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The Rhetoric of Interdisciplinarity:
Manifestos and Complaints in Literary Studies

by

Evelyn Nora Bennett

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Carleton University
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Abstract

This thesis is a rhetorical and discursive analysis of contemporary debates over the value of interdisciplinary practice in the postmodern academy. Drawing on theories and methodologies developed by rhetoricians, sociologists, sociolinguists, and discourse analysts, this study relies on a variety of approaches to examine this conflicting rhetoric of interdisciplinarity. Though the discourse of debaters from other disciplines is also considered, the primary focus of this study is on the debate over interdisciplinarity in literary studies, and the primary aim of this analysis is to show that these polarized and polarizing arguments are not as different as they may seem. Regardless of whether these debaters explicitly support an ideology of interdisciplinary inclusion or, conversely, an ideology of disciplinary exclusion, their textual and discursive practices reveal their similar subscription to a literary-critical practice that is, like all academic practice, both inclusive and exclusive.

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Introduction

On a cold winter evening in 1997, I braved the elements to attend a highly publicized and eagerly anticipated event taking place at a small humanities college. The event was a panel discussion of the recently perpetrated "Sokal hoax," which saw physicist Alan Sokal attempt to expose the failings of cultural studies with a parodic essay that seemed to suggest that contemporary cultural theory could tell us much about the social constructedness of quantum physics. Failing to recognize that the piece was an ironic attack intended to prove the worthless nature of interdisciplinary scholarship, the editors of the prominent cultural studies journal, Social Text, accepted the essay for publication. Their failure to recognize Sokal's essay as a lot of non-sensical gibberish seemed to prove Sokal's belief that an interdisciplinary cultural studies practice is indeed unworthy of the name scholarship. The incident sparked an uproar within the academy, and it was difficult to find a seat in the large (but crowded and over-heated) lecture hall where the panel sat.

There were approximately nine people participating in this discussion, all of whom represented different disciplines. The event began with statements given by each member of the panel and proceeded to an open discussion and acceptance of questions from the audience. The discussion began with a series of judicious and sensible statements given by some of the panel members. The discussion, however, very quickly devolved into a heated frenzy of insults and accusations levelled at scientists by humanists and vice versa. As a

rather idealistic graduate student in English, I was no less than appalled at what I perceived to be childish, counter-productive, and decidedly unscholarly behaviour. The aim of all scholarship, it seemed to me, was a shared one, but this overt antagonism quickly divested me of my rather naive illusions. I suddenly realized that many contemporary academics are more interested in valorizing and affirming the superiority of their own disciplines than they are in working cooperatively in their common quest to further human understanding.

My awareness of this interdisciplinary tension was heightened when I left the English department and began a second graduate degree in Applied Language Studies. No longer immersed in the discipline, I was, quite frankly, surprised by a few incidents that revealed either thinly veiled or overtly hostile views of my originating discipline. Indeed, it seemed that Michael Carter (1992) was quite right to suggest that "everywhere you turn these days there is somebody else crying over the demise of Western civilization and pointing an accusatory finger at English departments" (p. 303). Curious, I set out to discover the reasons for the discipline's unpopularity. In the course of my research, I discovered that the antagonism enacted between English and other disciplines is also found within the discipline itself, and that this inter- and intradisciplinary conflict is fuelled by and focussed on very similar issues.

Many dissenting voices identify the explicitly theory-based and interdisciplinary branch of scholarship known as "cultural studies" as the precipitator and perpetuator of this ongoing and intensifying academic conflict. Many cultural studies practitioners were trained by and/or are practising in departments of English; thus the discipline has

frequently been the subject of intense scrutiny and scathing criticism. Under the broad umbrella of cultural studies, "literary" scholars now frequently draw on theories from other disciplines, engage with a range of cultural and non-literary issues, and discuss an ever-growing body of primary texts; as M.H. Abrams (1997) notes, "[i]t has been remarked that, these days, if one wants to study Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Derrida, or Foucault, one must apply not to departments of philosophy, psychology, or sociology, but to departments of English or comparative literature" (p. 124). The boundaries of "English," a discipline once identifiable through conventionalized methods and a recognizable canon, have indeed become difficult to discern. This substantive, methodological, and canonical inclusiveness has its defenders and its critics: some scholars uphold interdisciplinarity as a moral imperative, a political and social obligation for the discipline to become more inclusive in both its objects of and approaches to literary study, while others protest the discipline's alleged academic imperialism and intellectual irresponsibility.

The broadened scope, the perceived inaccessibility, and the scholarly methods of interdisciplinary practice are primary causes of contention, and these points of dissent are also a corollary of the relatively recent ascension of "literary theory." Most of this so-called literary theory has its origins in other disciplines, and the literary critic's enthusiastic adoption of extradisciplinary theory, as Susan Peck MacDonald (1990) observes, has resulted in the

. . . enormous production of theory and interpretation in the last decade, with traditionalists pitted against vanguard critics--structuralists, post-structuralists, deconstructionists,

feminists, Freudians, Marxists, new historicists, and so on--
and vanguard critics of one sort pitted against those of
another sort. (p. 31)

As MacDonald points out, the theoretical bent of the discipline's interdisciplinary practitioners has not escaped criticism from within the English department itself, and the rift between interdisciplinarians and their more traditionalist colleagues seems to have grown wider in recent years.

Those literary critics who argue in favour of interdisciplinarity tend to be more radical scholars, whose subscription to what Stanley Fish (1989a/1994) calls "left culturalist theory" (p. 231) demands a practice that is more inclusive in both its objects of and approaches to literary study. But the ideology of inclusion that is concomitant with interdisciplinary practice has resulted in a discourse that continues to become increasingly exclusive; there are now so many different theories and approaches used by literary critics that it has become difficult even for the initiated to keep abreast of their colleagues' often esoteric interests. Those who oppose this "new" interdisciplinarity tend to be more conservative literary scholars who advocate a practice that is more exclusive in its notions of literary-critical method and in its definition of appropriate literary texts. The resulting paradox is a reversal of the contradiction between ideology and discourse found in the work of more "liberal" critics; subscription to a more exclusive practice generates a mode of discourse that is arguably more accessible and consequently more inclusive than that produced by critics who uphold ideologies of theoretical and textual inclusion. Yet, even though the textual practices of interdisciplinarians and traditionalists enact a similar paradox of inclusion and exclusion, both pro and con debaters persist in deploying a

rhetoric of polarization that constructs and upholds this fractious division over the issue of interdisciplinarity.

