. There is just as little sense in understanding the fusion of horizons as a site of completion or stasis as there would be in attributing a single plane of vision, without curvature, displacement, or parallax, to each and every subject, for the fusion of horizons "changes constantly, just as our visual horizon also varies with every step that we take."⁹⁰ Like a festival, like every event, as it moves certain encounters drop in and out of relevance, failing to impress at one moment while finding their way through the ceaseless barrage of voices in the next. It is the site of understanding as a spark: at times quickly muted and just as soon misunderstood, while at others, spreading as wildfire to an overwhelming sense of agreement.

Gadamer's fusion of horizons [*Horizontverschmelzung*] is just this: an encounter and contact where the new possibilities of understanding our relation to alterity lie. The dialogical nature of the fusion of horizons prevents it from being conceptualized as Caputo conceives of it, as a subjectivist category motivated and reducible to the interpreter; it is not exclusively the (forced) move of that which is other into the self's horizon (the absorption of the other), but the interpreter's self must also become other to itself. At the end of Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People* we find an example of the interpreting self, in this case a white, liberal South African named Maureen Smales, becoming other to herself. After revolutionary violence makes it too dangerous to live in the city, Maureen Smales and her family seek refuge in the childhood village of their

⁹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation With Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 61.

black, Friday-like servant, July. This encounter with a foreign terrain forces Maureen to engage with July as something other than her servant. And it is only in this interaction that Maureen, near the end of the novel, comes to recognize that, although she was rarely malicious, she had consistently treated July in a patronizing manner against her conscious intentions, usually reducing his alterity to the endearing or insignificant. It is only here at the limit of her horizon, removed from her familiar environment, that she could critically reflect upon the naïve confidence she had had in her own interpretation of July's role in her household. It was here that "she understood although she knew no word... what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him."⁹¹ In this moment Maureen became other to herself, the internal sufficiency of her former identity (of which she was so confident) and its relation to July was challenged, shown to be contingent upon many factors, not least of which was geopolitical locale. It is this back-and-forth movement that establishes the hermeneutical situation in a sense that cannot, according to Gadamer, be reduced to the "subjective nor the objective, but describes understanding as the interplay" between the self and the other. And on this basis, "the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity," Gadamer continues, "but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition."⁹² And when Gadamer speaks of "tradition and of conversation with tradition, [he is] in no way putting forward a collective subject. Rather, "tradition" is simply the collective name for each individual text (text in the widest sense...),"⁹³ the name for our ontological-hermeneutical condition of being-with

91 Nadine Gordimer, *July's People* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 152

92 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 293.

93 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Destruktion and Deconstruction," trans. Geoff Waite and Richard E. Palmer, in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 111.

(the condition of *Mitandersein* as Heidegger has described it), being-between. It is this commonality that allows us to recognize the other in the first place. It is this possibility of a greater commonality that is the crux of all understanding, at the heart of the fusion of horizons, and for this reason, where understanding is genuine, it is clear that such a commonality, this possibility of a (temporarily) shareable connection, is not a reduction of alterity to ipseity. The commonality that is necessary for our initial *recognition* of the event of encountering the other is without hermeneutical significance if unaccompanied by an acknowledgment of the other's difference *as* difference. That is, while such commonality is the necessary precondition of understanding (e.g. some similar language must be spoken or translated, some common background established, for communication to occur), such commonality is merely imposed or fabricated when conceptualized without an accompanying openness to the other:

Hermeneutics in the sphere of philology and the historical sciences is not “knowledge as domination” – i.e., an appropriation as taking possession; rather, it consists in subordinating ourselves to the text's [the other's] claim to dominate our minds.... [For example,] to interpret the law's will or the promises of God is clearly not a form of domination but of service.⁹⁴

This openness is demonstrated in the interpreter allowing the other to claim such a commonality where it might exist, and where it does not, it is the allowance given to the other to (forcibly, that is, externally) enable the interpreter to understand where she does not, to change the content of the interpreting self's anticipation of agreement. This force could take the shape of a willful disagreement, a silence, or a departure from the conversation, given the condition that such a disagreement be at least recognized by the

94 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 310.

interpreter (a point to which I will return to later in this chapter).⁹⁵ It is these others, the interpreted “things themselves,” that have the power to confirm appropriate projections and the power to lead the interpreter to revise these prejudices when necessary. And this openness to the revision of the other must be the constant task of understanding or there is nothing worth that title.⁹⁶ For if the interpreter refuses to be open to being told *otherwise* and closes himself off from the fact that the meanings possible in a foreign text “represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities... and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning.”⁹⁷

It is for this reason that Caputo is entirely correct when he claims that “we are admitted [to understanding the other]...only in the experience of the breakdown of such [anticipatory] attempts.”⁹⁸ But this is also precisely what Gadamer means when he states that “it is enough to say that we understand in a *different way, if we understand at all.*”⁹⁹ Indeed, Gadamer agrees that the limits of our horizon, that horizon that first conditioned the terms of the conversation, must shift, often to be unrecognizably altered, if the encounter is to provide understanding. The interpreter must open herself up to the possible destruction of the already established sense of her own identity, of the limits

95 “Force” is an excellent term in which to describe this connection to the other. Indeed, this is the way Hegel takes it up. He considers ‘force’ as that which has identity only through the expression of itself in and through another. What it means to recognize something is to take it as something in itself expressing itself through otherness. But we usually take that which exists within our horizon as independent of the influence of others. We take what has presented itself to us as isolated, as totally present, and consider it familiar. But “the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood. The commonest way in which we deceive either ourselves or others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar, and accepting it on that account.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) §31. We must open up the familiar (our own life-world, etc.) to uncanniness in order to understand it. We must lose ourselves in order to understand ourselves.

96 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

97 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 271.

98 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 102.

99 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 296.

drawn around her life-world's horizon (and, thus, drawn around the other's identity), in order to receive a (new) understanding of her own self. It is in this manner that Gadamer writes that openness in interpretation means recognizing "in advance the possible correctness, even the superiority of one's conversation partner."¹⁰⁰ What we are describing is not the same as suicide, that is, it is not simply the loss of all self, of all claim to identity. But in this way openness offers something much more radical than the individualistic attempt to gain an understanding of oneself without subjecting this self to the risk of reorientation, to conversion. Rather, interpretive openness is a 'project' (in all its senses) to "receive one's self from what gives itself,"¹⁰¹ the other. Our personal enrichment in this encounter, the taking with us, or "appropriation," of what we have learnt from the other, must here be reconceived. As Kearney writes, this "notion of appropriation does not... imply some triumphalist return of a sovereign subject to itself. If the goal of hermeneutics remains 'self-understanding' this must be reinterpreted in the altered sense of understanding oneself *in front of* the text."¹⁰² Instead of looking for something behind what is given, some deeper essence than that offered by the other, Gadamer insists that I must listen and be subjected to the other's voice and that this requires momentarily softening my own voice.

Indeed, "to understand means to recognize or accept [*Geltenlassen*]. It means, as Emil Staiger puts it, "Begreifen, was uns ergreift" – "To grasp something that takes hold

100 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 189.

101 This phrase is taken from a chapter of the same name in Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. viii.

102 Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, 2nd Edition (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 111-112.

of us.”¹⁰³ And so, Gadamer continues, “our prior judgments (or what I have called “prejudices” [*Vorurteile*]) are brought into play and actually put at risk in every process of understanding. In the rich concreteness of this kind of hermeneutical experience, concepts like... “compulsion-free dialogue” are revealed to be pale abstractions.”¹⁰⁴ There is no neutral terrain outside of prejudice, no assertion without its own history of motivation, according to Gadamer, but we must be able to question such prejudices, i.e., allow the other to call them into question. As Nadine Gordimer’s literary example suggested, I can appropriate the new horizon of possibility opened up by the other’s text only through my own disappropriation, which is not to be confused with the naïve notion of being *without* self or horizon, but rather, should be understood as a resignation from the status of the master toward my submission to the power of the other’s text. It is allowing ourselves to be addressed and interpreted by the other. In Gadamer’s own words, “understanding will be concerned not merely to form anticipatory ideas, but to make them conscious, so as to check them and thus acquire right understanding from the things themselves.”¹⁰⁵ In this way there is no understanding the other without a changed understanding of oneself. And it is only through an openness to the other that we are able to begin this self-critique that is so “necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the [other] to our own expectations of meaning. Only then can we listen...in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard.”¹⁰⁶

What this shows is that this openness, this embrace of the other’s authority, this acknowledgment of the claim of the *Gegnet*, is a required component of the horizontal,

103 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” in *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 61.

104 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” in *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 69.

105 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 272.

106 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 304.

interpretive project. And this openness (i.e., the embrace of the Open) is rife with risk, as the mere presence of the other leads us to acknowledge our deficiencies and limitations.¹⁰⁷ This openness is perhaps best captured by Aeschylus' *pathei mathos* or, in English, "learning, through suffering." This however means more than the platitudinous expression that one gains wisdom through tribulations. Moreover, what we gain through this suffering is recognition of intersubjectivity, which is equally the insight into the deficiency of our previous position, the particularity of our understanding, and the finitude of our experience.¹⁰⁸ That is to say that hermeneutics is neither based on an individualistic denial of intersubjectivity, nor on an overly easy notion of intersubjective harmony:

Hermeneutics always has an element that goes beyond rhetoric: it always includes an encounter with the opinions of an other person ... it does not allow itself to be just the teaching of an art [*Kunstlehre*] that devotes itself to empathizing with the opinions of *the other person*. No, as philosophy, hermeneutical reflection includes the point that in all understanding of a matter, or of another person, the critique of oneself should also be happening. In terms of hermeneutics, one who understands does not claim to hold a superior position in advance, but instead admits that his or her own assumed truth must be put to the test in the act of understanding...and for this reason every understanding of something contributes to the further development

107 For a phenomenological account of how we experience this in our daily lives see John Russon, *Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis, and the Elements of Everyday Life* (Albany: SUNY, 2003), pp. 51-74, especially p. 54.

108 Gadamer draws out these implications in an analysis of Aeschylus in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 351.

of...self-knowledge.¹⁰⁹

This is not assimilation as described by Caputo, for where it is self-knowledge it is also self-critique. It is openness as the acknowledgement that the other might be correct, that I might need to accept something that goes against my interests, and that I am willing to lose.¹¹⁰ But “losing” here would be specifically to lose our Faustian pretensions and relinquish the form of my previous anticipations, to redraw our initial perimeters, and to acknowledge the fact that I will likely need to continue to redraw such perimeters (as our horizon changes and as the other’s does). Drawing upon Hegel, Gadamer sees this encounter that the fusion of horizons inaugurates, this “experience, in the full sense of the term, as “Erharung der Nichtigkeit” (experience of negation). Experience is that wherein our previous sense of reality is undone, refuted and shows itself as needing to be reconstituted. It occurs precisely in those moments where the object “talks back.””¹¹¹

We must be ready to be addressed and bound by the word of another, to recognize in the speech of another that they are directing it towards us, making a claim on us that is not neutral. If our horizon’s initial motive was to bring the alien closer, here, in this moment of self-doubt, the close is made alien. Our horizon is put at risk. Gadamer gives us an example of the potential discomfort of such an openness by claiming that the West’s insistence that the USSR act in terms of furthering human rights, parliamentary democracy, and industrialization reveals only the West’s pre-occupations and does not

109 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” in *The Gadamer Reader*, pp. 69-70.

110 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, p. 189. As we will argue in the section below entitled “A Response to Incommensurabilism” (2.1.3), this openness to that which goes against my own interests cannot be absolute or it risks enabling the other to destroy the interpreting self, destroy the interpreter’s family, property, etc.

111 Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes” in *Gadamer’s Century*, p. 282.

reflect the USSR's traditions, values, and history.¹¹² Gadamer is well aware that opening up these pre-occupations to discussion, examining their foundations and presuppositions, and allowing the other to question these very foundations and presuppositions, does run the risk of jeopardizing the sufficiency of many of our previously held assumptions. But this is precisely the risk involved in opening oneself up to another.

Gadamer's example should not be read, however, as a claim that all traditions and preoccupations are equally valid or that we should necessarily cede to Soviet traditions when on Soviet soil and so forth. Indeed, one might press Gadamer on this point by imagining a particular cultural tradition that is systematically racist: If the USSR had a 'tradition' of anti-Semitism, would the 'open' interpreter simply be left with the choice of accepting this tradition or abandoning openness? A Gadamerian might respond in a way similar to Lorenzo Simpson, himself quite influenced by Gadamer, who was confronted with a similar challenge from Robert Bernasconi.¹¹³ Simpson responds to the accusation that his defense of hermeneutical openness to the other leads one to the absurd situation of charitably attending to the virulent claims of racists by arguing that the interpreter need not be open to the racist claims of the racist (or sexist, etc.). In fact this extreme openness could be seen to be an impediment to openness insofar as the racist *qua* racist "cannot be open to his or her target's self-descriptions."¹¹⁴ Hermeneutical openness is self-defeating if it is "open" to obvious ethnocentric closure. In fact, the mandate of openness is to challenge such arrogance. The difficulty lies in determining what counts, in examples

112 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: SUNY, 1992), p. 152.

113 The limitations of this openness is further addressed in the following section, 'A Response to Incommensurabilism' (2.1.3).

114 Lorenzo Simpson, "Cosmopolitanism, Humanism, and Meaning: A Reply to My Readers" in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2007) vol. 33, no. 33, p. 328. Simpson is responding to Robert Bernasconi, "Y'all Don't Hear Me Now: On Lorenzo Simpson's *The Unfinished Project*" in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2007) vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 289-299.

such as these, as the other's obvious racist closure and what counts as simply the projected pre-occupation of the interpreter. The Soviet other – to continue using Gadamer's example – might have much to offer by way of a dialogical challenge to my commitments, but in the case of this (hypothetical) Soviet anti-Semitism "I *already* know that the standard racist claims fail miserably to rise to the occasion."¹¹⁵ Instead, these claims present themselves as new ways of *avoiding* further dialogues with others.

Other cases, perhaps not as pernicious as culturally-ordained anti-Semitism, could arise and in these cases the interpreter must be cautious of the temptation to unjustly avoid opportunities to understand these customs, basing her eschewal on premature descriptions of the other's customs as demonstrating closure, racist, sexist, etc. And there is arguably no *a priori* standard to which we can appeal that would decisively settle this matter, removing the risk from this endeavour. Despite this risk, Gadamer's example of those traditions specific to the USSR, and his insistence on the interpretive openness that must accompany the interpretation of these traditions, clearly depicts the task of interpretation as one of acknowledging our own pre-occupations *as* pre-occupations; this is to suggest to the respectful interpreter that she strive to bring her own account of such matters to the fore in order to examine the reasons behind her convictions. This does not, however, mean that these pre-occupations are necessarily wrong or that they do not deserve due consideration.

But often when the interpreter's pre-occupations are brought to light they are shown to be latent intentions to someday occupy the other and can often orient the content of the interpreter's engagement with all things foreign. This openness is no less

115 Lorenzo Simpson, "Cosmopolitanism, Humanism, and Meaning: A Reply to My Readers" in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2007), vol. 33, no. 33, p. 329.

needed in today's world (as it was in Gadamer's world of European-Soviet relations) with contemporary Western preoccupations with topics ranging from globalization to technological modernization to religious headscarves. To be open to revise one's preoccupations (viz. our prejudices, anticipations, etc.) is to open ourselves up to the force of the other's injunction, which "always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it,"¹¹⁶ not by encompassing it but by opening ourselves up to the affectivity of external influence. This openness calls for a scrutinization and possibly, but not necessarily, an abandonment of previously held convictions.

But just as the openness necessary for understanding (as a fusion of horizons) separates Gadamer's project from the manner described by Caputo, that is, as an imperious, conservative melding-into-one-another (colonialism, reduction of difference to the same, to the status quo), it also avoids being construed as yet another theoretical paradigm celebrating the inanity of liberal capitalism. This openness differs from the buzzword of the same name one finds championed in self-help and business management monographs.¹¹⁷ That is, openness of the sort inherent to the fusion of horizons departs from the banal brand of flexibility that feigns a position of neutrality, of being without roots, history, or horizon, a position that has become something of a mantra for further success in today's workworld. Such naïve claims pretend to be without tradition, identity, or perspective and often turn out to be nothing more than self-interested attempts to

116 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 271.

117 For example, a sample of recent business management titles includes Henry Chesbrough, *Open Business Models: How to Thrive in the New Innovation Landscape* (New York: Harvard Business School Press, 2006) and Daniel Fasnacht, *Open Innovation in the Financial Services: Growing Through Openness, Flexibility, and Customer Integration* (New York: Springer, 2009). These texts champion an "open business" model, a financial strategy aimed at turning a greater profit by appeasing shareholders' and customers' demands for greater transparency and flexibility, as opposed to traditional, top-down, elite-run business models.

obliterate the other's difference by declaring the end of horizontal distinctions and thereby of the other's alterity (i.e., they return to a conservative defense of the exclusivity of the self's horizon). Neutral terrain then stands in for the same. But the real demand for openness stands in the way of this temptation to use the other merely to gain perspective on our own life-world, that is, to colonize the other for their resources, including the ability to serve as a catalyst for our atonement and redemption. This openness stands against the self-satisfaction that often accompanies treating oneself as a victim. Instead, we must realize the radical implications of this openness: often an alternative or threat to our life as we knew it is being offered. To recognize the true impetus of this openness is to recognize that such an event is not comparable to a New Age excursion to the Far East to be revitalized with a spiritual awakening, it is not a "voyage into the exotic, a flirtation with a distant Other."¹¹⁸ That is to say that the other resists being construed as a weekend retreat from which one might return refreshed but ultimately unchanged.

But when not just a dressed-up attempt to colonize the other, this naïve orientation to openness turns out to be nothing more than its opposite, a self-assailment, a quisling's attempt to *be* colonized, aiding an attack on the very idea of having a perspective or horizon. Just as Romanticism attempted to rid the other of her own horizon (the reduction of horizons to a single horizon, the interpreter's), this move simply inverts the target of reduction, now directed toward the interpreter's horizon. If we admit, following Gadamer, that our attempt to understand the other need not (in fact, *does not*, in true understanding) eliminate the other's alterity, we can equally propose that the interpreter's own self, however open to an engagement with the other it must be and however changed

118 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism" in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1 (1988: Fall), p. 154.

it might become (“we understand in a *different* way”), is not entirely destroyed and left without horizon. It is here that we can understand Gadamerian openness, which resists this move of horizontal obliteration, in close relation to Catherine Malabou’s discerning description of plasticity.