Emphasizing their differences and ignoring their similarities, the extreme opposition upheld by these debaters has led to what seems to be an irresolvable impasse. It must be acknowledged, however, that this polarizing rhetoric is produced by scholars who adhere to extreme rather than typical views. Though, as Richard Levin (1993) quite rightly notes, debaters on both sides of intradisciplinary debate posit ideologically motivated arguments that erroneously locate "all truth and virtue on one side and all error and evil on the other" (p. 34), this intense disciplinary dichotomization is not typical of mainstream English departments. But, in the interest of showing how even the most extremely opposed arguments can reveal ideological similarities, I have chosen texts that represent these polar extremes of the disciplinary spectrum.

Rather than considering only the substantive claims made by these debaters, an approach that has not led to resolution but seems rather to intensify this inter- and intradisciplinary antagonism, this study also examines the discursive practices of critics on both sides of this disciplinary divide. In this discursive analysis, I rely on methodologies that allow us to look beyond their surface polarity to see that these conflicting positions on disciplinary practice are not as different as they may seem. Close discursive analysis of these arguments suggests that, despite debaters' claims to the contrary, the ideological impetus of the practice's defenders is not significantly different from that of those who challenge the premises of interdisciplinarity: regardless of their expressed beliefs, this

study suggests that both maligners and defenders of interdisciplinarity simultaneously and paradoxically subscribe to opposing ideologies of inclusion and exclusion.

Drawing on theories and analytical tools developed by rhetorical critics, sociologists, sociolinguists, and discourse analysts, this study is interdisciplinary in its approach as well as its topic. And the discourse that relates and constructs its argument will necessarily embody many of the same discursive features it describes; as Abrams (1997) notes, any poststructuralist critique of language and rationality inevitably "rounds back upon and subverts the subverter" (p. 118). But the purpose of this work is not to assign blame, take sides, or propose a new model for a less contradictory form of academic discourse. Rather, the overarching aim of this analysis is to show that the discourse of disparate disciplines and schools (albeit to differing degrees) similarly and simultaneously subscribes to what are believed to be paradoxical modes of thinking and knowing, thus both reflecting and enacting a deeply entrenched epistemic tension that informs this contradictory rhetoric of interdisciplinarity.

Chapter One begins with a brief history of the rise of cultural studies and its relation to the English department; next, some particularly salient examples of the discursive tension inherent in this interdisciplinary debate are drawn from a recent and rhetorically violent skirmish dubbed the "Science Wars"; the chapter concludes by showing how epistemological belief both informs and perpetuates this rhetorical conflict. The second chapter explores the use of figurative language in interdisciplinary arguments, demonstrating that the spatial metaphors used to depict a restrictive and hegemonic disciplinary opposition reinscribe without eliminating the "boundaries" that

interdisciplinary practice is supposed to transcend. In this chapter, I will also show how metaphors drawn from the discourse of science enact a similar paradox by claiming the authority associated with scientific epistemologies, yet also subvert that authority by privileging the interpretive over the empirical. Chapter Three is a semantic analysis of two selected texts, in which I compare an argument written in support of interdisciplinary practice with one that adamantly criticizes the interdisciplinary turn in literary studies. Through this micro-analysis, I offer an illustration of the ways in which the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity is deeply and inherently contradictory at the semantic level, explicitly opposing conventional disciplinarity while simultaneously circumscribing an equally exclusive, though somewhat refigured, disciplinary practice. The final chapter considers the informing role of the aesthetic in traditionalist disciplinary arguments; in it, I argue that the aesthetic's role in defining disciplinary genres and thus the discipline itself challenges the ideology of exclusion that is often upheld by and certainly attributed to more traditional literary critics. My overall aim is to demonstrate that, regardless of whether scholars advocate traditional disciplinarity or explicitly affirm the value of interdisciplinary study, these seemingly polarized versions of literary studies are not as different as they may seem: ultimately, both sides in this debate uphold academic practices that are at once empirical and interpretive, specific and indeterminate, exclusive and inclusive.

Chapter One

Gestures and Postures: The Interdisciplinary Debate

In the interest of clarifying some of the interdisciplinary debate's key issues, I will begin by briefly considering the rise of cultural studies in the academy and its relation to English, a discipline whose implicit and often expressed aim is the study of literature. After a few decades of prominence, the New Criticism that had revolutionized the discipline beginning in the 1930s was gradually supplanted by "theory." The rise of theory, M.H. Abrams (1997) suggests, began in the late 1960s when Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Todorov, and other soon-to-be prominent theorists participated in a conference at Johns Hopkins (p. 130, n. 1). In retrospect, Abrams suggests, we can see that the most influential of these newly adopted theorists came to be the "postmodernist" or "poststructuralist" French writers, Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, as well as the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser. In addition to these contributors, Abrams identifies the perhaps equally influential modes of reader-response theory, reception theory, semiotic theory, speech-act theory, and Bakhtinian dialogic theory. These theoretical movements that fall under the general rubric of poststructuralism present significant challenges to the social, political, cultural, and academic status quo. Both articulating and generating an acute political and social self-consciousness, poststructuralist theories are united in their belief

that, as Charles Bazerman (1988) puts it, "different sign systems create incomparably different worlds of consciousness" (p. 20).¹ Though these theories similarly emphasize the instability of language, the inescapability of ideology, and the constructed nature of knowledge, Bakhtin's notions of dialogism seem best to capture the poststructuralist view of language as the means of both upholding and subverting hegemonic ideologies.² Poststructuralist theory led its adherents in a collective quest to question, challenge, and ultimately delegitimize modes of discourse deployed in support of political, social, and cultural ideologies. These theory-driven leftist tendencies within the academy were exacerbated by the larger world's reinstatement of political conservatism in the form of the Thatcher, Reagan, and (presumably) Mulroney governments. As Simon Frith (1992) notes, when the political climate of the 1980s in Britain and America shifted to the right, English departments reacted by moving further to the left, a reaction that was also felt in Canada.