Malabou writes that “plasticity, in effect, is not flexibility. Let us not forget that plasticity is a mechanism for adapting, while flexibility is a mechanism for submitting. Adapting is not submitting, and, in this sense, plasticity ought not serve as an alibi for submitting to the new world order being dreamed up by capitalism.”¹¹⁹ The openness demanded of the fusion of horizons cannot be conceived as the enslavement of the interpreter, as a mere reversal of the Romantic domination. Openness as adaptability (adapting my own anticipations, my own projections of meaning, and adapting my own sense of self in front of the face of an other) cannot merely imply the destruction of my self, whether it be by the face of another person or by the face of a political system that wishes to substitute distinguishable differences with an imposed neutrality or with the ultimate neutralizer, the reign of capital (cf. liberal capitalism). In opposition to this, Malabou articulates plasticity’s polyvalency:

Plasticity directly contradicts rigidity. It is its exact antonym. In ordinary speech, it designates suppleness, a faculty for adaptation, the ability to evolve. According to its etymology – from the Greek *plassein*, to mold – the word *plasticity* has two basic senses: it means at once the capacity to *receive form* (clay is called “plastic,” for example) and the capacity to *give form* (as in the plastic arts or in plastic surgery)...But it must be remarked that

119 Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. xiv.

plasticity is also the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create. We should not forget that *plastique*, from which we get the words *plastiquage* and *plastiquer*, is an explosive substance made of nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose, capable of causing violent explosions. We thus note that *plasticity is situated between two extremes*: on the one side the sensible image of taking form (sculpture of plastic objects), and on the other side that of the annihilation of all form (explosion).¹²⁰

To connect this description of plasticity with Gadamer's openness, we can say that similarly the interpreter has the capacity to initially give form to the interpreted phenomena, to anticipate what it might mean in order to establish with it the connection required for understanding. But in the event of a real encounter with the other – the encounter we describe as the event of understanding – the interpreter must be open to receive form from the other. That is to say that the interpreter's anticipations can be verified or corrected, but also that her own horizon, her own capacity to anticipate, can be reconstructed by the other. The openness necessary for this reconstruction of one's horizons by the other is, indeed, an invitation to annihilate the *form* these previous anticipations once took (it is possible that the interpreter was significantly wrong in her predictions), but this annihilation is surely not the annihilation of the very ability to create, to anticipate; it is not the destruction of the horizon nor of the interpreting self *per se*. The event of the other shatters my horizon only insofar as "it cannot return to its *initial* form after undergoing a deformation" after each encounter with another and "in this sense is opposed to 'elastic,'" ¹²¹ boomerang efforts of interpretation. In a way very

120 Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, p. 5; my emphasis.

121 Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, p. 15; my emphasis.

similar to the manner in which Malabou has put it, Gadamer elaborates on the interconnectivity between fore-meanings as projections and openness as the invitation to alter such fore-meanings, an interconnectivity one finds in the event of the fusion of horizons:

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's fore-meanings.¹²²

Here Gadamer emphasizes the interpreter's activity of projecting fore-meanings alongside a necessary receptivity to the other. That is, the "phenomenological respondent to the metacategory of otherness" is a passivity, an openness, that is equally "the attestation of otherness"¹²³ and this attestation is performed by the (open) interpreter. Such an attestation necessitates the self not be "exalted, as in the philosophies of the cogito" which we find in the history of traditional metaphysics, "nor be humiliated, as in

122 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 271-72.

123 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 318.

the philosophies of the anti-cogito,¹²⁴ the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas figuring as the example *par excellence* of this latter tradition. Rather, we must come to distinguish the position that posits the supremacy of the ego and consequently ignores the alterity of the other from that of the hermeneutic self that comes to recognize itself only through an engagement with the other, a self that sees *itself as another* through the event of understanding, through the fusion of horizons.

The affected, open self also affects the other through its attestations insofar as its openness, its listening, is an active listening, a vigilant receptivity that can at times be critical; it is an openness that affects the other and itself as another. If openness were not *active* in this way, if it were not, in the words of Gadamer, “playful” (a concept we shall discuss when we take up Caputo’s second challenge), interpretation would fail to involve the interpreter. Of course, listening to the voice of the other must be seen as an integral element of a dialogue and consequently the development of a dialogical understanding between self and other. But if we follow Gadamer here and conceive of the interpreter as a self who engages with her own unexplored alterity, but only via an open encounter with another, we cannot follow Levinas in his (one-sided) claim that it is the other who is given the “exclusive initiative for assigning responsibility to the self.”¹²⁵

2.1.3 A Response to Incommensurabilism

To be sure, hermeneutics must account for the injunction of the other, a demand that is directed from without but, still following Gadamer, if we are to phrase such

124 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 318.

125 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 331.

relationality in terms of agents and patients as Levinas has, we must first acknowledge the fact that such roles are fundamentally dialogical, i.e., reversible and co-constituting. In interpretation there surely exists the indubitable danger of the interpreter reducing the text of, say, a foreign culture to her own, ignoring what differences exist between them, and consequently claiming another's texts as her own – appropriation in the negative sense that occupies Caputo's concerns. (And we have already addressed such an imperative as it occupied the Romantic hermeneutical consciousness.) But Levinas's hyperbolic strategy – paradigmatic of the incommensurabilist position he represents – is equally a unilateral one, a move from the other to the self not in relation but through a break from relation that depends upon separation: "In Separation...the I is ignorant of the Other"¹²⁶ and so the epiphany of the face of the other signals nothing but an absolute, nonrelative exteriority.¹²⁷ On these grounds the other is not an interlocutor but a master, a pedagogue who cannot be subjected to the terms (or language) of dialogue with the self. And as a result of such mastery there befalls a victimization of the self, an assailing of the interpreter based upon this incommensurable bifurcation of the interpreter and the other. Here the interpreting self is blackmailed into representing the position of the Romantic, totalizing I in direct opposition to any type of openness or hospitality. Having set up the terms according to this relegation, it is then possible for Levinas to write that "the exteriority of the Other can no longer be expressed in the language of relation,"¹²⁸ where it would risk being usurped by the self. Levinas can then claim that the other can only be expressed in the accusative (injunctions derived from the other toward the self).

126 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 62.

127 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 337.

128 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 336.

Given this condition of non-relationality – at least insofar as it concerns the interpreter – an incommensurable lacuna is set up between the horizon of the interpreted (now, uninterpretable) other and the horizon of the interpreter.

Caputo follows Levinas's account and insists that given the alterity proper to the other, the other is that which "I will never know," being "in principle inaccessible. The alterity of the other would be destroyed if I had access to it; the other whom I would know would not be other."¹²⁹ The degree to which Caputo takes this inaccessibility is, like Levinas, total. This position represents the incommensurabilist externalization of "the category of alterity to the point that any contact with the self [would be a] contamination."¹³⁰ But since the interpreting self is obsessed with totalizing the other, according to Levinas, a corrective must be proposed and to this end Levinas offers the alternative that the self be, instead, mastered by this other who resists the self's totalizing efforts. Just as quickly as this claim is made does it slip towards the proposal that the self is, in fact, persecuted by the other. Finally, Levinas arrives at the idea of pure substitution, where he claims that the interpreter is entirely substituted by the other: "the responsibility for everyone goes to the point of substitution. A subject is a hostage."¹³¹

I share this account of Levinas's dissymmetry with Ricoeur, who dedicates a

129 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 41. Instead of reconceiving 'accessibility' he accepts the Romantic configuration of the term (total presentability of a truth) and opposes it. In order to demonstrate this he draws upon the most obvious example of a text (supposedly) without meaning (or without an accessible meaning), modern art (see p. 49). Gadamer, as Caputo acknowledges, has a different account (as Gadamer's work on Celan and Mallarmé demonstrates): modern artworks are not without shareable meaning – they are not fundamentally inaccessible – but instead adopt a form that frustrates the *ease* of accessibility and in this way emphasize the interpreter's own role in the creation of meaning.

130 Richard Kearney, "Between Oneself and Another: Paul Ricoeur's Diacritical Hermeneutics," in *In Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, p. 149.

131 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 112.

respectful yet critical chapter of *Oneself as Another* to Levinas's non-relationality.¹³² Ricoeur is concerned with the fact that in Levinas's account there appears to be "no middle ground, no between, [that] is secured to lessen the utter dissymmetry between the Same and the Other."¹³³ In Ricoeur's estimation, this absence of a relation results in a hyperbolic separation which, when coupled with the idea of the Other as a "persecutor",¹³⁴ "renders unthinkable...the formation of a concept of selfhood defined by its openness and its capacity for discovery"¹³⁵ and, therefore, lacks an account of the idea of the responsible, open interpreter.

Furthermore, the conclusion of Levinas's victimology seems to result in nothing less than a return to the domination and appropriation that we discussed under the title of Romanticism, with the sole distinction being that such oppression now originates from the side of the other. Just as Romanticism defined the meaning of the other as a secret to be entirely unlocked by the interpreter, fealty to this false dichotomy propels Caputo and Levinas to consider the other as the exclusive possessor of a "structural secrecy" who entirely prevents the active engagement (interpretation on the basis of projection) of the interpreter.¹³⁶ The logic is simply reversed (reactionary?) here: Romanticism's total

132 See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, especially the Tenth Study, "What Ontology in View?" pp. 297-356. Ricoeur is not the only philosopher to raise such concerns with Levinas's account of (non-)relationality and his privileging of the other. For example, Alain Badiou raises a similar problem when he writes, "the ethical primacy of the Other over the Same requires that the experience of alterity be ontologically 'guaranteed' as the experience of a distance, or an essential non-identity, the traversal of which is the ethical experience itself. But nothing in the simple phenomenon of the other contains such a guarantee. And this simply because the finitude of the other's appearing certainly can be conceived as resemblance, or as imitation, and thus lead back to the logic of the Same. The other always resembles me too much for the hypothesis of an originary exposure to his alterity to be *necessarily* true." Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 21-22.

133 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 338.

134 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 112.

135 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 339.

136 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 41. Caputo attributes the insight of the structural

commensurability thesis assumed the secret of the other was one that was able to be totally interpreted, disclosed, and brought into the public; Caputo's (and Levinas's) total incommensurability thesis bestows the other with an undisclosable, uninterpretable secrecy that resists any interpretive efforts for fear of its total publication.

My first objection to this type of incommensurability returns us to the question of interpretive hospitality. Caputo's preparedness for the other is precisely a hyperbolic unpreparedness (the result of eschewing the idea of the anticipatory, preparatory projections of the horizon). In admitting the complete ineffability of the other, this unconditional hospitality cannot be an openness that allows for any possibility of vigilant receptivity nor one that allows for any role played by the critical interpreter but, instead, opens the interpreting self up to victimization. Beyond the impasse that such a thesis implies for the possibility of meaningful dialogue, such a thesis goes further and presents the interpreter as entirely vulnerable to the whim of the other. This victimization suggests itself as an antidote to the subjection of the other, to be sure, but in its place there arises the possibility of the sadistic other, the horrific other that subjects the interpreter to a disproportionate trauma, the "traumatism of the transcendent."¹³⁷ The Romantic metaphysics of the subject have, as Dominique Janicaud rightly expressed, "simply been replaced on the 'good' side by the Other," replaced by "an eidetic discourse in reverse,

secrecy of the other to Husserl. Throughout *Radical Hermeneutics*, however, Caputo criticizes Husserl for overlooking this fact. Whatever we might say about the proto-hermeneutical approach in Husserl (considering it Romantic or not), it would seem to be the case that Husserl's "ignorance" of this structural secrecy is not, in fact, ignorance but rather a fidelity to the logic of the horizon as he sets it out which, as detailed above, admits to both a determinacy and an indeterminacy. According to Husserl, the other would then admit both a secrecy and a relationality and Caputo's depiction of the other's alterity solely as "inaccessible" would be indicative of taking the logic of the secret too far – further than Husserl, at any rate.

137 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. xliii.

whose extreme term is the exteriority of the Other [*Autre*].”¹³⁸

Although this present study is mostly concerned with matters of interpersonal interpretation and, as the final chapter will demonstrate, particularly those of cross-cultural significance, Gadamer’s own example of the theological other – where our interpretation of “the promises of God [are] clearly not a form of domination but of service”¹³⁹ – can aid us in setting up this problematic. Interpretation is an *observance* of alterity in both its active and its passive senses, through anticipatory signification and through the acts of listening and conversion; it is a commitment to change. This experience of the (divine) other is, as Derrida describes it, a “‘vision’ of the ‘invisible’” and an event that “must be inscribed...with visible signs of the invisible,”¹⁴⁰ even if such signs are fleeting and are only present through traces of the memory (i.e., never fully present). But such visible signs do not rid the invisible of all of its invisibility. The condition of this vision of the invisible, this inscription of the ineffable, this interpretation of alterity, is that of the limit situation. It is at this site that the border between the inside and the outside cannot admit to an inside or to an outside. The encounter that marks the event of this limit situation is one of a higher universality where the terms of the limit no longer apply to what it inaugurates; that is, the limit no longer has its traditional power to divide. But this does not mean that the higher universality is stable, all-encompassing, or that it will persist indefinitely but, rather, only that in this interpretive experience of

138 Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”* (New York: Fordham University, 2000), pp. 39, 45. The argument of this essay differs with the conclusions of Janicaud’s essay insofar as Janicaud will accuse Levinas of an “extremely dichotomous framework” but will then, after drawing up a character sketch of the two different approaches – Levinas’ and Husserl’s – position himself on one side of the dichotomy he has describes. Janicaud concludes his essay with a defense of a traditional Husserlian phenomenological methodology entirely against the Levinasian/Theological Turn. There is, hence, no consideration of a phenomenological in-between in his essay.

139 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 310.

140 Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 29.

alterity there is some degree of revelation (at the expense of total invisibility). This event admits to some sight, some signification, albeit through blindness.¹⁴¹ Paul claims that God reveals Himself “not only in [His] presence but much in [His] absence”¹⁴² but reveals himself nonetheless (even if such revelation is one of non-presence or quasi-presence)¹⁴³. Therefore, to admit to such revelation need not entail a retreat to the metaphysics of presence. Further examples, from Jacob to Moses, Elijah to Abraham, Gideon to Thomas (to mention but a single theological tradition), could be listed which erode the basis of fideisms borne of the fear of desecrating the sacredness of the other, of fetishism, or of idolatry. Each of these cases involve requesting a name, a prayer for a sign from God that identifies Him as God, and each case emphasizes the necessity of recognition, of discernment. Indeed, no name can suffice nor do justice to the other in her otherness. Yet the insufficiency or, better, incompleteness of the sign does not excuse it from its necessity. This theological example simply shows that even in those examples where the other comes closest to the wholly other, where prematurely attempting to identify the name of this Messiah might be considered demonic, the request for a name nevertheless speaks to the equal need for some revelation, some symbol or narrative to distinguish this alterity (of the divine) from the alterity proper to evil, trickery, or even the banal.¹⁴⁴

141 See Jacques, Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*.

142 Philippians 2:12 (NRSV)

143 In the most strained and difficult of these encounters, the determinacy of the other might appear quite slight and hardly visible. Nevertheless, I am following Heidegger here in his analysis that hiding-away [*Sichverstecken*] is another way of being-with-others. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 161. While the role of determinacy is never less than slight, it does not have to be *more than slight* for Gadamer’s account to be correct. For a study of the minimal solidarities that can arise from extreme differences see Alphonso Lingis, *Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

144 See Luke 4:31-42 for depiction of premature identification of the (divine) other as demonic. One might also recount the story of Mohammed and the “Satanic Verses,” where it is told by some, including Ibn

In order to open oneself to the other, to be hospitable and allow someone into one's home, it is first necessary that one have a home to offer. If the self is exposed to extreme trauma to the point of the removal of any possible notion of the subject (its substitution), how can we conceive a hospitality which will at times require "ownness," which will require a subject who hears and responds to the other? But left open to complete unpreparedness, hospitality without restrictions, we leave the subject open to the ethically barbaric other who may choose to burn the home down. What home can one offer up if it is no longer hers, if it has been taken over and she has been substituted? What invitation can she offer when she is gagged and how can she open her door to the stranger if she is bound? How is it ethically *responsible* to allow the barbaric other to cut out your tongue and prevent you from responding?

If this first objection to this incommensurability suggests that it is ethically

Ishaq and al-Tabari in their biographies of Mohammed, that the prophet Mohammed uttered "These are the exalted *gharāniq*, whose intercession is hoped for" after verses 19 and 20 of Sūrah 53 An-Najm in the Qur'an ("Have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza?/ And Manat, the third one, the other?"). As the story goes, Mohammed uttered these words to appease the Meccans, who worshipped these three deities (mentioned in verses 19 and 20), believing the words were sent from God by archangel Gabriel for the purpose of converting the Meccans to Islam. However, considering this sentence, if interpreted to mean that the Meccans were free to worship other deities, Mohammed's words contradict Islam's monotheism and so, the story continues, the revelation actually came from Satan. The story goes on to claim that Gabriel directed Mohammed to take back his recitation when he discovered his error. As it relates to our discussion here, this story, regardless of its contested historical accuracy, offers a striking example of the consequences of too hastily interpreting the other, taking the other (God and his revelations) as something it is not (the Satanic "revelation from God") for one's own purposes (converting the Meccans). Note, however, that one does not discern in this example the despairing of any revelation, symbol, or connection to the other, for in Gabriel's later chastisement Mohammed recognizes the true sign of God and does not question whether the latter revelation was from Satan and the former truly from God (via Gabriel). This is to say that despite Mohammed's premature "understanding," he nevertheless recognized the necessity of some distinguishing revelation to differentiate Satan's revelation from God's revelation. For an account of this story (or alleged incident), as it appears in the biographies of Mohammed, and its subsequent influence on Islamic scholarship see G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 13, 113-132.

See also Richard Kearney's work on eschatological desire, especially Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 53-80, for an argument for this in-between, hermeneutical position of requiring some revelation while nevertheless striving to preserve the other's alterity. Without some relationality, Ricoeur asks, "who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, the master who calls for a disciple from the master from the master who requires a slave?" Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 339.

irresponsible to be excessively hospitable to the unidentified other who might come to replace or remove your very ability to be hospitable, a second objection suggests that such an extreme alterity prevents one from even recognizing the other, from ethically comporting oneself toward that other who sits at your doorstep requesting hospitality. To return to a biblical context, I want to stress the fact that, upon being called by God, if Samuel were to continue to return to Eli, deny the true origin of this call, and exclaim that “surely this cannot be a sign of God, for an experience of such a sign would be nothing more than my own imposition, an idolatrous attempt to give an account of God, and consequently a loss of faith and respect” he would entirely fail to recognize it for what it was: God’s call.¹⁴⁵ The significant point is made by Derrida in “Violence and Metaphysics” that on the grounds of this hyperbolism the absolutely other would not be able to be experienced.¹⁴⁶ That which eschews any phenomenal signification can in no sense phenomenologically manifest its otherness to the interpreting subject or address the subject in such a way that provokes her to respond to its ethical injunctions. The address of an ethical injunction, if it is to be received, must come in a language I can hear, understand, and respond to and, ergo, cannot take such a radically singular form so as to not be received.

This need not be viewed only as a great concession made by the other, a slip into the similitude (of language) of the subject, for if the first objection to the incommensurability thesis concerned the traumatization of the interpreting subject, this second objection is chiefly concerned with the inhospitality to the other. A well-known piece of poetry by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow helps clarify this point:

145 1 Samuel 3:1-21.

146 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 79-153.

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.¹⁴⁷

We discover here that the nature of the connection established between the one ship and the other, as it were, is entirely provisional. There is no guarantee that the captain of the first ship is entirely correct about the origin of the signal, correct about his own projections of meaning-intentions or of origin. The light could be a reflection and the voice could be his own echo created by the nearby loch. He might discover his mistake later at the pier or he might not. But such mistakes do not preclude the fact that the possibility of communication or response is predicated on some recognition, some break in the darkness and the silence, as well as on the anticipatory preconditions of this recognition. The alternative is a situation of ships passing at night unaware of one another, incommensurabilism as an *indifference* to the other's difference!

Alternatively, and against this ignorance of difference, the possibility of a new space must be affirmed to allow conversations that transform us "into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."¹⁴⁸ Gadamer exclaims that "one must lose oneself in order to find oneself,"¹⁴⁹ never knowing who one will become. I "return," *per se*, to my life-world irreversibly changed. This attempt to understand the other is not merely in

147 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: J.R. Osgood and company, 1874), p. 303.

148 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 304

149 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to Jacques Derrida," in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 57. It is worth noticing the reference here to Matthew 10:39 insofar as the way Gadamer describes this loss and return could be considered as one of "conversion" in front of the other rather than the move of an interpreter excavating the secret of the other, thereby removing her alterity.

order to impose my own interpretation on the other, but the other, in fact, pushes me to alterity, to become other to strictures of my former horizon, beyond what I identify with, and returns me to myself as if to another.¹⁵⁰

Conformity between the two parties need not be the aim nor the condition here, but, rather, there must simply be an orientation toward a shared subject matter, the signal in Longfellow's poem.¹⁵¹ To ignore such a possibility is to close the space opened up to allow a superior breadth of vision. To insist on our complete incompatibility is to play it safe in a monologue and neglect the risk of letting the other shape your vision, of entering into a conversation where what you say or hear might offend, put you at risk, or be challenged. Furthermore, it is to overlook the fact that, insofar as we do encounter people or texts that are unfamiliar to us (a fact which is undeniable), the "external" influence of the other is already a characteristic of our being. In Heideggerian terms, "Being toward Others [is an] irreducible relationship of Being...[one which] already is.... The possibility of understanding the stranger correctly always presupposes such a *hermeneutic* as its positive existential condition."¹⁵² That is, we are always already in a situation of interaction with others insofar as we are always sharing a world with others. We are always interpreting their voices – indeed, it is this very dynamic that Levinas (and Caputo) *interprets*.

Interpretation is the precondition of listening, it is the recognition and consequent making sense of the call. The existence and distance of the stranger are the very

150 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Destruktion and Deconstruction," in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, p. 110.

151 In incredibly strained and difficult situations, this shared subject might be slight and it might be difficult to establish the conditions upon which congenial communication and agreement would flourish.

152 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 162-163; my emphasis.

conditions of understanding. Difference is not a problem to be overcome, but, seen as the very condition of understanding, it is the possibility of contextualizing the familiar “within a larger whole and in truer proportion”¹⁵³ and breaking out of the exclusivity of the familiar. There is a positive claim that a foreign text’s alterity makes on its reader that is not possible when we suspend its claim to truth. We suspend the other’s claim to truth when we conceive of understanding as if it were a mere transmission of meaning, where one says that they have exactly understood another’s intentions. We also suspend the other’s claim to truth when we deny ourselves any possibility of understanding the other’s text. This indifferentism must be carefully bridged, some chiasm established, through the openness and listening that only interpretation enables. As Gadamer writes

Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond.

Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another.

When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person

“understands” the other. Similarly, “to hear and obey someone” [*auf*

jemanden hören] does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other

desires. We call such a person slavish [*hörig*]. Openness to the other, then,

involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against

me, even though no one else forces me to do so.¹⁵⁴

This hermeneutic openness is not slavish nor is it an imperialism of the self, but is instead the inauguration of a space of recognition and understanding (against a unidirectional “understanding” of the other).¹⁵⁵ It is interpretation as an opening up of the in-between,

153 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 304.

154 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 355.

155 The term “space” here serves well because of the expansive sense in which it implies breadth but resists being definitively located or sharply ‘positioned.’ In this manner, the term is intended to preserve

the greater conjoining of the conjunction, the fusion of horizons.

And the bidirectional (productive/projective and receptive/open) task of hermeneutics is a task that is inscribed into philosophy itself. Philosophical life can, by this token, be properly considered a liminal life, life at the threshold. John Russon describes this task of philosophical life as, in one sense, “description in that to learn can only be to learn about reality as it is revealed to us. Reality is epiphanic form. Reality educates us by showing itself, and it exceeds its preconditions. It thus cannot be deduced – only described....” Yet in another sense the task of philosophy is also “metaphysics in that it is motivated by *the effort at witnessing* to the very nature of this epiphanic form. Philosophy is a critical discipline inasmuch as its careful attention to description of epiphanic form reveals the inadequacy of various presumptions about the nature of things.”¹⁵⁶ So to despair all effort at understanding the other, to deny the effort of witnessing for fear of tarnishing the event with the impurity of the interpretation is to occupy an equally dangerous stance as that taken up by the Romantic approach. True, the motivated effort to understand another often ends in further misunderstanding and altercations, but to ignore the possibility of the spark of understanding, to underestimate the power such an event has of just as easily leading to a wildfire, to an agreement, as to its extinguishment, is to in fact unnecessarily demarcate limitations on the possibility of the other’s expression. That is, to write off understanding – the contact dialogically established between the self and the other in their encounter with one another – or agreement is to actually remove the alterity of the other insofar as it is to claim what the other is intrinsically capable of. The claim that the very nature of the other is essentially

the plasticity of the in-between in contrast to metaphors which may be too easily appropriated by either supposedly sedentary side.

156 John Russon, *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* (Albany: SUNY, 2009), p. 69; my emphasis.

and wholly beyond understanding and outside of relationality is an essentializing one, one that defines the other's alterity as inherently incapable of intersubjective communicability, of being understood. Forswearing the very possibility of the contact of interpretation (i.e., the event of the fusion of horizons) does not protect the other's alterity from the domination of the self but, counterintuitively, *preemptively* stifles the voice of the other and fails to allow her the chance to be understood in the way she demands or calls for; it is to do an injustice to the scope and possibilities of alterity. I have thus argued that this schismatic division defended by the incommensurabilist position results in a self-contradiction, the contradiction of attempting to be hospitable to the other's differences in such a way that places the other beyond the event of understanding by treating this coming event – anticipating this event – as essentially a nonevent. Caputo, insofar as he defends the incommensurabilist claim, thus becomes guilty of what he erroneously accuses Gadamer of, the neutralization of the event.

2.1.4 Resistance / Interruption

Concerning the altercations that rise from the effort to understand, there is still a problem the incommensurabilist is likely to raise: the other who refuses to be understood (and refuses to understand). Does this count as incommensurability? The fusion of horizons must account for potential altercations, not simply agreement.

Sometimes the other does not wish to be understood for fear of being that catalyst to quick redemption, aware of the likelihood of misunderstanding, and for fear of being culturally homogenized. But what of this possibility of resistance, of the other who would

rather not engage in a dialogue with the interpreter? The other might worry about what Heidegger called “leaping in” for another, where I, under the guise of genuine help, attempt to disburden, by taking on, the concerns of the other.¹⁵⁷ In this “leaping in,” I reassure the other that she can relieve herself of her fears concerning my attempt to understand her. Here, I dominate the other insofar as I do not acknowledge her concern as her own and attempt to take this concern away from her by reassuring her of my own interpretive abilities. “Fear not,” I say, “for I will completely understand your perspective, leaving you nothing to be concerned about.” Such a takeover is often accomplished when one assumes too much commonality and impatiently predicts agreement. As Emerson has put it, there is often some violence in the gift, even if the “gift” is, in our case, a listening, an attending to the other, or an attempt to understand her, for sometimes the other wishes to be self-sustained.¹⁵⁸ This is to say that some encounters produce violence and that some conversations are going to be interrupted, sometimes before they even start. There are times when the possibility of understanding is doubted and looked upon suspiciously.

Though we have suggested some reasons someone might wish to not be understood (reasons which, for example, might lead one to resist an anthropologist’s efforts to understand, for fear of being reduced to a mere subject of investigation), we must still view this refusal as a type of communication. These reasons for not wanting to be understood come from the other’s interpretations of what the interpreter will bring to her text, the intonations the interpreter will give to her voice, and, in this sense, a contact

157 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 158.

158 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Gifts,” in Alan D. Schrift, *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity* (New York, Routledge, 1997), pp. 25-27.

between the two has, in a fundamental way, already occurred.¹⁵⁹ In fact, genuine dialogue often occurs in times of pressure, at the brink of war.¹⁶⁰ But this contact is *in* the in-between space of the encounter, in the event of the fusion of horizons, where the “closer and more distant acquaintances... friends and enemies” are recognized.¹⁶¹ It is here *in* the fusion of horizons that any interruptions, any refusals of further understanding, are made discernible and “in this experience [there lies] a potentiality for being other that lies beyond every coming to agreement about what is common.”¹⁶² All solidarity presupposes this possibility of difference and interruption; all unity presupposes a multiplicity of perspectives.

In the Gadamer-Derrida encounter, a public debate that brought the two thinkers together in 1981, Gadamer makes manifest his position on the topic of difference and its articulation in the fusion of horizons:

159 The metaphor of the voice serves us well here since it is incredibly personal yet when enunciated becomes for others, to hear and to emulate. Of course, interpretation need not be restricted to spoken articulation or the written word, but anything semantically significant. As Gadamer writes, “Naturally, we cannot mean by the fundamental linguisticity of understanding that all experience of the world is carried out as speaking and in speech.” Gadamer quoted in Jean Grondin, *Sources of Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), p. 109.

160 There are many cases to which one could refer in the history of international affairs where the geographical or ideological identities of two nation-states are challenged by one another and, facing an ultimatum between war and destruction, possibly mutual destruction, the two parties agree to forge a treaty of some kind on a certain shared matter. Often it is only within these difficult and precarious negotiations that the two nations are able to vocalize their concerns and be heard by the other. A significant example of this negotiation is the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the USA and the USSR in 1972. The concurrent development of an American Anti-Ballistic Missile system technology (dubbed the *Sentinel*) and the USSR’s MIRV technology spelled out an antagonism with severe consequences if either party refused to enter into conversation and bow to some of the demands of the other. Although this event resulted in a very limited agreement confined to specific terms (and, furthermore, became strained again in the 1980s), this particular occasion did give rise to greater conciliation between the two countries for the next few years. Likewise, in recent years the infidelity to the framework established in this dialogue has been referenced as an obstacle to reconciliation. See Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), pp. 267, 270. This is a specific example and is not meant to suggest that dialogue should always or even usually take the form of compacts or treaties. It is, however, to suggest that the productive encounter with another is not restricted to the mutual sentiments of camaraderie one finds in peaceful situations.

161 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 191.

162 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 26.

I would not want to say that the solidarities that bind human beings together and make them partners in a dialogue always are sufficient to enable them to achieve understanding and total mutual agreement. Just between two people this would require a never-ending dialogue... we speak past each other and are even at cross-purposes with ourselves.¹⁶³

Gadamer's position on the resistance to communication is unequivocal: Any possible rejection of an attempt to communicate would still imply that the one resisting communication must speak and write in order to be understood – at least inasmuch as both parties need to understand the boundary beyond which violence will erupt.¹⁶⁴ The multiplicity of perspectives and the potentiality of being other (at cross-purposes with ourselves) will undoubtedly lead to resistance. But resistance to communication is nevertheless a resistance *in* communication and “the hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, “to cancel means to [at least to some extent] take up and use.”¹⁶⁶ After all, surely the other wishes to be understood in their declaration “do not try to understand me, you cannot.” And so, in the incommensurabilists' defense of this differential *beyond* the encounter of the fusion of horizons, their explicit rejection of communication actually relies on the implicit recognition of the other and the possibility of dialogue, even if only continually interrupted dialogue. That is to say, within the implicit *recognition* necessary to defend the position of the wholly other are the tools to

163 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reply to Jacques Derrida,” in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 57.

164 Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reply to Jacques Derrida,” in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 57.

165 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 305.

166 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 240.

enact its very undoing.

Thus, we can say that the condition of the fusion of horizons must be regarded as constitutive insofar as there is undeniably some chiasmatic encounter at the site of each interpersonal interaction, even in those situations where conversation is difficult or prohibited. In those interruptive circumstances where I am prohibited to understand another, even here, if I have approached the encounter with the openness Gadamer speaks of, my previous standpoint, the limits of my horizon, are nevertheless jeopardized. I cannot return to my initial perspective without an understanding of its contingency, and have thereby returned with an expanded but discomforted horizon. The same thing stands for the other prohibiting such further interpretation for, in tandem, the contingency of the other's position is acknowledged in the perception of a threat that endangers the exclusivity of her alterity, such as it presents itself through the interpreter's attempt to understand. The other anticipates what the interpretation of the interpreter might mean for her exclusive hold on her horizon and through this anticipation she recognizes that there is something other to her and thus becomes an interpreter. And "as [her] horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded."¹⁶⁷ So, even in the decision to not recognize the other, resistance takes the form of a recognition, a point of contact, a supersession of exclusivity.

In this manner, can we not conclude that Levinas and likewise Caputo, in offering an interpretation of the (non-)relationality of the other (i.e., by calling her "wholly other," "inaccessible," etc.), are thereby reflecting on the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted as interpreting selves? Is it not here in the sharing of a connection with the matter-at-hand that they, though partially and antagonistically, exchange ideas with

¹⁶⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 306.

another and betray the signs of a deeper encounter? Certainly. It is through the accomplishment-without-finality, the establishment-without-sedentariness, of such an encounter that the subject matter of the conversation is recognized as a coming-into-language. “Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language...worked out in the conversation.”¹⁶⁸ We must be sure to recognize that in the inauguration of such a new common language, in the act of translation (i.e., the forging of a continuity of traditions between two parties or two cultures), there exists that which eludes translatability, a certain slippage between the horizons, an excess that cannot be properly shared and runs over on both sides.¹⁶⁹ Often such an encounter and the arbitration of such a language are neither comfortable nor met with equally zealous attempts at conciliation on either side. And it is in recognizing this presence of conflict and slippage that we can understand the import and relevance of Malabou’s work on plasticity to our project: Any project of understanding and communication based on Gadamer’s fusion of horizons as we have set it out must result in reconceptualizing such terms apart from the liberal ideal of a conflict-free world of easy exchange (be it in matters of money or meaning).

Reflecting on the Gadamer-Derrida exchange, many have interpreted Derrida’s position as an attempt to entirely resist communication, the attempt to defend total incommensurabilism. Indeed, in *More Radical Hermeneutics*, specifically in the chapter “How to Prepare for the Coming of the Other: Gadamer and Derrida,” Caputo uses Derrida to emphasize interruption against all preparation and communication. On this

¹⁶⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 371.

¹⁶⁹ The topic of translation is examined in further detail in Chapter Three (3.3).

topic Caputo understands Derrida as “very much under Levinas’s influence,”¹⁷⁰ and interprets his position similarly to how I have described the Levinasian project. In so doing, Caputo positions Derrida against Gadamer. It has been our contention here, however, that the fusion of horizons does not represent mediation in a Romantic sense where interpretation has a deeper commitment to the restitution and conservation of the identity of the interpreter, but rather as a risk-laden in-between that must account for competing sides. In this way a truly Gadamerian hermeneutics would be exemplified by the Gadamer-Derrida debate taken in its entirety; that is, a hermeneutics based on the idea of the fusion of horizons would account for the *relation* where the other attempts to disrupt communication (exemplified by Derrida’s paper), as well as the relation where the self and the other charitably engage in communication (exemplified by Gadamer’s paper). Against the hardline incommensurabilist interpretation of his work, Derrida admits in a conversation with Pierre-Jean Labarrière on the topic of ethical relationality that

There is a mediation which does not bar the passage to the other, or to the ‘wholly other’ [*tout autre*], on the contrary. *The rapport to the wholly other as such is a rapport*. The relation to the wholly other is a relation... To enter into a relation with the other, interruption must be possible: the relation [*rapport*] must be a relation of interruption. And interruption here does not interrupt the relation to the other, it opens the relation to the other.¹⁷¹

This is as close a description of the fusion of horizons (as we have defended it) as we are likely to get; the idea of interruption here is clearly that moment where the other

170 John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 42. See also p. 58 where Caputo describes Derrida’s project as fundamentally Levinasian.

171 Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986), p. 82.

displaces the former conditions of the interpreter's interpretations, the displacement of the limits of her horizontal projection, and the move to alter this self through an interpretive relation. And "what we think of as a relation to the other is only a relation to the other *as other*," a relation that is a departure from that understanding where "the other is tacitly treated as an alter ego."¹⁷² Given this, David Wood remarks that "grasping the otherness of the other is a condition for my relating to him or her as other, and the reactivation of that grasp must always be possible [because] the otherness of the other is not a mysterious inaccessible property but a necessary relational truth of a quite different order."¹⁷³ It would be a mistake, on these grounds, to identify Derrida with the defense of a position beyond relation and beyond the event of understanding if by understanding we mean precisely this momentary but shared connection.

What I have attempted to argue in this section is that, regarding the interpretation of the event of the other, Gadamer, with his rejection of the lofty infinitude of the Romantic enterprise, is much closer to Caputo and his company of philosophical peers than initially supposed. But I have also argued that Gadamer's fusion of horizons does indeed resist the untenable extremity of the incommensurabilist position without retreating back into commensurabilism and, instead, introduces the in-between in its place which obviates the very conditions of the incommensurabilism-commensurabilism dichotomy, equally displacing the primacy of the subject and the primacy of the other.

2.2 The Accusation of The Removal of Play

172 David Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 127.

173 David Wood, *Philosophy at the Limit*, p. 127.

Now that we have discussed how the fusion of horizons functions as the event of contact between the self and the other, the move beyond any one side (i.e., a higher universality) toward a sharing of meaning, we can now move further and inquire into the nature of the fusion of horizons as an accomplishment(-without-finality). What form does this understanding, this sharing of meaning, take? If the fusion of horizons does not in fact anticipate the other in such a way as to remove the event of her coming and thereby remove the alterity of the other, is Caputo nevertheless right in assimilating Gadamer's fusion of horizons to the position of the Romantics with regard to the truth or meaning it is said to have understood? This is to ask of Gadamer's hermeneutics if, in its ascription of a meaning or truth to the other's text, it falls back into an epistemological theory of the static, objectifiable meaning, a truth safe from all movement and playfulness. Gadamer's stance on this point is less equivocal and, thus, it will take less effort to demonstrate why these questions are fundamentally specious since they originate from a patent misreading (although one not without a certain chutzpah) rather than naturally arising from Gadamer's work.