¹ This highly influential social constructionist view is closely allied with an equally skeptical approach that Herbert Simons (1990) calls the "rhetoric of inquiry." The general point of this intellectual movement is "that no system of logic is ever self-validating; it depends, rather on some other system for its support" (p. 14). Bazerman (1988) also notes that this is not a twentieth-century notion: "This vision of the world of human consciousness being constructed by human language-making goes back to the Sophists and to the Biblical description of Adam naming the animals." But it is important to recognize that this idea has gained greater prominence with the rise of theory, finding "its currently most influential form in the literary/linguistic theories of structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction" (p. 20).

² Bakhtin arrived somewhat late on the theoretical scene. But, as David Lodge (1987) points out, his work was an uncanny articulation of the issues poststructuralism had brought to the forefront: "like many other readers," Lodge was "awestruck by the discovery that he was thinking his way, with the minimum of intellectual and material support, through the questions which preoccupy us, decades before we even thought of them" (p. 91).

Overt and growing resistance to right-wing politics was clearly a corollary effect of theory's ascension; despite the fact that poststructuralism saw the rise of multiple and sometimes conflicting schools of thought, these many movements nevertheless share some common ground. As Fish (1994) suggests, the diverse theoretical alliances (and combinations thereof) that are found within the realm of cultural studies are alike in two important ways: first, in their collective hostility toward the social structures that maintain political authority and, second, in their shared hostility toward the institutional structures that must be resisted in order for various disciplines to establish and extend their territory.

But in the postmodern academy, these two shared sites of resistance are ultimately inseparable. The inherently interdisciplinary practice of cultural studies is both explicitly and implicitly impeded by institutional and disciplinary structures whose very presence can be seen as a threat to the socially conscious postmodernist, who is well aware of both the constructedness and the force of these boundaries. These oppressive political and institutional structures are seen not only as a barrier to the academic privilege of intellectual freedom, but also as an impediment to the enlightened intellectual's attempt to live up to what are often believed to be political and social responsibilities.

Many postmodern academics attempt to fulfill their perceived social and political obligations by exposing--with the aim of erasing--these artificial boundaries, these institutional constructions that both reflect and perpetuate an oppressive social and political hierarchy. Thus Eugene Goodheart (1997a) notes that

[i]n my own discipline of literary studies, ideology critique rules the roost. It is a species of the hermeneutics of suspicion and one of the sources of the culture war. There

is nothing more aggressive than the effort to demystify the supposed illusion of others. (p. 167)

And any movement that opposes a given institution with the aim of exposing its constructedness, demystifying its own and others' illusions, and consequently depriving it of its authority is inevitably subject to counterattack.

Bruce Robbins (1995), a prominent figure working in cultural studies, ventriloquizes the central premises of the English department's critics:

Literary criticism has become too politicized. In following after theory and cultural studies, it has wandered away from its true path, its proper object of study. . . . In short, it is time for literary critics to get back to the activity to which their title commits them: the interpretation of literary texts.

(p. 95)

Robbins, of course, does not share this view. On the surface, Robbins's is a rather diplomatic depiction of an essentially idealistic protest; from this perspective, the English department's impulse toward redefinition within the broader parameters of cultural studies is unfair to the discipline itself. This sort of argument emphasizes the discipline's failure to live up to its own academic mission and intellectual responsibility, and thus tends to gloss over the motivating self-interest of those who express these views.

But there is a second and equally important aspect to the criticism levelled at cultural studies; as Lodge (1987) affirms, scholarly discourse is never truly objective, but is "saturated in the kind of dialogic rhetoric that Bakhtin named 'hidden polemic'" (p. 95). Imitating the arguments of his opponents, Robbins also makes it clear that the discipline's critics see that the real problem with English lies in its disregard for disciplinary boundaries. This source of contention suggests that the opponents of cultural studies also

believe that the practice extends into realms where it does not belong, unfairly encroaching on territory staked out by other disciplines. This tension between the ostensibly purist argument and the ideologically motivated and self-interested view is aptly captured in Robbins's paraphrase, a simultaneous incarnation of academic altruism and disciplinary self-interest. As we shall see, this contradiction is inevitably manifest in the discourse of the interdisciplinarity debate, a mode of argument that obscures subjectivity beneath gestures of objectivity. Moreover, much of the debate's discourse evinces its own impulse toward academic imperialism, even when this imperialistic tendency is explicitly denied or overtly opposed. Though many critics of cultural studies resent the discipline's intrusion into their own disciplinary territory, this does not mean that these dissenters do not participate in the very practice they set out to condemn.

The polarization of the "two cultures" identified by C.P. Snow in his (in)famous book of 1962 has become much more visible and their relationship much more antagonistic in recent years. As a result, the most heated engagements in the interdisciplinary conflict are found in the often acrimonious debates between the polarized faculties of "hard" sciences and "soft" humanities. Cultural studies practitioners have been busy demystifying the language of science; a stroll through the science section of the library will quickly turn up many recent books on the rhetoric of science, the social construction of science, and the sociology of science. This apparent popularity of cultural studies is often taken as evidence of its uncompromised success; as George Dillon (1991) points out, social constructionists tend to hold the belief that "[t]he traditionally firm lines between science and literature, reason and rhetoric, have been challenged and abolished"

(p. 1). But, as Dillon goes on to suggest, a closer look at academic discourse will reveal "anything but uniformity and consensus about the rules of the game, and this diversity does not present a picture of happy pluralism, but of competition and contention" (p. 13). The success of cultural studies' attempts to expose the constructedness of an empirically based and supposedly objective discipline is limited; far from being widely accepted, these critiques continue to be met with often hostile reactions from scientists. Using examples from the "Science Wars" (a relatively recent outgrowth of the culture wars), the remainder of this chapter will explore some of the interdisciplinary debate's key issues, demonstrate the contradictory nature of its discourse, and consider the relation of this contradictory rhetoric to epistemological difference.

Sometimes this contradictory tension lies beneath the surface of the discourse, but at other times it is blatantly obvious. Let us begin on an outrageously obvious note, with the 1994 diatribe, Higher Superstition, by biologist Paul R. Gross and mathematician Norman Levitt. Though these contradictory tendencies are rarely as obvious as they are in Gross and Levitt's unflinching jeremiad, their work does provide a usefully clear example of a not-so-unusual academic double standard.