Let us begin by articulating what motivates the task of attempting to understand something, the problem of hermeneutics. At the heart of the task of understanding is an inquiry into something. That is, the task of understanding must take as its point of departure the existence of some matter [*Sache*] whose very being (truth, meaning) is contested or misunderstood to such a degree that agreement on this matter is not unproblematical.¹⁷⁴ According to Gadamer, "the effort to understand is needed wherever there is no immediate understanding – i.e., whenever the possibility of misunderstanding

174 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 181, for a development of the relationship between the event of understanding and the *Sache* understood.

has to be reckoned with.”¹⁷⁵ In this way the task of understanding always assumes some relationality, some interaction involving some I and some Thou. Between two parties attempting to understand one another there cannot exist the possibility of understanding and reaching any type of agreement independent of this *Sache*, this issue at hand.¹⁷⁶ If there was no subject matter contested, there would not be any indication of misunderstanding or signs of unintelligibility and therefore there would be no explicit need or desire to undertake the task of inquiring into this (non-)issue nor would there be the recognition that such an undertaking had even occurred. This we defined as the error of putting the being of the other beyond recognition. Thus, understanding is the task of reaching some type of temporary agreement [*Einverständnis*] concerning the interpreted subject matter being contested. The minimum condition here is that there is some agreement that the matter contested is in fact the matter contested. In one sense, the meaning of the other is a contested matter given that the imperative to understand arises from the fact that the matter is one that resists and interrupts attempts at codification and closure (there is nothing that would instigate the interpretation of something that was already semantically codified and closed). But also, if we are to take the receptivity of the call of the other to be an important ethical endeavour, it is nevertheless the case that such a matter must provoke the understanding of the call and establish the relationality between the I and the Thou. We argued that the fusion of horizons, the inauguration of understanding, must accept this tension and is successful as the connection that lies at the heart of altercation only on the grounds that it discloses the *Sache* in such a way that

175 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 179.

176 This relation to another includes that conversation one has with oneself in thought, a conversation Plato had already called “the inner dialogue of the soul with itself.” See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 66.

interrupts both final closure by the interpreter and total separation from the interpreter. But the question then arises, *where and when* is the meaning (truth, *Sache*) of the other, contested and agreed upon, situated in relation to the inauguration of its understanding? (Is it something that exists outside of but is only accessible via the inauguration of understanding? Is it something that is made entirely present or is it something that will eventually make itself entirely present to us?)

Caputo implicitly raises this question when he folds Gadamer's impetus to interpret back into the effort to close off, back into a closeted "theology of lasting essences."¹⁷⁷ That is, Caputo's contention holds that Gadamer's theory of meaning, while not demanding *immediate* closure, is one that unfolds itself toward completion throughout time and conversation and, despite Gadamer's own contestation to the idea of finality, assumes a teleology of total presence. Caputo wrongly insists that with Gadamer we are *aiming at* total closure, an essential truth, even if its full attainment is not possible. "Gadamer is always more interested in the gift of the presence – the "present" which tradition makes to us – than in the giving itself, the *es gibt*," more interested in "deep essence, essential, albeit with historical embodiment."¹⁷⁸ If this accusation carries any weight whatsoever, then Gadamer's concern is one with the proximity of the (present) product of a certain interpretation to some single, essential truth of the matter, rather than with the event of (the production of) understanding itself. And in treating each interpretation as simply a means of getting as close as possible to the disclosure of such an essential truth, Gadamer would be resisting "Heidegger's attempt to think *Wesen*

177 John D. Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique," in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 259.

178 John D. Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique," in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 262.

verbally, as the sheer coming into presence [*An-wesen*] and passing away [*Ab-wesen*],”¹⁷⁹ choosing simply to privilege the *An-wesen*. Caputo claims that though Gadamer admits that “there is always a plurality of articulations,” they are always articulations “of the same truth...the selfsame is capable of an indefinite number of historical expressions...its deep unity is always safe. Gadamer’s whole argument turns on an implicit acceptance of the metaphysical distinction between a more or less stable and objective *meaning* and its ceaselessly changing *expression*.”¹⁸⁰ That interpretations come to expression in a language that changes would therefore be of secondary significance to the real concern with the underlying truth of the stable signified untarnished by its signifying sign. According to this argument, Gadamer would be more interested in some self-contained linguistic or cognitive entity than with the open-ended dynamism of the process itself.

2.2.1 The Space of Meaning

So *where* is the meaning understood in the fusion of horizons? We must begin by showing that for Gadamer the truth or meaning that is disclosed through understanding is such that it is nothing except what is thematized through the relation of the self and the other. Insofar as Gadamer describes this process as a coming-into-language he describes the truth as the process of inauguration (‘coming-into’) itself. It follows that the truth that discloses itself through understanding does not speak to something prior or independent of this fusion of horizons, to something just waiting to be discovered. Gadamer is thus

179 John D. Caputo, “Gadamer’s Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique,” in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 262; my emphasis.

180 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 111.

not proposing that there is a “variety of finite expressions [for some] infinite content,”¹⁸¹ or that while our expressions remain contingent and are constantly changing, what they refer to remains the same. Rather, given that the horizon of the interpreter plays a constitutive part with the horizon of the other in the fusion of horizons, this truth is inaugurated *through* this interaction, disclosing a higher universality borne of but extending beyond the limit of either horizon. Gadamer is not offering us a philosophy of excavating an interpreter-independent meaning while admitting the provisional nature of each interpretation (as would be the aim of some modest objectivist approach to meaning that could be rightly accused of ultimately rejecting a robust analytic of finitude). Gadamer instead insists that “to interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak to us.”¹⁸² It is here that Gadamer confronts Caputo’s challenge that a Gadamerian hermeneutics of meaning lacks playfulness. According to Gadamer the very appearance of meaning is dependent upon (that is, not independent of) the interpreter playing with her own preconceptions and allowing the other to play with them as well. But the category of play, as Gadamer uses it here, specifies the mode of being of meaning and as such avoids subjectivist definitions, avoids being reduced to a representing activity of any one player. “The players are not the subject of play; instead play merely reaches presentation [*Darstellung*] through the players.”¹⁸³ Through these players, the truth of a text arises out of the “to-and-fro movement of play: namely the playful character of the contest.”¹⁸⁴

181 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 112.

182 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 398.

183 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 103.

184 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 105. Gadamer goes on to describe this to-and-fro/contest: “There always has to be, not necessarily literally another player, but something else with which the player plays and which automatically responds to his move with a countermove.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 105

Meaning comes into being through this dialogical playfulness.

Gadamer articulates this with the example of the work of art. “Its actual being,” he writes, “cannot be detached from its presentation.”¹⁸⁵ The artwork (or more broadly, the text) “does not ‘mean’ something or function as a sign that refers to a meaning; rather it presents itself in its own being...by virtue of its own existence it is an event, a thrust that overthrows everything previously considered to be conventional, a thrust in which a world never there before opens itself up.”¹⁸⁶ That is, there are not noetic finite expressions, on the one hand, that correspond to some noematic stable infinite truths, on the other. The presentation of the work of art is precisely the way in which it is received by its viewer, the inaugural event of itself through interpretation and dialogue. And the being or truth of the work of art is nothing independent of this inauguration of itself. This inauguration of its being is what we can call the play of the in-between, the movement between the interpreting self and the other (in this case, the work of art) that enables the sharability of meaning. We are not concerned with some game outside of this play, some static truth outside of its interpretive inauguration. This is precisely the play between the *An-wesen* and the *Ab-wesen* (we might say between the common identity of agreement and interruptive alterities) in Heidegger. The truth or “being of the work of art is play and...must be perceived by the spectator in order to be actualized [*vollendet*], so also it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning.”¹⁸⁷ Gadamer is not concerned with an essentialized, “dead” meaning – attainable or not – that could exist outside of (or prior to, beneath, behind, etc.) the playful process of understanding. He is concerned with the

185 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 120.

186 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 222-223.

187 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 156.

meaning that is living, that which resists objectification, and that which can only be referred to as playful. In this dynamic sense, meaning, as the play between interpreter and other, is without consistency, without a permanent position; it is a verb of disposition and consequently also a verb of dispossession (never at rest in a particular place long enough to be the exclusive possession of the present, of the interpreting self, etc.). The truth understood is, as Jean-Luc Nancy has described it, “put into play between us, and should have no other sense than the dis-position of this between.”¹⁸⁸ This meaning is nothing more than the movement of the fusion of horizons and points to nothing outside of the interaction (or ‘interactualization,’ co-constitution, *zwischen-Vollendung*) of the text and its interpreter.

With meaning created and thus necessarily attached to the engagement between the text and the interpreter in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, is it not Caputo rather than Gadamer who is “spinning out the same yarn while no one is around to tell the other side of the story?”¹⁸⁹ Is Gadamer not a representative of meaning as inaugurated by the playful in-between and Caputo the false “friend of the flux,”¹⁹⁰ insofar as it is Caputo who limits playfulness by overemphasizing the *Ab-wesen*, the hiddenness or absence of truth? Is it not Caputo who is substituting the hermeneutical in-between for the either/or of the “metaphysicians who believe that there are binary oppositions, who think that there are clear and decidable differences between things and cannot tolerate the ambiguity of the flux?”¹⁹¹

We have argued that Gadamer is not concerned with meaning outside of that

188 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 27.

189 John D. Caputo, “Gadamer’s Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique” in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, p. 263.

190 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 6.

191 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 263.

created by the players in the encounter, nor with any particular “subjective attitude of the players, but rather [with the fact that] the players are caught up in the shaped activity of the game itself.”¹⁹² This game, this encounter [*Gebilde*] with another is creative [*Bild*] and educating [*Bildung*]; it does not simply conceal itself but shows itself as well. It is a game that “presents itself” [*Darstellung*], that performs itself “through the players,”¹⁹³ “something with a shape or structure which is particularly brought out in presentation.”¹⁹⁴ So not only does Caputo incorrectly depict Gadamer’s approach to this event as “the most liberal form of traditionalism possible, [as introducing] as much change as possible into a philosophy of unchanging truth, as much movement as possible into immobile verity,”¹⁹⁵ but furthermore, he pays far too high a price whilst rejecting it by denouncing the disclosive aspect of truth so necessary to playfulness.

2.2.2 The Time of Meaning

And *when*, on Gadamer’s account, have we truly understood the meaning of the other? Is the meaning of the other something that makes itself entirely present to us, something we can hope will eventually make itself entirely present to us, or something we can at least treat as entirely present for us? For Gadamer, it is always possible that I have another, differently thematized relation with another (including the ‘same’ other) than the one presently thematized. So, not only is it the case that there is no underlying stable meaning independent of its coming-to-expression through the dialogical

192 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xiv.

193 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 103.

194 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xiv.

195 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 111.

connection between the interpreter and the text (2.1) but, furthermore, the meaning that comes to expression in the event of understanding is never something that cannot be otherwise, that cannot change its form. The truth of whatever text we interpret thus never presents itself in all its possibilities. And for this reason it cannot be successfully neutralized to *operate* as some unchanging/unchangeable truth – as something that acts *as if* permanently present. That is, the higher universality of the fusion of horizons resists fetishism, which would extract it from its inauguration and treat it independently of this process. The relation between myself and even a single other (or the dialogue with my own self) is a ceaseless task beyond completion and total thematization. Because of this, the attempt to take the truth-process of understanding, the meaning disclosed in a successful conversation between a particular self and a particular other at a particular time, and overextend its significance beyond its historical particularities is nothing less than the attempt to circumvent the necessity of further interpretive encounters; it is to declare oneself in possession of a single, essentialized (i.e., forever present) meaning, bracketed off from other differing accounts, other altering, interruptive and interpretive voices. Of course, this meaning might have significance beyond the moment of the dialogue itself. Coming to shape the interpreter's horizon, the truth of this particular interaction might very well influence future interactions. But this will not be the same meaning, the same truth, unadulterated by the movement of history, re-presentable in its same form – this particular presentation will be eclipsed.

There is a temporal tension between the meaning that has been understood by the self and the possibility of understanding otherwise with future others, through future encounters, and this characterizes the truth disclosed to the interpreter through

understanding as one that must remain provisional (never entirely present). The nature of this truth is that it moves to-and-fro and always in between the past ways in which it has been given and the future senses in which it might be given – a juggled tension between the way the meaning of the other has been received by the self and the projections of (or from) the self toward future receptions – between the closure of agreement of past understandings and the necessary risk of being open to the coming event of the other.

But when the truth of this event is understood as independent of its temporal experience [*Erfahrung*], when it is fetishized and forced to be taken as nothing but present (without other pasts and other futures, both of which prevent its full disclosure), it is “falsified by being turned into a possession,” which has the effect of “neutralizing its special claim.”¹⁹⁶ Drawing again on the example of art, Gadamer claims that “*all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event.* This is what must be emphasized against aesthetic consciousness and its neutralization of the question of truth.”¹⁹⁷ Notice that Gadamer does not claim that this is an as-of-yet-unfinished event, an event that we cannot *yet* neutralize. He gives us no reason to hope or wait for the day where the question of truth will be removed (through completely subjective means or through perfect revelation). And so there is no reason to consider Gadamer slipping into a covert teleology or a messianism. Rather, the opposite, for

If we examine how the word “play” is used and concentrate on its so-called metaphorical senses, we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of

196 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 85.

197 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 85.

forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words. In each case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. Correlatively, the word “Spiel” originally meant “dance” and is still found in many word forms (e.g., in *Spielmann*, *jongleur*). The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.¹⁹⁸

Caputo would have us regard Gadamer as concerned with interpretation as the gradual unfolding of an objective but admittedly never attainable truth, a project that is at base teleological in the traditional, metaphysical sense, in pursuit of totally disclosing some atemporal truth, at which point my “consciousness has unlimited sovereignty over everything.”¹⁹⁹ And surely, in this way, Caputo fails to read Gadamer charitably or even carefully. For what teleology (movement toward a final truth) or messianism (awaiting the full disclosure of the truth) would be actually satisfied with this dancing, perichoretic interplay without end?²⁰⁰ Precisely none. What Gadamer describes in this constant renewal through repetition, against teleology, is the movement through history that takes up each new encounter as a new *entre-deux* with its own unique unending histories of effects [*Wirkungsgeschichte*], each of which splinter off into innumerable directions, rather than unilinearly toward a single trajectory. And furthermore, in this playful movement through the history of effects and interactions the interpreter plays an integral role (that of the player) and thus, against messianism, does not idly sit by waiting to have

198 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 104.

199 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 77.

200 I am considering these terms (‘teleology’ and ‘messianism’) chiefly in their metaphysical senses, in the manner in which they are used (implicitly and explicitly) by Caputo to implicate Gadamer in some hidden essentialism and a fidelity to a metaphysics of presence over against fully embracing ‘playfulness.’ This is arguably not the only manner in which one might effectively (phenomenologically and/or postmetaphysically?) conceive of these terms.

revealed to her the meanings of interactions she has had no part in creating.

This playful movement of understanding “cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which one is inquiring. Such an “object in itself” clearly does not exist at all...it is senseless to speak of a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an “object in itself” toward which its research is directed.”²⁰¹

Gadamer is not denying that understanding can serve certain purposes and be used towards specific ends but, rather, he is challenging the teleological project defined in the metaphysical sense, aimed at arriving at a *telos* beyond mediation, beyond history, unsusceptible to change. The horizon of my experience has been influenced by previous engagements, previous external forces that have shaped its current shape, as have all previous attempts to interpret the other (and the other’s own attempts to attempt other others) effected the other’s horizon. Each interpreter has such hermeneutical experiences with others in inexhaustibly repeated but always different and renewed ways, becoming in some sense a new interpreter each time – each new connection being the negation of the limit of the previous experience, but not of limitation itself.²⁰² Thus, understanding cannot be properly conceived as the attempt (even the futile attempt) to map the lineage (i.e., mark the borders) of each external horizon-defining force. Each inscription on such a map would write over former and future ways in which this lineage could be (re-)written. It is for this reason absurd to talk, even hypothetically, about interpretation as the attempt to unfold some ultimate truth. That is, the truth or the meaning that asserts itself in the event of the fusion of horizons, as we have described it, differs significantly from what Gadamer calls “perfect knowledge.” To distinguish this truth from “perfect

201 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 285.

202 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 347.

knowledge” we can highlight three differences between the two, as noted by Charles Taylor, which will enable us to briefly summarize the grounds upon which we have defended Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics against Caputo’s misconstruals.

First, the attempt to know an object is an operation that is unilateral, whereas the coming to an understanding with another is bilateral. If I am trying to know the rock, as Taylor’s example has it, I am not interpreting and thus do not inaugurate its meaning. The truth of the rock is of a completely different order than the one opened up in the process of understanding. I am not personally involved in the truth that can be known in this manner nor am I interested in my relation to its truth-disclosure. The key difference here is that in the pursuit of knowledge “I don’t have to deal with [the object’s] view of me or of my knowing activity,” for I am only interested in some “finally adequate explanatory language, which can make sense of the object and will exclude all future surprises.”²⁰³

Second, understandings are horizon-dependent. The understandings we share with certain interlocutors are never granted the permanence that could entirely account for the all further horizon-dependent understandings (originating from either my side or the other’s and with the same or different interlocutors) that will come to shape the significance of these past understandings. That is to say that every momentary disclosure of the meaning of a text is necessarily a concealment of the other ways in which the text has been or could be interpreted. It follows that we must resist the vain task of establishing some neutral knowledge, independent of the knower and the process under which it becomes known; this is to resist the temptation to claim that if the epistemic truth of something, say the structure of every constellation in the solar system, is not

203 Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes” in *Gadamer’s Century*, p. 280.

immediately known, that it can at least be said to be eventually or theoretically, perfectly and quantitatively, knowable. As Nietzsche has written, “our knowing limits itself to establishing quantities,” limiting its objects to an extra-experiential domain. But, in understanding, the interpreter’s involvement displaces the exclusivity of such quantitateness to the extent that she understands such quantities in relation to the conditions of her existence and they thus undergo a process of valuation. For this reason, we “cannot help feeling these differences in quantity as qualities. Quality is a perspective truth for *us*; not an “in-itself.”²⁰⁴

Third, the goal of knowing, as it were, is “to attain full intellectual control over the object, such that it can no longer “talk back” and surprise me.”²⁰⁵ Although I might be surprised by the findings of my research and be led to change and substitute some of my preconceptions about the material I am trying to know, the goal of attaining full intellectual control goes unchallenged. This differs from the task of hermeneutics where, through the connection established in dialogue with another, I am also questioned and there is a “giving and a taking, talking at cross-purposes and seeing each other’s point.”²⁰⁶ In contrast to epistemic endeavours, seeing the other’s point often means more than a reorientation of the same goal, and often comes to mean “that I give some ground in my objectives”²⁰⁷ and revise my goals. The player is not actually playing if he attempts to control the game from the sidelines but only plays when he lets the game direct him. “Thus, understanding is not playing, in the sense that the person understanding playfully

204 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 304, §563.

205 Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes” in *Gadamer’s Century*, p. 281.

206 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 361.

207 Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes” in *Gadamer’s Century*, p. 281.

holds himself back and refuses to take a stand with respect to the claim made on him,” Gadamer writes. “The freedom of self-possession necessary for one to withhold oneself in this way is not given here, and this, in fact is what applying the concept of play to understanding implies. Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself.”²⁰⁸

Given these distinctions we can conclude that as a result of Caputo misreading Gadamer’s concern with the truth asserted in the fusion of horizons as one that fundamentally differs with Heidegger’s (i.e., one that privileges *An-wesen* instead of accounting for the playful movement between *Ab-wesen* and *An-wesen*), he mistakes the nature of Gadamer’s endeavour, taking it as a “philosophy of eternal truth pushed to its historical limits.”²⁰⁹ And this oversight accompanied with the failure to take Gadamer’s conception of play seriously leads to Caputo’s final assessment of Gadamer’s project as an epistemological one, the truth of the matter being substituted for an ideal knowledge of the matter-at-hand. Rather, we have demonstrated that Gadamer would agree with Heidegger in that “the assimilation of understanding and interpretation to a definite ideal of knowledge is not the issue here.”²¹⁰

Our defense of a Gadamerian in-between against the competing temptations of the total commensurabilism of homogeneity and the total incommensurabilism of heterogeneity provides us with the necessary framework to extend our considerations to a concrete example of interpretive experience, the manner in which the fusions of horizons plays itself out in intercultural relations. It is with this in mind that we turn to the topic of understanding alien cultures and the inauguration of postcolonial space.

208 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 484.

209 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 111.

210 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 194.

Chapter 3

Between Commensurabilism and Incommensurabilism: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics and Postcolonial Space

The project put forward is one of moving from the commensurability of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, examined in Chapter One, and the incommensurability of Caputo and Levinas, discussed in Chapter Two, toward the prospect of Gadamer's fusion of horizons inaugurating a postcolonial space, in this final chapter. This particular topic of the role of interpretation in intercultural political relations presents itself for a couple of reasons:

First, Gadamer only ever hints at but never fully develops the implications of his philosophical hermeneutics for intercultural interpretation. Gadamer often talks of foreign languages and texts and translation, but he rarely extends this consideration to intercultural politics or relates hermeneutical philosophy to any colonial/anti-colonial/postcolonial schema.²¹¹ It will thus be well to outline the ways in which our

211 For example, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 190. Elsewhere Gadamer will acknowledge the influence of Theodor Lessing on his own interest in applying hermeneutics to the topic of interpreting other cultures. In an interview Gadamer talks about how Lessing got him to acknowledge how many interpretation scholars were employing one-sided hermeneutical strategies to interpret non-European cultures: "The deciding factor for me was a book about Asia by Theodor Lessing that described precisely how all of this optimism about progress and efficiency, so to speak, was a completely one-sided orientation and relationship to the world and one that, in contrast to Confucianism and the fatalism of the other great Asiatic countries, represented a peculiar global superiority – the same global superiority, that is, that we now attribute to America when we say that America dominates the world." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy*, p. 98.

previous discussion of Gadamer's work can provide us with the resources to broach the topic of postcoloniality and, further, propose a Gadamerian account of intercultural interpretation.

Second, although it is likely that Gadamer's work has so rarely been taken up in contemporary intercultural political discussions because Gadamer himself did not spend a great deal of time, for one reason or another, on the specificities of cross-cultural interpretation, it could also be convincingly contended that the persistent misreadings of Gadamer's philosophy, as addressed in the previous chapter, especially concerning the fusion of horizons, have until now prevented this conversation from occurring. Not only were the implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics for cross-cultural and postcolonial politics relatively unexplored by Gadamer himself, but contemporary scholars of hermeneutics and postcolonial theorists alike have underestimated the significance of this relation.²¹² With this in mind I will draw upon the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha, whose work, I shall argue, parallels Gadamer's in a striking manner. And although Bhabha often discusses intercultural solidarity as an achievement that requires "inciting cultural translations,"²¹³ rarely does he himself discuss the hermeneutical significance of such an undertaking since he overlooks the ways in which Gadamer's work could be beneficial for this very process.

It is for these reasons that an inquiry into the connections between hermeneutics, intercultural relations, and postcoloniality is so pressing. Exploring these connections is a

212 It is interesting to note that such has not been the case everywhere and that, in fact, as Jay Lampert demonstrates in "Gadamer and Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics" in *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXVIII, No. 4, Summer, 1997, there has been considerable interest in the relation between philosophical hermeneutics and cross-cultural dialogue amongst some African philosophers, most notably Tsenay Serequeberhan and Theophilus Okere.

213 Homi K. Bhabha, "Conclusion" in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 354.

project of politicizing the space of the textual relationship as laid out in the previous chapters. And by approaching the political topic of postcoloniality from a particular hermeneutical standpoint, this also becomes the project of textualizing the political sphere. The task set before us, then, is one of drawing out the political significance of interpretation as well as the interpretive significance of political praxis.

3.1 Colonialism

In its most basic sense, colonization (from the late Latin term *colere*) refers to the cultivation and/or inhabitation of some territory via the setting up of settlement colonies. However, in this examination of cross-cultural interpretation we are specifically concerned with the process of colonization as it concerns interpretation and intersubjective relations with others and, for this reason, we will here limit our discussion to the form of colonization wherein these intersubjective relations occur, that is, the colonization of territories already inhabited by other peoples. In this particular sense, colonialism refers to the politico-military policy of one people or nation occupying the territory ruled by an existing people or nation for the purposes of economic exploitation or diplomatic influence. This policy operates by way of setting up colonies, often by force or coercion, whereby one people or nation extends its sovereignty over a new territory, which consequently becomes subjected to the control of the colonizing people or country.

For the most part, colonies have historically been set up for the purposes of attaining control over a foreign land and its resources and not out of some deeper desire

to better understand another culture. The accuracy and consistency of the colonizer's interpretation of the other's culture is often – at least initially – of negligible importance to the colonizer inasmuch as the chief priority remains the exploitation of the other's resources and not a comprehensive understanding of the other's everyday customs. This is simply to say that cross-cultural understanding is not the explicit aim of most colonization efforts. Yet, as the colonizing subject/nation (what, at the time of the British Empire before decolonization, was called by the British the “metropole,” the main, parent-state distinguished from its colonized subjects at its periphery) attempts to further establish its power via cultural imperialism, the social structure of the newly colonized people plays a greater role for the colonizer in her colonization efforts. And the management of this newly colonized people, including the need to communicate the demands of the colonized to the colonized and to quell native resistance efforts, necessitates some account of the differences that exist between the colonized and the colonizer's culture and social structures (even if only for the purpose of annihilating these differences by assimilating the other).²¹⁴ This is especially true where some account of the other's political and economic structures would benefit the colonizer's continued expansionist goals with greater efficiency. It thus becomes necessary, in these instances, for the colonizer to provide an interpretation of the other's cultural practices (i.e., it is advantageous for the colonizer to understand who or what she is dealing with and, ultimately, up against), especially in order to ground formal policies of cultural imperialism aimed at assisting future development and exploitative ventures.²¹⁵ For example, as Edward Said writes, Sir William Jones, upon arriving at his post with the

214 We will address the role of mimicry in colonizer-colonized relations later in this chapter.

215 For a detailed examination of these imperialist policies and the strategies of their application see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 113-97.

East India Company in 1783, immediately noticed how advantageous it would be for British company rule in India to know all there was to know about Indian cultures and languages, especially as it concerned establishing which laws would and would not be effective in the ruling of the Indian people.²¹⁶

The imperialistic social policies that often accompany such colonial endeavours are typically chauvinistic and, likewise, their interpretive accounts of the other's customs (to which such policies are intended to respond) are similarly bigoted; the exclusive standard against which the other is judged is the metropole and its cultural practices. And insofar as the colonizer takes her own practices and concerns as the ultimate standard, she implicitly (if not explicitly) insists that nothing escapes the purview of her gaze, that nothing is unaccountable in the terms of her discourse, an assumption that mirrors that trait we identified in our analysis of Romantic hermeneutics: the completeness (ultimate sovereignty) of the interpreter's interpretation. Furthermore, insofar as the colonizer's account is taken to be complete in this manner, it might be said that her interpretation alleges to having understood the hidden essence of the other (as fundamentally savage, childlike, etc., in comparison to the colonizer), a claim that resembles the essentialism of Romanticism, as previously assessed. Insofar as this interpretation of the other only arises as a result of furthering the colonialist agenda (e.g. increasing the efficiency of necessary communication with natives, quelling resistance by assimilating the natives, etc.), this account of the other is intended to serve as an unchanging definition of the other and her mannerisms to be used by the colonizer for personal gain. In our earlier analysis of Romantic interpretations we referred to this goal as interpretive objectivism.

216 In this manner, Jones believed it desirable to compile "a complete digest' of laws, figures, customs, and works," from which the British could profit. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 77-78.

Acknowledging these characteristics of a typical colonial description of the colonized, we can note the resemblances between the colonizer's account of the other and Romantic interpretations of texts. It is to this colonial interpretation of the colonized that we will continue to refer throughout this chapter.

One will notice that the colonizer, by taking the metropole as the standard against which she bases her interpretation of the colonized and by taking herself as a representative of the metropole, appraises her own account of the other as totalizing and outside of the mediational influence of the other. That is, insofar as the colonizer takes her account of what the other's practices represent to be the final word on the matter, her interpretation is taken to carry all definitional power. The force of her categorization of the other is, thus, assumed to be purely one-directional, directed *at* (rather than ever from) the other. But when we refer to an object of interpretation, cross-cultural or otherwise, our employment of the terminology of limits and distinctions, the phraseology of the self and the other, implicitly assumes the notion of a parallax view (*parallaxis*, from *παράλλαξις*) insofar as we acknowledge this distinction as one made by either side of the distinction in question. I recognize the two sides, the self's and the other's, from my own position, but I can also recognize that the other recognizes these two sides (A and B) from her own perspective and that the terms are, in her case, reversed. If we like, we can describe this relation thus: A for A, A for B, B for A, and B for B. Slavoj Žižek describes this notion:

The standard definition of parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. But

the philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply “subjective,” due to the fact that the same object which exists “out there” is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently “mediated,” so that an “epistemological” shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an “ontological” shift in the object itself. Or – to put it in Lacanese – the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its “blind spot,” that which is “in the object more than the object itself,” the point from which the object itself returns the gaze.

“Sure, the picture is in my eye, but I, I am also in the picture.”²¹⁷

The interpreter’s phenomenological horizon shifts through her encounter with the other (the interpreter becomes an other to herself through the force of the other) and ceases to be the same interpreting self, but so too does the other’s horizon shift and in this manner it too is no longer the same other. This is to say that from the interpreter’s standpoint the other becomes understood as what I will call an *imigré* (formerly not understood by the interpreter, now at the border where understanding is possible), but insofar as this other remains something once foreign she does not entirely shed her alterity (her different past, etc.) and cannot become the same. Likewise, from the former standpoint of the other, the newly understood other is what I will call an *émigré*, for she already has the interpretation of the interpreting subject inscribed into her subjectivity, she has been understood by the interpreter. And the same bilateral consciousness applies for the interpreter. The mediating contact of interpretation alters (in this parallaxic sense) and cuts both sides

217 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 17.

with each other; the identity of either side are thus split identities, contaminated with each other and impure.

And this mediational impurity is precisely what is ignored in the colonizer's interpretive account of the other and the relations she shares with the other. The cultural imperialism advanced by the colonizer demands that the other also acknowledge the metropole's norms as authoritative and assimilate herself to the demands of the colonizer, folding herself into the identity of the colonizer. The dichotomous logic employed here (sovereign or not, mine or yours) insists on speaking in terms of a total possession by the self or total possession by the other; the claims of the colonizer, considered the standard here, are intended to exhaust the possibilities of the other's identity. The total commensurability of Romantic hermeneutics operates in an analogous manner, where the condition of understanding is completion as defined by the successful assimilation of the other's meaning to the interpreter's projections; the other must be brought over to the side of the self where the sovereignty of the interpreter's projection can be secured. But full sovereignty is only demonstrated by making the other yours and thus indistinguishable from yourself and, as we will argue, this creates a problem for the colonizer.

Even in some of the (anti-colonial) literature of resistance that decries this move to possess (e.g. Edward Said's classic, *Orientalism*) there is often an assumption that the colonizing usurper is ultimately successful in her attempt to gain total possession of the other, able to set via her interpretation of the other the descriptive terms to which the other must correspond, yet the colonizer remains unchanged in her own identity throughout the process; the other assimilates, but the colonizer is always still the same colonizer. For example, Bhabha notes that "There is always, in Said, the suggestion that

colonial power is possessed entirely by the colonizer[,] which is a historical and theoretical simplification.”²¹⁸ Assuming the validity of this dichotomy cedes to a blackmail of terms, for even in colonization there is a subtler interplay between the binary relation of the empowered and the powerless. If this binary relation were sufficient, the colonized other would be seamlessly turned into the property of the colonizer and the colonizer herself would never recognize the contingency of her own position as one that is already mediated and multiple. The possessing power of the colonizer would be so pervasive in this instance that, once the other was colonized (and consequently ‘understood,’ taken in the Romantic sense), such power could only emanate from a single side (indeed there would only be a single, non-contingent side), leaving no room for a recognitive connection and the acknowledgment of differences, the condition for resistance and for dialogue.

However, in fact, the colonizer attempts to subject the other to her terms but “that otherness...is at once an object of desire and derision.”²¹⁹ Although the colonizer will not admit as much, at the core of colonialism’s accompanying cultural imperialism are two competing demands: the demand for removing the alterity of the other and the unconscious, implicit demand for the other to enunciate her position as other. Depictions

218 Homi K. Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: The University of Essex, 1983), p. 200. For an example of Bhabha’s point about an exclusively one-sided power see Said’s discussion of the pervasivity of Silvestre de Sacy’s influence on Arabic scholarship in the 19th century in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 129. Later, in the same book, Said considers the “Arab world today [as] an intellectual, political, and cultural satellite of the United States...obviously a triumph of Orientalism [that] the felt tendencies of contemporary culture in the Near East are guided by European and American models.” Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 322-323. However, Bhabha’s claim that Said *always* attributes the emanation of this power to the colonizer’s side might itself be a simplification. Without disagreeing with Bhabha’s argument here about colonizer-colonized relations, one might challenge his account of the underlying tendency of Said’s work by pointing to the latter’s recent discussions on the possibilities of resistance to (and within) Orientalist structures. See, for example, Edward Said, *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2008).

219 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 96.

of the colonizer as satisfied with her own projections, satisfied with her stereotyped representations of the other, always disguise an underlying tension in her very position. The colonizer secretly desires that the other enunciate themselves in their alterity and talk back, in order that she might be able to assimilate such enunciations; it is not sufficient, therefore, that the colonizer describe the other in mere colonial terms and immediately concede their initial correctness, for the colonizer is apprehensive about the possibility of something lying outside her grasp that would deny her the position of objectivity (and thereby prove to set back her exploitative pursuits), that would mar the completeness of her possession. We see this struggle play out in a similar way in Romantic hermeneutics, with its efforts toward establishing a definitive, complete, and unchanging interpretation of a text. The colonizer's Orientalist depiction of the other "produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible."²²⁰ And in this way, Bhabha argues, the colonial "stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive."²²¹ That is, the colonizer, in her account of the other, clearly attempts to reduce the other's alterity to (usually pejorative) terms already found in the metropole's lexicon, but the colonizer is also distressed by the possibility that such an account will not be sufficiently comprehensive or accurate insofar as it *is* describing something different than the metropole. The recognition of this otherness amounts to a recognition that the colonizer herself is dependent on the other for the enunciation of this otherness. But the admission of this would mean the admission of a certain dependency on the other – ceding power to the other – and the underlying contingency of the colonizer's own power, the self as affected *by* the other.

220 Homi K. Bhabha, "Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *The Politics of Theory*, p. 199.

221 Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question" in *The Location of Culture*, p. 100.

Conceiving the other in terms of “the fetish or stereotype,” the colonizer’s means of neutralizing the force of the other and thus of attaining power backfires as it “gives access to [the colonizer’s] ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it.”²²² That is, the fact that the colonizer must depend on a fetishized or stereotyped account of the other betrays her inability to accurately depict the other’s alterity and, thus, betrays her dependency on the other for enunciating this otherness. This is to say that the total commensurability that marks the colonialist (and Romantic) endeavour cannot but be contradictorily and uncomfortably dependent upon the projection and recognition of difference, on the recognition of that which resists commensurability, of that which it attempts to suppress and disavow. And it is in this manner that the imperialist commensurability fails to create the fixed and one-sided conditions for complete assimilation and demonstrates a deeper, parallaxic ambivalence at the centre of its project.²²³ This colonial ambivalence is indicative of a personal history created *through* others, an identity that depends on intersubjective relation and recognition. The colonizer’s prejudices (projections) can thus not satisfy the colonizer if they are left unchallenged, foreclosed to the possible inflections or outright dismissals the other might give to them, because they can serve only a limited purpose if they fail to actually account for the other. In denying its own contingency, colonialism

222 Homi K. Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *The Politics of Theory*, p. 202.

223 One would be correct to point out that there are many different strategies employed by different colonial empires. Born into a Parsi family in Bombay, Bhabha’s work is informed by his own experience with colonialism and its vestiges and so his main point of reference is British colonialism. Yet Bhabha’s analysis of colonialism is not restricted to this particular instantiation; while many colonial systems differ in form (e.g. some colonial systems claim to be attempts to ‘emancipate the natives,’ while others are more straightforwardly hostile to the other), Bhabha is correct in depicting all colonial systems as expressing a certain ambivalence toward the other.

only assimilates a fabricated other. This is what Gadamer realizes when he asks:

How are we to know in advance what insights and what understanding and self-understanding the experience of what has come down to us will lead to, and indeed this includes what has come down to us from world cultures, not just the European! Indeed, we in the humanities and the social sciences need to accept our worldwide heritage not only in its otherness but also in recognizing the validity of the claim this larger heritage makes on us. This is to say we must approach it recognizing that it has *something to say to us*. For this we will need openness.²²⁴

As long as the colonizer takes up her goals of purity, failing to acknowledge how she is implicated in another's heritage and how this other's heritage, in turn, structures the colonizer's life-world, she uncomfortably denies Gadamerian openness – but without success.