Gross and Levitt are particularly offended by the peculiar brand of "postmodern thought" found in the not-so-scholarly work of "fields such as literary criticism, social history, and a new hybrid called 'cultural studies'" (p. 4). Their relentless and unforgiving attack on the humanities is largely aimed at literary studies, the discipline guilty of

spawning what these hard scientists derisively dub "the academic left."³ Gross and Levitt contend that "[t]he academic left is embedded in a nearly inviolable insularity," the lamentable legacy of the traditional humanists (p. 7). Yet, not seeming to recognize the contradiction, Gross and Levitt also describe cultural studies as a mishmash of arbitrarily linked theories from disparate disciplines, an idiosyncratic hybrid non-discipline that lacks an identifiable center or a unifying body of theory. These scientists seem especially indignant at cultural studies' lack of a disciplinary home, where this dangerous breed of academic could perhaps be safely contained without threatening to contaminate the realm of "pure" science. In their territorial defense of their own field of study, these scientists unequivocally condemn the collective postmodernist attempt "to bring science within its empire" (p. 13).

But, despite their insistence that leftist, feminist, Marxist, and multicultural theory-wielders have no business polluting the sanctity of science with their cultural studies nonsense, Gross and Levitt have no problem openly advocating the ability and even the right of scientists to take on the work of the humanities if they so choose. In an astonishingly arrogant passage, Gross and Levitt argue that the scientists they know have "extensive" and even "enormous" knowledge of "music, art, history, philosophy, and literature." Moreover, if

the humanities department of MIT (a bastion, by the way, of left-wing rectitude) were to walk out in a huff, the scientific faculty could, at need and with enough released time, patch

³ This is a term Gross and Levitt attempt to use with "reasonable precision." The academic left "is comprised, in the main, of humanists and social scientists; rarely do working natural scientists. . . show up within its ranks" (p. 3).

together a humanities curriculum, to be taught by the scientists themselves. . . . What the opposite situation--a walkout by the scientists--would produce, as the humanities department tried to cope with the demand for science education, we leave to the reader's imagination. (p. 243)

In Gross and Levitt's world of bumbling and inept cultural studies practitioners, this scene would likely bear a close resemblance to one from a Jerry Lewis picture. In the interest of being consistent with these complainant's view of the grossly limited capabilities of their colleagues in the faculty of arts, we can only imagine that MIT's humanities professors are incapable of adapting to the rigours of science, and their attempts to do so would enact an unmatched travesty resulting in utter failure. In Gross and Levitt's scheme of things, only scientists are capable of moving beyond the boundaries of their own discipline to produce work worthy of the name scholarship: postmodernist thought, on the other hand, is deluded in its faith "in its own omniscience" (p. 74). Higher Superstition's overt insistence on disciplinary exclusivity in the realm of pure science, when considered in light of their claim that scientists are or could easily be proficient in many disciplines, is an extremely virulent and unusually candid example of the tendency of anti-interdisciplinary to contradict their explicit support of an exclusionary disciplinarity.⁴

Higher Superstition did not go unanswered. The most notable of these reactions came in response to the personal and scathing attacks on Andrew Ross, a science critic, professor of American Studies, and one of the editors of the cultural studies journal, Social Text. Ross retaliated by organizing the journal's now infamous "Science Wars"

⁴ A "new" version of Higher Superstition came out this year (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Their argument, however, remains unchanged; except for some additional "Supplementary Notes," the text is exactly as it appears in the 1994 edition.

issue, which included the bogus and parodic cultural studies essay submitted by physicist Alan Sokal. Published under the explicitly interdisciplinary title, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," Sokal's paper is an ironic attack intended to expose the folly of cultural studies and the impossibility of a truly scholarly interdisciplinarity. The Sokal hoax, as it has come to be known, seemed to affirm Gross and Levitt's claim that cultural studies is indeed nonsense.

In what was perhaps an attempt to save face and redraw our attention to the genuine article, other essays that appeared with Sokal's in Social Text were republished (along with some new contributions) in a book version of Science Wars. By republishing these essays in a new collection, these cultural studies practitioners affirm their allegiance and their mutual support of each others' work; in their bid to defend the right and worth of their interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, they assume a disciplinary posture by making an overt gesture of solidarity in the face of adversity. Uniting a paradoxical interdisciplinary discipline, this gesture styles the practice of cultural studies in contradictory terms.

This paradoxical disciplinarity is also embodied in the discourse of Gross and Levitt's respondents, a contradictory rhetoric that relies on equally paradoxical gestures and postures. According to Ross (1996), the Science Wars collection includes "appropriately varied" responses to Higher Superstition and encompasses the work of "natural scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and scholars in cultural studies and literary studies." Though Ross emphasizes the contributors' interdisciplinarity, he goes on to gloss their shared practice as "science studies" (p. 14), a term that has distinctly

disciplinary connotations. Other contributors assume a similar stance, justifying their own right and ability to be interdisciplinary while simultaneously revealing their impulse toward a homogeneous and exclusionary disciplinary identification. Although most of these essays are not as overtly contradictory or hostile as Gross and Levitt's book, the discourse of Science Wars nonetheless reveals an ideological contradiction not unlike that found in Higher Superstition.

Under the revealing title, "Consolidating the Canon," N. Katherine Hayles (1996) responds to Gross and Levitt's rant in a less strident tone and with a more carefully measured argument.⁵ She answers Higher Superstition's indictment of cultural studies by emphasizing the potentially positive effects of what was intended to be a debilitating diatribe: "Whatever else the book does," Hayles avers, "it demonstrates convincingly that constructivist arguments can no longer be ignored" (p. 226). Hayles's choice of words here is both revealing and strategic. First, she disempowers the scientists by insisting that Gross and Levitt's hostile tactics have backfired. Contrary to their primary intent to prove the dangers inherent in the practice, Hayles suggests, these scientists have inadvertently affirmed the significant and now undeniable influence of cultural studies. Second, by affirming the validity of the constructivist approach and assuming the posture of a disciplinarian, Hayles both empowers and defines her own "discipline."

⁵ Hayles's work is vilified by Gross and Levitt: "Hayles's arguments, such as they are, are based on subjective and shoddy analogies, leaky metaphors, and (not unusual for work immersed in postmodern theory) flat and unsupported assertions" (1994, p. 99).