The example of mimicry problematizes the purity of the colonialist perspective. Initially, mimicry is a colonial strategy employed by the colonizer intended to assimilate the colonized to the customs of the metropole. The colonizer attempts to turn the colony into a replica of the metropole by enforcing the metropole's laws and customs in the foreign, now colonized, land for the purpose of turning the colonized subjects against

224 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), pp. 54-55. In this particular case, Gadamer is positioning his call for openness to world cultures outside of the strictly European against the work of Joachim Ritter. It is Gadamer's contention that Ritter believes that the humanities and social sciences should retrieve their "historic sense" and achievements, achievements that are increasingly being displaced by techno-scientific modernization. Besides distancing himself from Ritter's narrow determination of the concept of science (to which Ritter opposes his project), Gadamer also suggests that the "'historical sense" on which the *Geisteswissenschaften* were based in the nineteenth century," of which it is Ritter's explicit aim to rescue, is simply "not the last word on the subject," especially insofar as it neglects the experience of non-European traditions. Opening ourselves up to our 'worldwide heritage' would, therefore, be to explore the manner in which the tasks of the social sciences and the humanities have been articulated in other cultures and even the way in which these accounts may have influenced European accounts of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

their own traditions, encouraging them to give up their claims to alterity by adopting the form of the colonizer. The goal of this policy is the creation of ‘mimic men’ (and mimic women), colonized subjects who willingly comply with and enforce these imperial laws and customs. The assumption of this goal is that if the colonized subjects learn to comply with these laws and customs they will also turn to the colonizer’s language, values, and cultural history in the construction of their own identities. This policy is intended to aid the colonizer’s own imperialist project by removing the dissent that commonly arises when the colonized, upon acknowledging the manner in which colonialist policies serve to subjugate them, strike back against their colonizers. To this end, the ‘mimic man’ is created through incentive (e.g. guarantee of safety, higher wage, the promise of a better quality of life, etc.) and, if necessary, through forced assimilation (e.g. punishment for continuing one’s religious practices, consequences for those who harbour dissenters in their homes, etc.). For example, the British colonizers wished to enforce British law in India in order to more easily pursue their own interests and silence any opposition to these interests, but for this they needed many Indian public servants such as law enforcement officers, Indian bureaucrats to attend to the publication and consequent application of these laws, and generally people who could be trusted to aid the colonizers in advancing colonial interests. So, the British colonizers sought to extend certain privileges and occupations with power to those colonized subjects who were willing to collude with the colonizers by modeling themselves after their oppressors.

On the surface, the colonized mimicking the colonizers effectively completes the task of colonial appropriation. But in reality, the mimicking other is “not quite / not

white.”²²⁵ In mimicry the competing desires of the colonizer, to ensure that it is the other who assimilates but to nevertheless disavow this other as other, are exposed, as the other can only ever partially mimic the colonizer. That is, in mimicry, the other vacillates between the two, avoiding total identification (becoming the same for either side). The colonizer can tell that the Indian bureaucrat is not quite English and in this way the other occludes the colonizer’s panoptical gaze and disrupts her dream of mastery. This is, as Žižek described, “the point from which the object itself returns the gaze.” Very plainly, in the attempt to make the other the same, the colonizing self recognizes its own failure to master. This failure is enunciated by the other’s mimicry which acts as a mirror for the colonizer’s own (disavowed) split subjectivity (that A is A for A, but also that A is A for B). In the words of Robert Young, “the colonizer performs certain strategies in order to maintain power, but the ambivalence that inevitably accompanies the attempt to fix the colonized as an object of knowledge means that the relation of power becomes much more equivocal.”²²⁶

The text operates in a way that is *almost* in correspondence with the projection set out by the interpreter, but not quite. The colonized enacts all the necessary mannerisms necessary to emulate her colonizer yet there is still something off about it, something resistant to a clean commensurability. It is this resistance built into the very notion of mimicry that Bhabha describes as “like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.”²²⁷ It is the unsettling kernel at the heart of the colonizer’s demands, the

225 Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 131.

226 Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 147.

227 Homi K. Bhabha quoting Jacques Lacan in “Of Mimicry and Man” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 121.

Though Lacan, whom Bhabha quotes, claims that this technique is *exactly* like camouflage, mimicry, as Bhabha describes it, is not always *intended* for war or resistance, not always *intended* to unsettle (e.g. the case of the Indian bureaucrat), whereas camouflage in human warfare is worn purposefully.

However, Lacan’s (and Bhabha’s) comparison can still stand in a certain sense since mimicry can be

uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) of the returned gaze, that has the ability to blow apart the very (Romantic) idea of pure correspondence, from within. After all, the Algerian *fidai* who no longer wears the symbol of difference, the religious veil, and slips into a crowd unnoticed and unsuspected, poses the greatest capacity to disturb the totalizing order, for she is most able to carry a grenade in her handbag.²²⁸ In a tense scene in Gillo Pontecorvo's masterpiece, *Battle of Algiers*, we see three women, soldiers of the National Liberation Front (FLN), remove their veils and customary clothing, step into French clothing, cut their hair, and apply lipstick. With mimicry as their disguise, these three women are able to move quickly through the crowd with their bombs while everyone else on their way to the Casbah is suspected and searched. And it is this fact that is so unsettling to the colonizer: the assimilation of the other to the same can, in fact, be used by the other to affirm her difference and it is this enunciation that poses the greatest threat to the dream of a pure colonial identity.

Another example that demonstrates this point is the forced adoption of language and the consequent formation of new "not quite / not white" languages. We see this in the phenomenon of what was formerly and usually pejoratively called "Pidgin English(es)" (amongst other patois), "broken" form(s) of English that form as a result of the colonizer's desire to assimilate the colonized via the enforcement of the speaking of English.²²⁹ These new forms of language ultimately pose a challenge to the colonizer's

purposefully subversive, like camouflage (e.g. Pontecorvo's example below), but the comparison is not exhaustive of the possibilities of mimicry, since mimicry goes beyond mere purposefulness. In this way, mimicry actually exceeds camouflage in its ability to unsettle the colonizer's position (e.g. in war, it might be an advantage to know that your opponent intended to disguise themselves and use this disguise as a weapon – one might be especially vigilant in these circumstances. But this information might be of no value in the case of mimicry, since not all mimickers *intentionally* use this technique to unsettle the colonizer).

228 Homi K. Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" in *The Location of Culture*, p. 90.

229 It is perhaps not surprising that a possible etymology of the term "pidgin" comes to us from the

self-sufficiency. When the English colonizer hears this “Pidgin English” spoken she considers it similar to “English” but not actually “English.” To make such a judgment it is necessary that she reflect on the identity of English – what constitutes authentic English – and this comparative encounter addresses the particularity and contingency, rather than the universality and necessity, of the colonial, English experience. When the colonizer ranks something in terms of “Englishness,” she affirms the fact that the English identity itself is something that emerges as a consequence of an encounter with the alien, the non-English.²³⁰ Racist/ethnocentric discrimination works as a last ditch effort to defend the purity of these boundaries but fails since the “racial/cultural identity of “true nationals” remains invisible [and is merely] inferred from...the quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the “false nationals” – Jews, “wops”, immigrants, *indios*, *natives*, blacks.”²³¹ By identifying what is “impure,” the colonizer attempts to avoid the question of her own impurity and can only identify herself through what she is not (as the subject who lacks X; the subject who can account for the A who is A for A but not the A who is A for B). And the mere acknowledgment of the other is enough to identify this internal lack: “That the “false” are

Portuguese word for occupation: *ocupação*.

230 That is to say that the imperialist spread of a certain language (through colonialism, globalization, etc.) cannot be given the last word, as if it were pure, one-sided, and all-encompassing. On this point, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write that “It is futile to criticize the worldwide imperialism of a language by denouncing the corruptions it introduces into other languages (for example, the purists’ criticisms of English influences in French, the petit-bourgeois or academic denunciation of “Franglais”). For if a language such as British English or American English is major on a world scale, it is necessarily worked upon by all the minorities of the world, using very diverse procedures of variation. Take the way Gaelic and Irish English set English in variation. Or the way Black English and any number of “ghetto languages” set American English in variation... American English could not have *constituted* itself without this linguistic labor of the minorities.” Calling attention to the internal ambivalence of the colonialist claim to homogeneity, Deleuze and Guattari write, “You will never find a homogenous system that is not still or already affected by a regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation... Black Americans do not oppose Black to English, they transform the American English that is their own language into Black English.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 102-104.

231 Etienne Balibar, “Paradoxes of Universality” in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 283-295, 284.

too visible will never guarantee that the true are visible enough.”²³² The English experience can no longer be held up as self-sufficient, or as any sort of pure standard, due to its own incomplete nature. Mimicry, in this case, incites a self-reflection on the identity of the colonizer which calls up a history of effects, of translations, a formative history of previous contacts with others. And, as Jay Lampert argues, these “translations across cultures recognize distance at the same time as they make contact.”²³³ Translating the other into the pre-established colonialist paradigm is likely to highlight how very different the other actually is, backfiring for the colonialist who wishes to disguise any trace of difference.

I have argued that even colonial assimilation can never entirely reduce the other to the same because of the internal impurity of the colonial project itself. Colonialism’s claim to completion or exhaustibility (of translation, of assimilation, of its gaze) is internally frustrated by its own ambivalence, leaving it with no choice but to admit, with Bhabha, that “there is never a simple distinction between the colonizer and colonized.”²³⁴ And although the Orientalist strategies of colonialism produce what looks and acts as the means to assimilate the other and give a whole account of her identity (without excess), in so doing the metropole is forced to confront its own identity, which is then displaced. For, if the metropole examines its own ipseity and its respective constitutive history, it will notice that it possesses an identity that is “told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity.”²³⁵ Its

232 Etienne Balibar, “Paradoxes of Universality” in *Anatomies of Racism*, p. 285. We can note the similarity here to Jacques Lacan’s conception of the other as necessary to the formation for the subject whose identity is defined by this lack.

233 Jay Lampert, “Gadamer and Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics” in *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXVIII, No. 4, Summer, 1997, p. 352.

234 Robert Young defining Bhabha’s position in Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 151.

235 Homi K. Bhabha, “Life at the Border: Hybrid Identities of the Present” in *New Perspectives Quarterly*,

identity is, in Gadamer's words, a narrative with a "worldwide heritage." To confront this heritage and its co-constitution of the colonizer honestly is to admit to the other's movement, to the inherent proclivity of her meanings to shift. That is, what on the surface seems to be a pure correspondence with the interpreter's original projections and orders turns out to be otherwise since this mimicry, this "'repetition' of the 'original' can never be identical with the 'original' (otherwise it would be the 'original'), this process of 'translation' produces a destabilizing lack in that 'original.'"²³⁶ This is to admit that the other is not something in stasis, existing to be disclosed and assimilated once and for all in its entirety (i.e., corresponding to the Romantic interpreter's projected sense, *verbatim et literatim*). And so to examine colonialism on its own terms leads one to ultimately admit the bankruptcy of its aspirations of purity, the dream of total commensurability.

3.2 Nativism

In "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism," Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests that "the claims of nativism upon literary theory cast in sharp relief an ongoing debate over the relation between literary theory and particular bodies of text."²³⁷ Insofar as the hermeneutical project has been recently greeted with calls to radicalize itself by resisting and reversing the Romantic hermeneutical endeavour, we can extend Appiah's assessment to the debate between hermeneutical approaches and texts conceived in the broadest sense. Accordingly, we will now examine the nativist approach to texts and the

vol. 14, #1, Winter 1997, pp. 30-31.

²³⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 119.

²³⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism" in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1, p. 165.

consequences of its reversals for cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Nativism can be roughly defined as the attempt to invert the traditional valuation of the colonizer over the colonized; nativism valorizes the colonized over the colonizer. This valorization of the other(-than-colonizer) founds its project on some essential, paradigmatic other, wholly outside the influence of or relation to the colonizer and colonial history. With this in mind, nativists, like the Martinican poet, cultural theorist, and politician, Aimé Césaire, attempt to resuscitate some pre-colonial other, some untouched tradition or group, with a past pure of colonial contamination, and affirm the legitimacy of its values and traditions over against the colonizer's. Most important to note here is the incommensurable gap between the parties, the severe distinction between (colonizing) self and other, the other's claim that "I am essentially different, and for this reason am without relation to you, which prevents you from understanding me."²³⁸ In this case the other identifies herself as a particular against and outside of the universal, as a pure exteriority outside of the group, outside of the totalizing efforts of colonialism. According to the nativist, "there are only two real players in this game: us, inside; them, outside. That is all there is to it."²³⁹ According to this topology, Romanticism and colonialism, with their (erroneous, as we showed above) claims to universalism and commensurability, stand together united on one side. And the philosophies of the valorized other, Caputo's radical hermeneutics amongst them, with their emphasis on particularity (absolute heterogeneity) and incommensurability, join the nativists on the

238 Or, as Robert Bernasconi puts it in the title of his article on the subject, "you don't know what I'm talking about." For his objections to a rather Romantic-sounding Gadamer see, Robert Bernasconi, "'You Don't Know What I'm Talking About': Alterity and the Hermeneutic Ideal," in Lawrence K. Schmidt (ed.), *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), pp. 178–94.

239 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism" in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1, p. 157

other side. This move from the former side to the latter side is an extremely important one and offers itself as a necessary response to the hegemonic goals of colonialism and the forced homogeneity of Romantic hermeneutics. Such incommensurabilism should, indeed, be recognized “as a salutary corrective to a great deal of nonsense that has been written about [the other], by critics for whom ... merit is gauged by whether [it] can be inserted into a Great White Tradition.”²⁴⁰

But a problem presents itself insofar as a mere inversion fails to actually move beyond the identitarian distinctions set up by the colonizer herself, with her “narcissistic desire to find an other that [*sic*] will reflect Western assumptions of selfhood.”²⁴¹ And the effect is that “the nativists are of its party without knowing...we end up always in the same place; the achievement is to have invented a different past for it.”²⁴² The nativist’s attempts to maintain a total separation from the self amount to purifying her account of the other. That is, the nativist reverts to extolling and mystifying the other’s virtues at the expense of offering a more realistic (relational, mediated) picture. As a case in point we can turn to the way in which Césaire essentializes the other’s alterity by distinguishing it from the metropole. In service of the Négritude movement, he identifies the nativist’s task as one which will “systematically defend our old Negro civilizations [since] they were courteous civilizations.”²⁴³ And while he quickly notes that this is a question of building a new society rather than simply idealizing the past, his valorization of an African past seems to remain intact as he describes this new society as “warm with all the

240 Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism” in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1, p. 159.

241 Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 165

242 Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism” in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1, pp. 162, 170.

243 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 31.

fraternity of olden days.”²⁴⁴ The reader, however, would do well to remind herself that when Césaire wrote these words in 1955 the greatest challenge in Césaire’s mind was to oppose the growing trend of Martinican *bovarisme*, the phenomenon in Martinique of colonized subjects allowing themselves to be assimilated. Césaire describes the environment as one where “Antilleans were ashamed of being Negroes...Europeans despised everything about Africa, and in France people spoke of a civilized world and a barbarian world. The barbarian world was Africa, and the civilized world was Europe.”²⁴⁵ For these reasons it is imperative that we recognize the motivation for Césaire’s nativist Négritude and recognize him as an important voice in decolonization efforts whose work serves as a fruitful resource in the struggle against the politics of assimilation.

That said, the difficulty with such retreats into the past is that their final recuperation of some essentialized other (some originary secret, an aboriginal origin, the *arche*) can never fully account for the other’s influences or internal flux. The identity of the ‘native’ can easily become fetishized and stagnant when immovably fixed to a romanticized past. This is to say that whenever we present the other meant to represent all others (the other who is courteous, who does not colonize, etc.) we always do so at the expense of any real, living other; it is a fabricated other selectively remembered (while other aspects go forgotten). We are here reminded of the problems previously noted with Caputo’s valorization of the separated other.

Considering that the nativist position of individuation or separation is one of resistance, it must admit to recognizing and identifying a certain symbolic order or language from which it desires to be emancipated. This type of resistance to the

244 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, p. 31.

245 Aimé Césaire, “An Interview with Aimé Césaire” in *Discourse on Colonialism*, p. 73.

colonizer's demand for assimilative commensurability is, thus, not itself wholly incommensurable, for its struggle is indispensably an intersubjective one. These enunciations of resistance already admit to a space of interaction arising through a shared history and it is only on this basis that it can suggest a (fabricated) wholly other (a pre-colonial other, a pure other, etc.) as an alternative. And so this dream of total incommensurable is as untenable as the dream of total commensurabilism, for they both depend upon a prior discourse, a primordial intersubjectivity. As Richard Terdiman points out, "no discourse is ever a monologue; nor could it ever be analyzed intrinsically...everything that constitutes it always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies."²⁴⁶

This is not to despair of anti-colonial resistance nor to deem the entire project impoverished, but rather to acknowledge the hermeneutical structure of these efforts in order to reconceive the possibility of resistance outside of the strict boundaries imposed by the idealized nation, by the idea of an aboriginal essence, and hyperbolic heterogeneity. Resistance must instead be understood as arising out of this discourse, not simply as a complete withdrawal from it. Such reconceptualization of the project of resistance will "need to transcend the banalities of nativism – its images of purgation, its declarations, in the face of international capital, of a specious "autonomy."²⁴⁷ We need only mention some well-known examples of anti-colonial resistance such as the Hutu extremism of the 1990s or the current violence of Hindus against Muslims in the Indian

246 Richard Terdiman, *Discourse / Counter Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 36.

247 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism" in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1, p. 175.

state of Gujarat in the 2000s,²⁴⁸ both nationalistic resistance efforts initially aimed at emancipation from colonialism, to raise suspicion about nativist purgation and purification. Either resistance to (neo-)colonialism moves toward transcending the aestheticized alterities of identitarian exclusion and incommensurable difference or, as Stuart Hall aptly puts it, such “politics of absolute dispersal” run the risk of becoming “the politics of no action at all.”²⁴⁹ Absolute incommensurability is not sufficient to displace the models of colonial power.

It is for this reason that the best defenders of nativism, such as Benita Parry, have no choice but to recognize the extremity of the nativist position and therefore dilute this very position, turning nativism into something other than the return to an essentialistic position (‘the other essentially at odds with the self’) that is resistant to any hermeneutic space of connection. Parry performs such a move in her article “Resistance theory /

248 It has been the contention of many historical analysts that the contemporary violence between Hindu and Muslim communal identities in Northern India has been a direct consequence of British colonial rulers’ attempts to divide and conquer via classification and separation of the people of India. “In this perspective, the creation or development of communal consciousness is an instrument of struggle, either against the British or between Hindus and Muslims for political advantage,” a consequence of colonial constructions. Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 25. For analyses of this kind see Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) and Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). And these communal conflicts have not been restricted to Hindu-Muslim violence. As we know, in such situations it is not uncommon for the previously colonized other to force the conversion (or assimilation) of their colonizers and in this way take the form of the colonizers, subjecting the colonizing subject to victimization and finally replacement (cf. Levinas’s “traumatism of the transcendent”). As recently as October, 2008 the *New York Times* reported forced conversions of Christians (adherents of the “colonizer’s religion”) to Hinduism (the pre-colonial, “Indian religion”) were carried out in the Borepanga region of India in a manner quite reminiscent of colonial methods of religious assimilation. See Somini Sengupta, “Hindu Threat to Christians: Convert or Flee” in *The New York Times* (13 October 2008), accessed online on 05 May 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/13/world/asia/13india.html?_r=1&ref=todayspaper&pagewanted=pri nt&loc=interstitialskip .