Hayles goes on to grant cultural studies even greater disciplinary structure and identity: practitioners, Hayles suggests, "can draw a different lesson from [Gross and Levitt's] book." Hayles proposes that

we use the opportunity to articulate the ideas that have been so extensively documented by different researchers working with various materials that they constitute a canon of the cultural and social studies of science. (p. 226)

A disciplinary canon, Hayles argues, will demonstrate that the theories and approaches of cultural studies (what she calls "ideas") "are firmly enough established so they will not easily be displaced" (p. 226). In the academic world, traditional disciplines are very much defined by their canons. Moreover, disciplinary authority is crucially dependent on a discipline's canonical works; in Hayles's terms, the way to success for this putatively radical and subversive approach to scholarship lies along the path of traditionalist conformity. The legitimation of cultural studies, Hayles thus argues, can only be realized if its practitioners adopt the type of authoritarian stance they explicitly aim to subvert.

The solidarity and authority implied by a cultural studies canon also serves as a means of counterattack against the more traditional and longer-standing authority of science. In a maneuver that is at once defensive and offensive, Hayles recommends for the cultural studies canon works that aim to demonstrate "why the claim for a pristine 'core' of science is unsustainable" (p. 228). Hayles thus reveals a tendency toward disciplinary imperialism, a tendency reaffirmed when she goes on to propose that cultural studies should search for "allies" among disparate disciplines, including the sciences, and "forge alliances with them" (p. 233). Hayles's aim is to find sympathetic scientists who will

abandon their disciplinary affiliation and join the newly formed ranks of this curious discipline that isn't. Hayles affirms the value of interdisciplinarity in cultural studies by proposing to welcome those with other distinct disciplinary affiliations to the cultural studies' camp, but her aim in recommending this interdisciplinary inclusion is to establish more clearly an exclusive disciplinary identity; in this scenario, inclusion is not synonymous with interdisciplinarity.

This disciplinary/interdisciplinary paradox is found in the mutually negating propositions posited in arguments coming from both sides in the Science Wars. These substantive contradictions level the distinctions these antagonistic debaters aim to uphold, the result of which is a similarly contradictory rhetoric that is manifest in style as well as content. A strident and relentless diatribe, Higher Superstition is, by the authors' own admission, a polemic rather than an empirical study. Nevertheless, Gross and Levitt do not hesitate to criticize the unscholarly rhetorical obfuscations and manipulations of the academic left, insisting that "postmodernism is more a matter of attitude and emotional tonality than of rigorous axiomatics" (p. 17). In a work that is semi-hysterical in tone and assertive rather than demonstrative in content, Gross and Levitt's description of the rhetoric of cultural studies seems equally applicable to their own work. Though it is clear that Gross and Levitt's discourse is, to an extent, a deliberate parody of the rhetoric of cultural studies, their attempt to fight fire-with-fire simply doesn't work. Both commenting on and serving as a useful illustration of the inseparability of language and ideology, Gross and Levitt's critique of cultural studies, as Abrams (1997) would say, "rounds back upon and subverts the subverter" (p. 118).

In response to Gross and Levitt's attack on the rhetorical and thus worthless nature of cultural studies scholarship, Hayles offers a similar stylistic critique of Higher Superstition, which she describes as a piece of "shoddy scholarship" that attempts to camouflage argumentative weakness with "virulent rhetoric" (p. 227). Yet, in a gesture of objectivity, Hayles is careful not to level criticism only at the enemy. Adopting an explicitly objective critical view of cultural studies, Hayles readily concedes that "academic discourse in the humanities, particularly in literary studies, has been dominated by a rhetoric of resistance" (p. 233). But, even though she acknowledges this fault, Hayles goes on to suggest that cultural studies' reliance on rhetorical fervour is not attributable to problems inherent in the practice; rather, she looks outside of this troubled discourse community to find another cause.

Once again, Hayles affirms the need to establish cultural studies as a genuine and distinct discipline. This tendency to deploy an inflammatory rhetoric is, she argues, necessary and ultimately attributable to a lack of disciplinary identity: cultural studies, Hayles insists, has been too often "practiced in a vacuum" (p. 233). According to Hayles, the self-styled rhetorical "freedom fighters" (p. 234) working in cultural studies need to continue in the interdisciplinary vein, pushing beyond the limited forums imposed by disciplinary boundaries, but at the same time need to unite and act collectively within their own self-delineated disciplinary structure.

Hayles thus seems to affirm Gross and Levitt's claim that the disparate theories associated with cultural studies and (presumably) the discourse that relies on these theories share an underlying unity in that "[t]hey are more a matter of rhetorical style than

of logical articulation" (p. 11). These hostile adversaries, despite their scathing indictments of one another's rhetorical tactics, inadvertently agree on the same point: both Hayles and the scientists demonstrate and suggest that an identifiable rhetoric grants cultural studies a degree of disciplinary unity, even as its practitioners insist on claiming that this mode of inquiry is and should continue to be freely interdisciplinary.

But Gross and Levitt's discourse is just as contradictory; enacting the paradox in reverse, their argument aims to uphold disciplinary exclusivity, but their method is interdisciplinary. Despite their overt allegiance to the rigidly conceptualized disciplines they categorize as "hard" science, Gross and Levitt's project is rhetorical in nature and is thus unavoidably interdisciplinary; as Angus and Langsdorf (1993) rightly point out, when "the sciences defend their boundaries. . .they are forced to enter the domain of philosophy and rhetoric" (p. 5). These antagonistic science warriors, like their cultural studies adversaries, rely on rhetorical force; these scientists simultaneously proclaim their subscription to scientific objectivity while using the subjective rhetorical tools of their declared opponents. Higher Superstition thus seems to affirm Dillon's suggestion that the discourse of science embraces an academic double-standard: "the scientific discourse community is not necessarily those who observe the norms in their own writing, but who employ them in judging and reacting to the writing of others" (p. 59). Even though Gross and Levitt do not define or present their book as "objective" scientific discourse nor do they deny the fact that they rely on the same rhetorical strategies they find so offensive in their opponents, they nevertheless insist on positioning their work and their discourse over-against the postmodern rhetorical Other.

And the social constructionists have their own discursive double-standard.

Poststructuralist theory has made it clear to its adherents that, as William Cain (1996) points out, "[n]o claims can be objective because none is free from interpretation;" thus "all claims depend upon and are presented through rhetoric: they are efforts at persuasion" (p. xix). There is no denying the significant and widespread influence of this primary poststructuralist belief, a popularity that leads rhetorician Kenneth Gergen (1990) to suggest that cultural studies, though still experiencing disciplinary growing pains, has realized its primary goal of proving the indisputable truth of this foundational premise.

This assemblage of practitioners from various disciplines, Gergen argues, "has seen through the humbug, broken through the ontological sham, and dared to pull the rug from under truth and knowledge" (p. 296). Despite the undeniable influence of poststructuralism, the example of the Science Wars shows that its premises are far from being accepted as universal truth. And Gergen, seemingly unwittingly, goes on to reveal the self-subverting nature of poststructuralist claims: "it is this group that understands the craft of knowledge making--of constructing compelling realities" (p. 296). Social constructionists, then, understand the artificiality of knowledge-making well enough to disassemble the objectivity claimed by science. On the other hand, though, their supreme understanding of the way compelling realities are constructed must make them skillful builders of a "reality" that can only be equally contrived.

For the avowed social constructionist, there is no reality other than the one constructed (largely) by language. Thus many interdisciplinarians, particularly those working from a New Historicist, Marxist, or feminist perspective, are intent on relocating

and reading the written work within the social, cultural, and political conditions of its production and reception, often with the aim of showing how these larger "realities" are constructed. On the other hand, for every practitioner who insists on relocating scholarly practice within a more human context, there seems to be another equally determined to remove the text from the location of its production and reception; as Abrams (1997) suggests, many poststructuralist theories, "whatever their disagreements, coincide in abstracting literary texts from the human world and relocating them in a nonhuman site" (p. 115). Removed from the world in which they originate, the discourses that are analyzed and produced in the poststructuralist realm of cultural studies become as abstract as the theories used to interpret them. This abstract and interpretive basis for knowledge claims is clearly unacceptable to Gross and Levitt, who argue that "postmodern philosophy, in its guise as literary theory, flatteringly concedes a high degree of power to the skills and habits of mind of literary critics" (p. 84). According to these scientists, the existence of a postmodern academic left is "the manifestation of a certain intellectual debility afflicting the contemporary university," and "[w]hat is common to all of them becomes clear at the rhetorical level" (pp. 7-12). For these scientists, only the empirical method is of real scholarly value and is thus the only method that can produce genuine knowledge.

Ironically, though, Gross and Levitt's discourse reveals that any disciplinary claim--including their own--is ultimately subjective. Higher Superstition subscribes to an explicitly subjective view, what Ross rightly (1996) calls "the elitist perception that only scientists can do science" (p. 13). Gross and Levitt are quite willing to make claims for

scientists' often "enormous" understanding of the humanities, but are unwilling to grant legitimacy to the interdisciplinarity practices of scholars from "softer" disciplines. But this exclusionary tendency is also apparent in Hayles's essay. Hayles claims that many readers of Higher Superstition, "especially in the sciences, have no independent experience of the research by which they can judge [Gross and Levitt's] distortions and misrepresentations" of cultural studies (p. 234).⁶ Many of these readers, Hayles suggests, would be incapable of evaluating Gross and Levitt's argument because they lack the necessary experience. But Hayles and the other contributors to Science Wars also had their training in other disciplines; apparently, one needs to be an actual practitioner of cultural studies in order to fairly assess Gross and Levitt's view of the work done in cultural studies. Hayles does not, however, claim that scientists and other readers would not be capable of the task; unlike Gross and Levitt, who maintain that scholars from the humanities could not do the work of science, Hayles allows for the possibility of participation. Even so, both sides in this debate maintain that the other is incapable of even a small degree of meaningful participation in their respective disciplinary worlds.

This similar arbitrary exclusion also suggests that the conflict is, from both perspectives, an epistemological one. Gross and Levitt (1994) argue that the postmodernists are settling "old scores" over "epistemological ranking." This disciplinary hierarchy is overtly endorsed by these scientists, whose disciplines, they claim, are seen to produce "reliable knowledge" that is "assembled into coherent theories." Literary criticism

⁶ Hayles's reluctance to grant a humanistic understanding to those in the hard sciences seems especially surprising in light of the fact that she holds graduate degrees in both chemistry and literature (Ross, 1996, p. 321).

in all its manifestations, they argue, is "subjective beyond hope of redemption, and thus out of the running in the epistemological sweepstakes." According to Gross and Levitt, "[t]he recent critiques of science incarnate attempts to regain the high ground, to assert that the methods of social theory and literary analysis are equal in epistemic power to those of science" (p. 12). Gross and Levitt suggest that critics of science are motivated by their desire to affirm their own approach's validity and ultimate superiority. Though this conclusion seems equally applicable to Gross and Levitt's own ends--an irony these avowed empiricists conveniently overlook--it is not unfounded.

Ross (1996) acknowledges cultural studies' epistemological difference, but makes a different statement of intention. Ross contends that the aim of cultural studies analyses of the rhetoric and practice of science is to force the latter discipline toward a "self-modification of the universalist claims maintained on behalf of empirical rationality" (p. 5). Here Ross assumes an idealistic posture, suggesting that science critics' concern lies with the object of their study; their interest is styled by Ross as an aim to help science improve itself. But, as Gross and Levitt suggest, the cultural studies critique of science is two-pronged in intent; the aim of social constructionism, they argue, is "to undermine [science's] epistemic authority" and "to valorize 'ways of knowing' incompatible with it" (p. 11). Even though Gross and Levitt are just as determined to undermine the epistemic authority claimed by cultural studies, these scientists seem quite right on this point; social constructionist critiques are indeed intent on revealing the subjectivity inherent in any

mode of intellectual inquiry, a revelation that simultaneously affirms what they believe to be the greater credibility of their very different epistemological orientation.⁷

Privileging the modes of inquiry claimed by their own disciplines has locked these opponents in an irresolvable conflict, a conflict that is precipitated and perpetuated by the perceived irreconcilability of their respective epistemological beliefs. And, as Lodge (1987) observes, "there is a tendency for binary oppositions to become hierarchies, one term being privileged over the other" (p. 91): both sides in this debate construct an academic hierarchy by insisting that their discipline's methods, approaches, and theories are somehow superior to those of the other. Yet both points of view mistakenly gloss over the interdisciplinarity inherent in all academic practice, scientific and otherwise.