249 Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves” in *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, ICA documents, 6, London, pp. 44-6, 1987, p. 45

theorising resistance, or two cheers for nativism,”²⁵⁰ treating nativism as a (strategic) passage rather than an objective unto itself. In this way she does not defend incommensurability all the way down and her position does not bar the possibility of a postcolonial hermeneutic connection between colonizer and colonized (and their mediated histories and descendents). But Parry’s type of strategic nativism departs from many traditional nativist positions (cf. Césaire) and one could easily imagine her claim to nativism challenged insofar as it admits some degree of mediation. Nevertheless, she astutely cautions us about prematurely demanding an agreement (of terms, of content, etc.). A premature postcolonialism would not be a postcolonialism at all but a reversion back to colonialism (or neo-colonialism), an “openness” without real others.²⁵¹

We find this sort of “openness” in a figure like Paul Gauguin, whose attempts to understand and articulate the other endeavored a new depiction of the Tahitian people, apart from their standard colonialist depiction. For example, in both *The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch (Manao Tupapaul)* [1892] and *Te Tamari Non Atua* [1896] Gauguin considered himself having inaugurated a genuine connection between Western art traditions and non-Western custom by integrating Christian symbolism in pictorial representations of Tahitian life. And this was seen to represent a new artistic, intercultural

250 Benita Parry, “Resistance theory / theorising resistance, or two cheers for nativism” in *Colonial Discourse / Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 172-197.

251 In early 2005 the Union for a Popular Movement, a French political party, introduced and passed a bill that would force schoolteachers to emphasize the beneficial aspects of French colonial presence abroad. It was argued that the time had come to put the debate between colonial and anti-/pre-colonial pasts behind us in order to reflect on the strengths of both systems. What this bill represented was a positive reassessment of the contributions of colonialism. The “February 23, 2005 French Law on Colonialism,” as it has come to be referred, exemplifies how reversion and revisionism illegitimately invoke transcending the incommensurabilist dichotomy of self and other only to return us to some earlier colonial commensurability. Though we are here arguing that the self and the other, the histories of the colonizer and colonized, are intimately intertwined in a way that cannot be reduced to total homogeneity or heterogeneity, it should be clear enough that the argument here is not some cost-benefit analysis regarding colonialism or nativism, but rather an analysis of (the failures of) their internal logics and the consequences this has had for hermeneutical philosophy.

space that escaped privileging either tradition. But it is precisely these painting that are now often criticized by art historians like Griselda Pollock for their reduction of the alterity of the Tahitians to an ersatz other, an Orientalist reduction to primitivism/exoticism. It is often argued that by sacrificing a real dialogical connection Gauguin adopted a unidirectional approach and treated the Tahitian people as mere sociological datum.²⁵² And this is what is of concern to Caputo and the nativists alike.

Fully accepting the gravitas of this premature and misguided attempt at conciliation, the fact still remains that the nativist alternative, insofar as it remains satisfied with a polarized account of its own relation to the discourse it resists, is insufficient on its own. With Diana Fuss, it is our contention here that the other is situated “somewhere between difference and similitude...organized through a play of

252 See Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993). Throughout this work Pollock perspicaciously identifies different aspects in Gauguin’s work which, though initially taken as showing respect for the other, are simply different ways of silencing the other’s voice and reducing the other to Gauguin’s own fantasies. But we can imagine a critic challenging Pollock’s concern by mischaracterizing our project here. The mischaracterization goes as follows: If one successfully argues that our hermeneutical nature is inherently intersubjective, that there is no position outside of dialogical relationality, then the commensurabilist and incommensurabilist positions are moot. But if such extreme positions are not actually tenable positions, then why should we concern ourselves with them? Even the colonizer (Gauguin, in this case), is in some dialogue with the other and his ambivalent position can never truly claim to fully appropriate and silence the other. So, on what grounds can we even criticize Gauguin (who is, after all, in dialogue)? And, in this sense, is hermeneutical philosophy left without a critical project, unable to challenge these so-called non-mediational positions? To criticize attempts at assimilating the other, must we relinquish our defense of mediation? To these questions one must respond that, to be sure, acting from the misconception that one is unmediated does not remove such mediation (as we described it, resistance is still intersubjective communication), *but* both the commensurabilist denial of finitude and the incommensurabilist denial of communication prevent us from better, more ethical relations with the other (e.g. the colonizer is certainly mediated by the other, but because this is not openly *acknowledged* by the colonizer, serious consequences follow for the colonized – and arguably also for the colonizer). The aim here (whenever I have made mention to the critical task of the interpreter or reader) is to enable the acknowledgment of this condition in order for better, recognitive relations with the other to follow. I am here reminded of Heidegger’s discussion of solicitude in *Being and Time*, where leaping in [*einspringen*] for the other and hiding away [*sichverstecken*] from the other are both, despite themselves, relations to the other, but they are show to be deficient forms of solicitude when compared to leaping-ahead [*vorausspringen*]. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 157-161.

identification and disidentification.”²⁵³ Many assessments of the history of colonial/anti-colonial relations have not made it their priority to clarify the role of the space between. Edward Said’s work on Orientalism, for example, is almost exclusively concerned with the colonizer’s experience and the ways in which the colonizer reduces the other to Orientalist caricatures in order to incorporate the unfamiliar within the familiar.²⁵⁴ On the other side, much of Frantz Fanon’s work accepts this oppositional structure and focuses primarily on the experience of the marginalized and the way they are able to resist the colonizer’s caricatures.²⁵⁵ And within this structure, both authors present outstanding analyses of their respective sides of this divide. Surely, it is not my intention to oversimplify or discredit the diverse work of either of these complex authors, or of the many others this chapter so quickly surveys, but instead my aim is to briefly set the scene for Bhabha’s alternative.²⁵⁶ For my purposes, I wish to illustrate how Bhabha’s work emphasizes the role of the in-between underlying the political milieu in which these

253 Diana Fuss, *The Identification Papers: Readings on Psychoanalysis, Sexuality, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 147.

254 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. See also Bhabha’s assessment of Said in Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*, especially pp. 101-104.

255 See especially Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: The Grove Press, 2005) and compare it with the less separatist, earlier work of *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: The Grove Press, 1967). For example when Fanon writes “for the people only fellow nationals are ever owed the truth” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 14, he seems to “uphold the view that the building of national consciousness demands [nativist] cultural homogeneity and the disappearance or dissolution of differences [amongst the oppressed]...[which is] deeply troubling.” Homi K. Bhabha, “Foreword to *The Wretched of the Earth*” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. x. But Bhabha notices that this rhetoric stands in contrast to Fanon’s claim that “The Negro is not. Any more than the white man,” in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 231, a claim that “dismembers the dreams of a political imaginary based either on revolutionary victimage or nationalistic narcissism.” Homi K. Bhabha, “Day by Day...With Frantz Fanon” in *The Fact of Blackness*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996) p.196.

256 To be sure, Bhabha frequently credits the influence of Said and Fanon on his own project. For example, Bhabha’s article “Day by Day...With Frantz Fanon” in *The Fact of Blackness*, pp. 186-206, was written with the express purpose of positively reassessing Fanon’s work in the context of contemporary postcolonial studies. And in an interview Bhabha remarks, “Said’s perspective caused the flash of recognition in which I first apprehended my own project.” Homi K. Bhabha, “Interview with W.J.T. Mitchell” *Artforum*, v.33, n.7 (March, 1995), pp. 80-84. The purpose here is simply to show the manner in which Bhabha directly addresses the in-between in a way that is not as apparent in the work of these other two scholars.

oppositions exist. In Bhabha we find a development of the complex relationship *between* the two sides and how their histories and identities are shaped through one another, how the colonizer's fear and desire of the other creates an unstable relationship between the two. This analysis leads him to move beyond an oppositional framework, without retreating into the feigned neutral terrain of liberalism or "easy egalitarianism where white and black are somehow the 'same.'"²⁵⁷ Avoiding commensurability, Bhabha describes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as "not so much 'equal' as they are equivocating, doubly inscribed signs of personhood, each 'less than itself' by virtue of its liminal articulation in/to the other."²⁵⁸ Being 'less than itself,' neither side can truly attest to independent self-constitution.

And so difference must be conceived differently, apart from its usual narcissistic, non-mediational sense.²⁵⁹ Bhabha writes, "The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial... is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional.... The contour of difference is agonistic, shifting, splitting."²⁶⁰ As the example of mimicry showed us, the colonized is able to undermine the colonizer's totalizing attempts without entirely excusing herself, in the name of difference, from the self-other relationship itself. The recognition of the ambivalence of the colonizer's demands as a tactic of resistance to commensurability is, implicitly, also the resistance to incommensurability; it is the admission of the ambivalence inherent in the one-sided delusions of the colonizer *and* the nativist. The task of affirming one's identity in opposition to another is frustrated by its

257 Homi K. Bhabha, "Day by Day... With Frantz Fanon" in *The Fact of Blackness*, p. 196.

258 Homi K. Bhabha, "Day by Day... With Frantz Fanon" in *The Fact of Blackness*, p. 197.

259 As the title of Bhabha's essay specifies, difference "interrogates identity," and disrupts categorical binaries as they are employed by the "myths of negritude and white cultural supremacy." See Homi K. Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" in *The Location of Culture*, p. 58.

260 Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in *The Location of Culture*, p. 156.

internal dependency on an external other. The more one attempts to cut oneself off from another, the more this other shapes the actions and behaviour of the secessionist; the more one attempts to totally incorporate another, the more it becomes evident that this other cannot be entirely assimilated. And this bi-directional tension “undercuts both colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self, and also warns us against interpreting cultural difference in absolute or reductive terms.”²⁶¹ With the recognition of this ambivalent co-constitution (identity formed through alterity) “it becomes possible to cross, even to shift the Manichaeian boundaries.”²⁶² And for this reason, Bhabha argues that some anti-colonialists like “Fanon must sometimes be reminded that the disavowal of the Other always exacerbates the edge of identification, reveals that dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned. For denial is always a retroactive process; a half acknowledgment that otherness has left its traumatic mark.”²⁶³ A wholly other other could not leave this mark. Recognizing this, effective resistance (as Pontecorvo’s film demonstrates) cannot accept the terms of a total distinction or apartheid: “The veiled Algerian woman in the course of the revolution...crossed the Manichaeian lines to claim her liberty.”²⁶⁴

The analogy between nativist, separatist anti-colonial efforts and (anti-)hermeneutical philosophies of alterity should at this point be clear. The argument put forward is simply that overemphasizing disjunction and separation in both the

261 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 149.

262 Homi K. Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 88.

263 Homi K. Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 88. As Bhabha shows us with the example of mimicry, “resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the ‘content’ of another culture, as difference once perceived ... [but rather] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference.” See Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 158.

264 Homi K. Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity,” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 89

hermeneutical and political sphere (not that they themselves can be separated) has the potential to underestimate the ambivalence of relationality and overlook particular sites of enunciatory address. By exclusively focusing on dissemination and the semantic slippage between the text and its interpretation we risk overlooking the possibilities of solidarity (as well as resistance) on the border between the two. It is for this reason that Bhabha, otherwise quite indebted to the strategic approach deconstruction affords us, calls for a “departure from Derrida.”²⁶⁵ In the spirit of charity we might prefer to understand Bhabha’s call as one of reorientating all overemphasis on the incommensurable, including the way in which such incommensurability figures in Caputo’s philosophical application of Derrida and Levinas. In this way it is still possible and indeed advantageous for us to appreciate and draw upon, but nevertheless reorient, the work of Caputo and other so-called incommensurabilists, especially insofar as they put forward the necessary problematic of respecting alterity and emphasize the need to resist hegemonic efforts of subjugation. But it follows from such a Gadamerian (and Bhabhaian) reorientation that we then move beyond the question of colonial and anti-colonial opposition to the question of postcolonial space, the space of the in-between.

3.3 Postcolonialism: The Political Fusion of (Cultural) Horizons.

With their internal, ambivalent co-dependencies exposed, the colonialist and nativist positions are divested of their authority. But between these two positions emerges

265 Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817” in *The Location of Culture*, pp. 154, 155. The context of this remark concerns what Bhabha perceives as Derrida’s failure to take seriously those specific moments of *address*, and consequently interconnection, in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 193. It should be noted that in the same paragraph Bhabha acknowledges that such a “departure from Derrida” would also amount to returning to Derrida’s problematic of presence and rethinking such a problematic from the de/position of the in-between.

a third de-positioned space.²⁶⁶ That is, between the incommensurable and commensurable arises a third space of temporary borders populated with border-crossers, a space that can never simply be but, rather, is always in the process of formation, of becoming. Its past is a variegated one marked by ostensibly opposed cultural histories which, together, constitute a new possibility: postcoloniality. This space is postcolonial insofar as it “exists in-between the violent [the colonialist] and the violated [the oppressed turned anti-colonialist], the accused and the accuser, allegation and admission.”²⁶⁷ Gadamer calls this dialogical space that of the fusion of horizons. Bhabha calls this space of intercultural contact the in-between and the third space. Whatever one calls it, it is a space that exists between the opposing sides and challenges their very opposition but in a way “beyond any semblance of sameness.”²⁶⁸ According to Bhabha, such a space is “unthinkable outside of the locality of cultural translation.”²⁶⁹ And, if we can agree with Gadamer’s contention that “the situation of the translator and that of the interpreter are fundamentally the same... For every translator is an interpreter,”²⁷⁰ then it follows that understanding this postcolonial space as cultural translation is precisely to understand it in terms of cross-cultural hermeneutics. Let us turn, then, to the model of translation.

Unsurprisingly, in the work of translation there arises a similar problematic as the one we have set up; as Richard Kearney defines it in his introduction to Ricoeur’s essay “On Translation, ” this problematic is that of “a double duty: to expropriate yourself as

266 On the use of the term “space” see footnote 135 above.

267 Homi K. Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space” in *Communicating in the Third Space*, eds. Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. x.

268 Homi K. Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space” in *Communicating in the Third Space*, p. ix.

269 Homi K. Bhabha, “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space” in *Communicating in the Third Space*, p. ix.

270 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 389.

one appropriates the other.”²⁷¹ That is, “good translations involve some element of openness to the other...that we be prepared to forfeit our native language’s claim to self-sufficiency – which can sometimes go to extremes of nationalism and chauvinism – in order to ‘host’ (*qua hospes*) the ‘foreign’ (*hostis*).”²⁷² Ricoeur identifies two “paralyzing alternatives” to the real task of translation:

Either the diversity of languages gives expression to a radical heterogeneity – and in that case translation is theoretically impossible; one language is untranslatable *a priori* into another. Or else, taken as a fact, translation is explained by a common fund that renders the fact of translation possible... this is the original language track.”²⁷³

Both alternatives take as their reference point the dream of a perfect translation. That is, both understand the task of translation in terms of pure correspondence, with the “illusion of a total translation which would provide a perfect replica of the original.”²⁷⁴ The commensurabilists believe in this translation without excess but believe it to be secured only by appealing to some original, normative language against which one could base all translations, which almost undoubtedly stands in for their own native tongue, consequently reducing everything foreign to that which can be found in the domestic. The incommensurabilists on the other hand point to the remarkable, post-Babelonic diversity and multiplicity of languages, as well as their comparative dissimilarity, and thus do not believe in this perfect translation and so denounce the task of translation itself as an

271 Richard Kearney, “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation” in Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. xvi.

272 Richard Kearney, “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation” in Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. xvi.

273 Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. 13.

274 Richard Kearney, “Introduction: Ricoeur’s philosophy of translation,” in Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. xvii.

impossible one before it has had the chance to begin.²⁷⁵ But, the incommensurabilist is, of course, able to communicate her supposed untranslatability since, as John Sallis writes, “one attests in the writing to their untranslatability into writing.”²⁷⁶ Their untranslatability cannot go all the way down. To note the difficulties of translating a text is nevertheless to admit to the need to translate; in fact, saying as much is already a minimal effort towards translation. For if a text was so untranslatable so as to avoid all points of interlinguistic connection, what would ever instigate the translator to approach the text as something worthy (or not) of translation? How would the topic of translation arise? What would even lead one to treat the untranslated text as a text?

Sallis also takes the commensurabilist, who he calls the proponent of “nontranslation,” to task. This dangerous position proposes a perfect transference of meaning that would move the text beyond any further need for translation. Sallis’s example of this is the project of globalization through English, a project that represents the “danger of a certain accommodation in which one would be prone to fail to recognize the necessity and the effects of translation.”²⁷⁷ Indeed, “a certain complicity between the spread of English almost everywhere and the dream of nontranslation threatens to render translational effects and the border to which they attest less and less perceptible.”²⁷⁸ Of course this project is not new or unique to globalization or English. As Sallis notes, Leibniz had already suggested a type of universal, mathematical language, which would serve to eliminate the necessity of translation, as early as 1666 in his *De Arte*

275 In terms of translation studies, Ricoeur lists the work of sociolinguist Benjamin Lee Whorf and his colleague E. Sapir as examples of this emphasis on untranslatability.

276 John Sallis, *On Translation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 114.

277 John Sallis, *On Translation*, p. 6

278 John Sallis, *On Translation*, p. 6.

Combinatoria.²⁷⁹ And Leibniz had at that time already explicitly connected this project to the colonialism which it implies: “If this language is introduced by the missionaries, then also the true religion, which is most perfectly unifiable with reason, will be established on firm ground.”²⁸⁰ But even if such a language were possible, it would nevertheless require translation between word-languages and the new mathematical, universal language.

Similarly with globalization: although the spread of the English language and many aspects of Western culture(s), with the help of contemporary technology, seem able to pervade whatever they touch, globalization has nevertheless been unable to completely neutralize the specificity of the other, as our example of what were formerly called “pidgin” dialects demonstrated. We could, further, point to the way new art forms, cross-genre pollinations, tend to arise out of encounters that were meant to assimilate. For example, as early as the 1940s, Bollywood cinema (a particular genre of Hindi-language, song-and-dance films produced in Bombay), combined the influence of Western film techniques and early Hollywood musicals with Indian folk theatre and Sanskrit epics and created a new hybridized art form irreducible to categories of Western film or traditional (i.e., pre-colonial) Indian art forms.²⁸¹ Limbo dancing, a form of dance reinterpreted on the ships carrying slaves through the Middle Passage, serves as an additional example of cultural translation that avoids these paralyzing alternatives.²⁸² As Bhabha writes, “The

279 John Sallis, *On Translation*, pp. 9-10, referring to G. W. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), 7:184ff.

280 G. W. Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, 7:184ff.

281 While the influence of Hollywood film was not specifically British, American film came to India via England and Hollywood musicals were performed in English, the colonizer’s language. Furthermore, many Hollywood musicals were set and/or filmed in England (e.g. *My Fair Lady*) and England itself had a considerable song-and-dance/musical film movement (e.g. Gracie Fields, etc.) which Bollywood film adopted as one of its influences. This is all to say that Hollywood film had been considered a symbol of (British) colonialism before (and arguably for sometime after), August 15, 1947, the date of India’s independence from British rule.

282 See Wilson Harris, *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas* (Georgetown, Guyana:

‘middle passage’ of contemporary culture, as with slavery itself, is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience.”²⁸³ Globalization has not been able to prevent the innovations that are borne of this middle passage.