Emphasizing the constructedness of disciplinary boundaries, Sabin (1997) rightly notes that

The dichotomy between so-called nostalgic conservatism and the so-called radicalism of interdisciplinarity disables rational discussion by erasing the variegated educational experiences that make up the actuality of so many individual histories. (p. 89)

As anyone who has gone through the postsecondary system can attest, the demands of required classes and the diversity required in any academic programme leaves no graduate bereft of an at least marginally interdisciplinary education. And this interdisciplinarity does not disappear when one enters the world of academic specialization.

⁷ Gross and Levitt make a valid point when they suggest that "postmodern" scholars reveal a "radical epistemological skepticism" that "informs their commentaries on science, though rarely is it seen to impeach their own researches" (p. 11). However, if we reverse the equation by transposing "postmodern" and "science," the statement seems equally valid.

Many scholars suggest that literary studies and cultural studies have always been inseparable, an interdisciplinarity that is apparent in both its history and its practice. Frith (1992) argues that "literary criticism has always been theoretical (even if the theories involved change) and to study literature has always been to study culture. . . . In practice, then, English studies have always been multidisciplinary" (p. 7).⁸ Nor are literary and cultural studies divorced from practices claimed as the province of science. Louis Menand (1997) points out that "the first university English departments were. . . composed of professional scholars who tended to emphasize the utilitarian and scientific value of their research and pedagogy." A discipline once dominated by philologists, whose study of language depended on empirical evidence and rigid methodologies, "the history of the English department is the history of efforts to fit a series of new paradigms into this self-consciously science-based structure" (Menand, 1997, p. 206).⁹ And this tension in literary studies is not unlike that found in the larger interdisciplinary debate; revealing a similar friction between empirical and interpretive ways of knowing, the intradisciplinary conflict Menand describes shares a common impetus with the Science Wars.

⁸ Frith, whose training is in sociology and was in 1992 appointed Chair of the English department at Strathclyde, likely has a personal interest in upholding literary studies as an interdisciplinary practice. Nevertheless, his claim seems valid and is not unsupported by other scholars (Abrams 1997; Gallagher 1997; Parini 1997; Hodge 1990).

⁹ Menand's view is supported by Abrams's (1997) similar recognition of a conflict that is epistemological in nature. Even though critical theory "is as old as Aristotle's *Poetics*," Abrams suggests, poststructural theories are "genuinely revolutionary" because they "alter drastically the enduring Western paradigm. . . for dealing with literature" (p. 115). The paradigm has shifted away from an emphasis on concrete literary evidence in a movement toward more abstract theorizing; the predominance of one approach, however, does not negate the other.

But, as Robert Hodge (1990) has found in his study of literary criticism, subscription to one school of thought does not negate the theories and methodologies of the other. Hodge demonstrates that the ideological tension created by this convergence is necessarily manifest in the discipline's discourse, where the disparate approaches of the "old" and the "new" remain in conflict. This unhappy union of what are believed to be polarized ways of understanding gives rise to "an analytic practice that is strategically concerned with heterogeneity and contradiction as well as norms and continuities" (p. 18). As Hodge describes it, this discursive friction can be seen as the incarnation of the inharmonious convergence of the empirical and the interpretive, a binary opposition of modes of inquiry and argumentation that are perceived as ultimately contradictory and incompatible.

Like the humanities and social sciences, the hard sciences have not evolved in isolation, nor do they rely solely on practices and methodologies believed to be exclusive to scientific disciplines. As Abraham Edel (1990) astutely points out, as much as the humanities "engage in hypothesis, deduction, observation, verification" (p. 3), all disciplines rely on "[i]magination, values and purposes, evidence, responsible tracing of relations, general ideas, particularity, and the rest" (p. 8). The difference in approach is one of degree rather than kind, as Edel goes on to suggest,

In the humanities the exercise of the imagination is in the forefront and constantly obvious; in the sciences it is most evident in bold leaps on the theoretical frontier. In the humanities, the rigorous search for evidence is often relaxed; in the sciences it is on its best behavior. (p. 8)

The problem is that opponents on both sides engaged in the Science Wars insist on denigrating the means of understanding believed to be exclusive to a particular discipline, and by so doing obscure the epistemological diversity inherent in any discipline's approach to scholarship.

These polarized and polarizing views seem equally mistaken in suggesting that empirical knowledge and interpretive understanding are innately and always incompatible; as Edel (1990) suggests, we need to question "the legitimacy of the dichotomy in the modes of inquiry in science and the humanities" (p. 1). As we have seen, debaters on both sides of the Science Wars maintain and uphold this dichotomy: cultural studies practitioners are intent on affirming the constructedness and consequent instability of empirically based claims to knowledge, but practitioners of science are equally determined to dismiss the validity of interpretive approaches in favour of an empiricist epistemology.

Both sides fail to recognize the perhaps equally important informing role that the interpretive and the empirical must play in any knowledge claim; rather, they refuse to compromise or even to recognize the possibility of compromise. Both the scientists and their respondents construct a willful polarization that is designed to uphold their respective disciplinary version of reality as the right one. But, as Bazerman (1988) suggests, the most common erroneous perceptions of the uses and interpretations of language arise when it is considered "only in relation to reality." On the one hand, there exists the naive error of assuming that "language is an unproblematic reflection of reality"--an assumption seen in the objectivist ideology of Gross and Levitt. On the other hand is "the sophistry that language is arbitrary, radically split from nature" (p.27)--the subjectivist view of

language upheld by social constructionist critics of science. Bazerman seems quite right to suggest that the polarization these opposing views demand obscures a reality more complex than either side is willing to admit. And this complex, fractious reality is reflected in the arguments posited by these science warriors, a reality that is neither subjective nor objective, but an inharmonious combination of the two.