These examples each point to the fact that the translator must “give up the ideal of the perfect translation[.] [T]his renunciation alone makes it possible to live...the impossibility...of serving two masters: the author and the reader,”²⁸⁴ the text and the interpreter, the other and the self. At this point translation is no longer the game of mere transference or restitution but becomes the production of meaning, meaning which will shift and require further translations as the two languages or cultures shift. Ricoeur defines this production as the “creative betrayal of the original, equally creative appropriation by the reception language; construction of the comparable.”²⁸⁵ And Ricoeur’s definition should accompany Sallis’s assessment that “It is not only a matter of taking over from the Greeks [or Indians, etc.] what they have thought and said but of setting ourselves back into the Greek [or Hindi, etc.], into the domain from which Greek

Calaloux Publications, 1974), p. 14.

283 Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 8.

284 Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. 8. After all, what would a perfect translation even look like? If we were to imagine another language which was simply a mirror of another language (e.g. a language where every letter was simply the next letter in the same alphabet, where “AND”=“BOE”), where the form looked different but in every single way the sense of the terms corresponded with each other, we might be tempted to call this a perfect translation. But would it not be more correct to conclude that this cannot count as a truly different language and consequently translation has not actually occurred? Barring such an absurd “translation,” every translation is going to be impure (i.e., not a pure correspondence). Given this, it is quite common to see translations only in terms of *loss*; as they say, “traduttore, traditore.” But a successful translation will result in a *gain* along with the inevitable loss of some of the other’s meaning (e.g. the pun “traduttore, traditore” is lost when we translate it as “translator, traitor” and must be paraphrased, compensated, adapted, etc.). Gadamer explains this with an example: “Even if it is a masterly re-creation, it must lack some of the overtones that vibrate in the original. (In rare cases of masterly re-creation the loss can be made good or even mean a gain – think, for example, of how Baudelaire’s “Les fleurs du mal” seems to acquire an odd new vigor in Stefan George’s version).” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 388.

285 Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. 37. As Sallis point out, the term ‘translation’ is etymologically derived from the ancient term, μεταφέρω, which has both the sense of a transference, a bringing-across, and the sense of a change, an alteration, creativity. See John Sallis, *On Translation*, p. 24

[or Indian, etc.] thinking and saying issued.”²⁸⁶ The translator quickly finds that she is not simply translating words on the page but is engaging with a broader context, a new set of influences (texts, stories, artifacts, etc.). Any real translation, from one language to another, is equally a translation from the latter into the former. The space of translation, then, is properly between each language, in the back-and-forth movement, rather than some secured position outside of dialogue. Translation produces something new, but it does not offer us a new *pure* language which could account for all possible linguisticity, a new site of resolved nontranslation.²⁸⁷ Instead, translation produces something constitutively hybrid, neither all-encompassing nor perfectly discreet. Sallis’s example of a successful translation of this kind, one without any pretension to purity and one which gains a new sense as it inevitably loses other senses, is August Wilhelm von Schlegel’s translation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Admittedly, this example is not a translation into or from a language of a colonized people, but it should be noted that it is not uncommon that postcolonial authors should use the former colonizer’s language as a tool for the creative presentation of ideas and concepts that are irreducible (and therefore somewhat foreign) to the colonizer’s experience. This can be understood as a cultural translation. An example of this is Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack, Monkey*, a novel whose plot, which concerns a child’s struggle to understand her own identity as torn between colonizer and colonized, mirrors Hodge’s own writing style.²⁸⁸ Although the novel is written in English, the English language is here used to express a certain mood

286 John Sallis, *On Translation*, p. 18.

287 In this regard, see Sallis’s criticism of Walter Benjamin’s analysis in John Sallis, *On Translation*, p. 108-110. Sallis contrasts Benjamin’s goal of inaugurating a new pure language with Gadamer’s argument that interpretation and translation does not free some ideal meaning, the grounds for a new ideal language, located behind the text. Here, as throughout his book, Sallis sides with Gadamer.

288 Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (London: Heinemann, 1970).

and tempo that would seem relatively unfamiliar to most British or American “English-speakers,” opening up new possibilities for the (familiar) language, supplementing its own internal lacunas by enabling it to be spoken in a new ways. Throughout, Afro-Trinidadian terms are combined with English terms to explain ideas and an environment that is irreducibly and constitutively hybrid.

The avowal of the hybridity of cross-cultural hermeneutical encounters announces an end to the dream of self-sufficiency. According to Bhabha, “Those substitutive objects of colonialist governmentality...are strategies of surveillance that cannot maintain their civil authority once the “colonial” *supplementarity* ... of their address is revealed.”²⁸⁹ As a meeting place of divergent cultural narratives, postcolonial space is defined by its embrace of this hybridity, this supplementarity. In the same way we described the fusion of horizons, decoupled from its Romantic mischaracterization, intercultural translation opens up a third, postcolonial space, the space of the in-between.

Reflecting on the similarities and differences between two texts, Plato’s *Philebus* and Mallarmé’s *Mimique*, Derrida writes that intertextual translation is “an operation that *both* sows confusion *between* opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites “at once.””²⁹⁰ The confusion this in-between sows is also a mark of standing-between and standing-together, a mark of solidarity which constitutes the event of understanding. Nevertheless, the solidarity that springs from postcolonial, transnational, cultural translation is radical and ill at ease with liberal determinations; postcolonial hybridity “impedes the question

289 Homi K. Bhabha, “Sly Civility” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 136.

290 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 212-13. On these pages Derrida’s study is both an analysis of the two mentioned written texts but also an examination of the intersubjective (and inter-bodily) relations of the ‘hymen,’ which he calls a “partition,” an “invisible veil...which stands between the inside and the outside...between desire and fulfillment,” and adopts as a metaphor for the syncategorem “between” [*entre*].

of the transparent assimilation of cross-cultural meanings in a unitary sign of “human culture.”²⁹¹ We described the fusion of horizons in its plasticity as resistant to these types of neutralizing signifiers. And as the political expression of the political fusion of horizons, postcolonial translation is similarly resistant to this type of liberal determination. Instead, postcolonial translation offers a significant challenge to the way in which liberalism has undermined ‘openness’ by equating the term with neutrality, which it couples with hyperbolic voluntarism.²⁹² “These borderline negotiations of cultural difference,” Bhabha writes, “often violate liberalism’s deep commitment to representing cultural diversity as plural choice. Liberal discourses on multiculturalism experience the fragility of their principles of ‘tolerance’ when they attempt to withstand the pressure of revision.”²⁹³ That is to say that the space of understanding opened up via the hermeneutical encounter with another must be understood in its eventfulness, the radical newness and the possibilities therein must be underlined. This encounter constitutes an event which breaks from the logic of liberal gradualism and, instead, posits itself as a type of conversion (the self transformed by the other, the other transformed by the self). This potential to transfigure is far removed from the logic of a progression through slight and eventual modification and from the rhetoric of ‘tolerance,’ taken in its current vernacular as connoting the distanced and uninvolved permittance to differ. Liberal approaches to this problem most often miss the challenge of the in-between and, instead, depict all cultures as natural equivalents which are for the most part

291 Homi K. Bhabha, “Articulating the Archaic” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 178.

292 In the same way that plasticity must be opposed to flexibility (cf. Malabou), Gadamerian ‘openness’ must be opposed to the trite but not infrequent manner in which the term has been used to enjoin us to accept all perspectives as merely a matter of choice and all choices as fundamentally equal (and thus only answerable to some neutral standard of acceptability).

293 Homi K. Bhabha, “Culture’s In-Between” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage, 1996) p. 54.

interchangeable, offering no significant power to change or challenge one another. Cultural values are taken to be merely relative and thus cultural differences are largely insignificant and can be reduced to a normative centre, *e pluribus unum* [“out of many, one”]. Dependent on this anti-dialogical standard of normative neutrality, the liberal sets up a discourse wherein the terms are set such that *you* are the colonialist if you pose a challenge to the standing (neo-)colonialist order, which stands enshrouded in a cloak of impartiality.

Breaking through this impasse, the aim of postcolonial politics is one of bringing something *new* into this world out of something old and supposedly oppositional, the move to push beyond the limitations of the problematic as historically situated. As Bhabha puts it, “If you seek simply the sententious or the exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence – not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified.”²⁹⁴ The aim of postcolonial politics is not simply analysis, which aims at entirely determining its subject of investigation, nor can it count as merely a dream, which would leave things hazy and undetermined. Moving beyond mere explications of how past dichotomous hermeneutical and political theories have excluded their edges and the liminal space between, it is possible for a new conception of political agency to emerge, one formed out of this hybrid fusion of horizons. As our analysis in the previous chapter suggested, meaning is produced through intersubjective encounters and does not rest completed somewhere behind the text idly awaiting some mere transference. The process of interpretive dialogue between the reader and the author, the self and the other, inaugurates this production of meaning. And so it is with the hybridized identity of the postcolonial subject: its “agency [involves] a

294 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” in *The Location of Culture*, p. 260.

conception of the effects of that agency on others who then become ‘authors’ of that agency in the way that readers, too, might be understood to (help) construct the meaning of the author’s text.”²⁹⁵ The postcolonial agent stands in the *entre-deux*, with a critical double consciousness to competing extremes; her identity is one wary of all forms of identitarianism. On the one hand, this new agent – the postcolonial hermeneut – never gives up the task of resistance and is vigilant for the slightest indication of hegemonic integration, nationalistic fragmentation, and other reductionist hermeneutical approaches. On the other, she is a communicative agent, acceptant of the impure and mediated nature of her constitution and eager to go to the risk-laden limits of the horizon of her life-world. This postcolonial hermeneut recognizes her identity, the truth of her life-world, as a porous one formed by the agencies of others, just as she recognizes “the meaning of any text is linked through the play of allusion, genre and inter-texts to other texts, and thus contains ‘traces’ of them.”²⁹⁶ This postcolonial subject is defined by her refusal to arrogantly deny these traces and inter-textual and inter-cultural influences and, for this reason, she stands on the *qui vive* for any spectre of the “naïve self-esteem” Gadamer so warned us about, as well as any of its political instantiations.

295 Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 137.

296 Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 137.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have sketched out the topography of current hermeneutical approaches to understanding the other. I have approached this topic through the lens of Gadamer's work on the subject and have argued that in his work there lies a radical alternative to two equally erroneous approaches, total commensurabilism and total incommensurabilism. Taking Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons as its central motif, this study has defended the space proper to hermeneutical understanding as one that lies between these two approaches.

Beginning with commensurabilism, this thesis began with a historical explication and critical assessment of the Romantic approach of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. The Romantic project, as we described it, can be characterized by at least four different traits: the longing for a complete interpretation, divination of authorial intention, an objectivistic conception of meaning, and the appropriation of the other's alterity. These four traits were each demonstrated to be problematic insofar as they all function in their respective ways to rid the other of all claims to otherness. Furthermore the Romantic hermeneutical endeavour could not account for the way in which its demands were irremediably conflicted, simultaneously concerned with accounting for the dynamism of the interpreter's experience while approaching the subject of its

investigation in a way that stifled the movement of understanding between self and other. As demonstrated, the Romantic hermeneut could not account for her internal ambivalence towards and co-constitution through an engagement with the other considering such alterity was shown to be irreducible to its totalizing efforts.

Our second chapter dealt with a challenge from Romanticism's chief opposition, the incommensurabilist defense of radical heterogeneity as set out by John D. Caputo and Emmanuel Levinas. Here our goal was twofold: a defense and a challenge. In defense of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, we argued that Gadamer's conception of understanding is not reducible to the Romantic endeavour to which it is frequently compared. A reconsideration of the way in which Gadamer conceives of phenomenological horizons as porous limits, between determination and indetermination, allowed us to reflect upon the way in which horizons are as much invitations as they are delimitations. But the invitational constitution of our horizons implies that the other can approach our horizons from the context of *her* own life-world. And in this way, one can anticipate the countenance of another from the context of her own life-world. Likewise, the interpreter can anticipate the horizon of the other via the anticipatory structure of interpretation. But we were not able to conclude our discussion with an analysis of anticipation alone. Indeed, because this connection is one that is bi-directional, the other speaks back and often challenges our anticipations. It is in this dialogical encounter that we can make sense of understanding as an event, as something that changes constantly as the involved horizons change (due to engagements with other others). It is for this reason that openness is a necessary characteristic of any defensible hermeneutical approach.

This openness prevents the interpreter's horizontal projection from reverting back

into imperious efforts to silence the other through foisted expectations. In this way Gadamer's approach shares with incommensurabilism an emphasis on respecting the alterity of the other and resisting the unilateral usurpations of Romantic hermeneutics. Gadamerian hermeneutics characterizes every encounter with another as one carrying the potential to change the interpreter and return her to herself as if to another. What results from this interaction can be considered a higher universality, a fusion of horizons that goes beyond any one side but nevertheless attests to no purity or totality. This in-between site of understanding must remain open to the other's movement and interruption. Communication depends on this possibility of interruption just as solidarity depends on multiplicity. It is as Nicholas Davey has written,

“Because [philosophical hermeneutics] grasps understanding as an event, it proposes that understanding does not merely interpret the world but changes it. The ontological actualities underwriting understanding deprive hermeneutic consciousness of any certainty of interpretation. What they reveal is the ever-present difficulty of residing within “the quietness of a single interpretation.”²⁹⁷

Insofar as Gadamerian interpretation involves changing the world, the interpreter, and the other, it offers a significant challenge to incommensurabilism. That is to say that according to the position we have herein defended, the openness and receptivity of the interpreter to the other must also be complimented with some active, critical sense that avoids 'slavishness' or the annihilation of the interpreter's initiative to understand. An engagement with the recent work of Catherine Malabou provided us with a useful

297 Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding* (Albany: SUNY, 2006), p. xiv. The expression “the quietness of a single interpretation” is taken from Gianni Vattimo.

concept, that of plasticity, which served as a model for understanding hermeneutics' double imperative. But Caputo's incommensurability stands against this double imperative out of respect for the other's alterity. Caputo designates the other as *tout autre*, wholly other, and so the interpreter can only ever be open to the other, never approaching her. Our objection to this orientation to hermeneutic hospitality was that the interpreter, thus construed, had no ability to *commit* to change, nor did she have any recourse to challenge the possible sadistic other, the other who attempts to replace the interpreting self. Without the ability to respond, merely awaiting the command of the other, we concluded that this non-dialogical conception of the self-other relation was indeed irresponsible.

A second objection to this extreme incommensurability arose from the fact that the wholly other, as defined by Caputo, would elude all recognition. If no connection could be established and if the interpreter could not translate the other's injunction into her own terms the very meaningfulness of hospitality would be removed. On these grounds, the exclusion of the possibility of a fusion of horizons would prevent the interpreter from hearing the other's call. In this way the incommensurabilist position thus was shown to be conflicted in its demands for hospitality but towards an other beyond the scope of recognition.

As we reckoned with Caputo's second challenge, which characterized Gadamer's focus on the sharing of a meaning or truth as tantamount to a removal of the playfulness of the other's text, it was important to take up the question of the space and time of meaning. With respect to the space of meaning, we interpreted Gadamer's account of meaning as offering an alternative to its traditional configuration whereby a text's

meaning depicts some static truth impervious to interpretation. Instead of elucidating the concept of meaning in this sense, as occupying a space behind interpretation, Gadamer was shown to be concerned with living meaning, meaning as inaugurated through the playful process of understanding. Thus, the meaning at the heart of Gadamer's hermeneutical work is that which occupies a moving space between interlocutors and serves as an alternative to the Romantic notion of a fixed positionality. Similarly, the time of meaning is never merely in the present. Meaning cannot be conceived outside of its process. As Gadamer understands it, the meaning understood is an unfinished event; constituted as it is by the constantly shifting horizons of the interpreter and the other, the meaning inaugurated in the fusion of horizons has the potentiality to become another meaning. It is possible that the present meaning, with future engagements with new others, will be shaped by these interactions. We concluded that the meaning that interests Gadamer is that which emerges between the self and the other, shaped by past influences but constantly moving toward future receptions, and not meaning construed as (an imagined) fully presentable moment.

We then moved from an analysis of hermeneutical commensurability and incommensurability to the political sphere where this problematic has structured political possibilities. This dichotomy has shaped many contemporary discussions about living with the memory and consequences of colonialism, resisting new hegemonic efforts to subjugate the other, and imagining a space beyond oppositionality. The goal of this final chapter was as much one of examining the political implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics as it was to highlight the hermeneutical structure underlying contemporary approaches to the topic of postcoloniality.

By considering the similar manner in which the colonialist's attempt to possess the other and Romantic hermeneutics' approach to interpret texts operated, we were able to align the two approaches by their consonant claims to commensurability. Challenging this, the colonialist project on its own terms, we revealed the ways in which this project betrays an internal ambivalence insofar as it desires the other as other while meanwhile insisting on its assimilation. Under colonialism the occupied other is often instructed to become like her colonizer, forcing her to comply with these demands through mimicry. We enunciated the fashion in which the other affirms its difference through this mimicry and how colonialism thus undermines its own claims to totality, admitting to a subtler interplay between the self and the other. While the colonizer reflects on her own identity, the identity she wishes the other to assimilate to, she discovers a contingency that disrupts her pretension to purity. The colonial effort to usurp is thus seen to undermine itself by admitting to its constitution through another.

Nativism, on the other hand, was understood in opposition to colonialism, as a position of resistance which defined itself in opposition to colonialism. Its own model of a wholly other, a pre-colonial, essentially different other completely separated from the colonizer, was, in an important way, seen to mirror the hermeneutical philosophies of alterity as examined in Chapter Two. But these incommensurabilist valorizations of alterity have the tendency to stagnate differences by attributing a one-sided purity to them. Although nativism, with its useful critique of the colonial endeavour, is right to caution us against prematurely demanding an easy postcolonialism, we contended that insofar as the nativist position was one of resistance, tied merely to opposing all things colonialist, it was politically deadlocked and gave too much credence to the totalizing

claims of colonialism.

Moving finally to the mediational sphere that exists between these two political schemas, we suggested that Gadamer's fusion of horizons offered the theoretical framework upon which we could conceive postcolonial space. This third, postcolonial space would be the space of the in-between, a constantly shifting space which mediates different cultural histories. As our examination of some recent work on the topic of translation demonstrated, the postcolonial subject can be understood as a newly created subject arising out of an interaction between the two. This postcolonial subject is inimical to binary boundaries since she recognizes and embraces her own identity as a hybrid one, an identity marked by the transforming event of an encounter with another. This transformation is a dialogical one and in this way offers a challenge to liberal conceptions of the third space that offer neutrality as a means of bypassing polarizing distinctions. In conclusion, by extending our discussion of the fusion of horizons, the site between similitude and alterity, to the political terrain of postcoloniality, the site between colonialism and nativist demarcation, we have used Gadamer's hermeneutical groundwork to posit a new postcolonial hermeneutics, a philosophical approach that has as its task the recognition of a mediational political agency.

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