All of this divisiveness arises because the players insist on maintaining or creating disciplinary distinction in response to the relatively recent acceleration of disciplinary boundary shifting, blurring, and redefinition. And the rise of a more overtly interdisciplinary academic milieu indicates, as Clifford Geertz (1980) noted almost two decades ago, that "[s]omething is happening to the way we think about the way we think" (p. 166). Yet the twenty years that have passed since Geertz wrote his paper have not completed the process; this intellectual "something" is yet unfolding. Our thinking about our thinking is indeed changing, and the tension inevitable in any process of change is inevitably manifest in the discourse it inspires. This ongoing metamorphosis is captured in the conflicting rhetoric of acceptance and resistance found in the Science Wars. On the one hand are the social constructionists, who insist that our thinking has changed, and on the other hand are the scientists, who aver that real scientific thinking has not and must not change; seen from a more synoptic perspective, these debaters not only discredit their own arguments with their many contradictions, but, more generally, the irreconcilability of their premises also means that these arguments cancel each other out.

The heated and contradictory nature of this debate suggests that resolution remains far away indeed. Neither side in the interdisciplinary debate has won the war, nor has

either camp succeeded in seriously discrediting either interpretive or empirical epistemologies. Thus, as Dillon argues, we find a current crisis in academic writing, a crisis manifest in what Dillon describes as "contending rhetorics." This rhetorical contention is, as demonstrated, the incarnation of an acute epistemic anxiety that remains unalleviated; moreover, this postmodern epistemological crisis seems irresolvable in an academic climate of relentless contention and hostility. The dual and conflicting legacy of an objectivity associated with scientific epistemology and an acute poststructuralist awareness of the inescapability of subjectivity both informs and impels the interdisciplinarity debate. As Dillon perceptively points out, this rhetorical conflict cannot be evaluated "in terms of logic (or proof) giving way to rhetoric (or persuasion)." Rather, this crisis in academic writing sees "the rhetoric of impersonal objectivity being challenged by the rhetoric of reflexive self-awareness" (p. 156). Regardless of the declared ideological positions of the debate's participants, their texts reveal a similar tension between objectivity and self-reflexivity, a self-reflexivity that arises from an acute awareness of the impossibility of escaping our own subjectivity.

Thus the discourse of this debate embodies an epistemic tension that is informed by the dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity, a dialectic that is inseparable from the perceived irreconcilability of the empirical and the interpretive. As a result, these debaters ultimately uphold disciplinary privilege even while explicitly endorsing interdisciplinary practice or, alternatively, expressly advocating a version of disciplinarity that is not as exclusive as its proponents believe. Positing an extreme disciplinary opposition, their rhetorical strategies obscure similarity by emphasizing difference; ultimately, then, the

debate over interdisciplinarity is a surface polarization, a way of making sense of a complex situation through mere opposition. More generally, the example of the Science Wars suggests that a more synoptic and less participatory perspective can present some distinctly illuminating advantages; as Simons (1990) suggests, "[a]mong the rewards of studying rhetorics of inquiry is that one discovers how similar many of the problems are across disciplines" (p. 19). As we shall see, a less obvious but equally contradictory rhetoric of interdisciplinarity is also found in the arguments of adversaries less overtly hostile than the science warriors.

Chapter Two

Boundaries and Frontiers: The Rhetoric of Inclusion

As the example of the Science Wars has shown, the debate over interdisciplinarity is impelled by the perceived incompatibility and imposed dichotomy of disciplinary epistemologies. Yet this insistence on epistemic distinction obscures the interdependence of empirical and interpretive methodologies that inform any knowledge claim. These disciplinary distinctions are, as I have aimed to show in the previous chapter, surface polarizations that gloss over disciplinary similarity and the ultimate inseparability of ways of knowing that are only believed to be irreconcilable.

These disciplinary distinctions are metaphorically as well as substantively delineated in the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity. Drawing evidence from a series of letters submitted to a PMLA "Forum" on the subject of interdisciplinarity in literary studies, this chapter will consider the preponderance of metaphors in these arguments and show how they uphold the interdisciplinary ideology of inclusion while also enacting a contradictory process of disciplinary exclusion. I will begin by showing how these metaphors embody a symbolic interdisciplinarity by opposing the practice's ideology of inclusion to an ideology of exclusion that is metaphorically attributed to traditional disciplinaryity. Next, I will show how these metaphors enact the semiotic processes sociologists Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine (1995) identify as crucial in the construction of sociolinguistic and disciplinary

difference, distinctions that obscure the complexity and diversity inherent in any society and in any scholarly practice. Finally, I will show how these metaphorical gestures of interdisciplinarity seem to affirm the epistemological interdependence of disparate disciplines, yet at the same time privilege the interpretive over the empirical. Although these metaphors enact a symbolic interdisciplinarity that supports the practice's expressed ideology, they also contradict that ideology by depicting a somewhat refigured but nevertheless exclusive disciplinarity.

Metaphor seems to be an especially fitting figure of speech for the proponents of interdisciplinarity; as cognitive psychologist Benny Shanon (1992) observes, "metaphorical expressions seem to be used more often in special domains where specific and rather novel experiences are described" (p. 676). The liberal use of metaphor in these pro-interdisciplinary arguments describes and supports a specific type of intellectual experience that is construed as novel; despite the interdisciplinary tendencies inherent in any scholarly practice, contemporary practitioners largely proclaim the breadth and scope of the "new" interdisciplinarity as surpassing anything that has come before. Shanon further suggests that "[m]etaphor confronts one with incongruence, with things that do not seem to go together, inviting one to view those things in a new light and to recognize conceptual distinctions that were inconceivable before" (p. 677). Again, metaphor is a useful vehicle for the interdisciplinarian who believes that the nature of academic work must be conceived in an entirely new light; reconceptualizing and refiguring literary practice, these metaphors delineate the incongruence of interdisciplinary studies and traditional criticism, and by so doing validate and valorize the interdisciplinarity they aim to uphold.

In the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity, disciplines and interdisciplines are deconstructed and reconstructed by the discourse's liberal use of metaphor. We are all familiar with metaphorical expressions that describe disciplines as "territories" with clearly delineated "boundaries," restricting physical spaces that must be transcended in the name of responsible, progressive, and socially conscious interdisciplinary scholarship. This physical conceptualization of disciplinary structure is metaphorically described by Tony Becher (1990) as "the topography of knowledge" (p. 333). This topographical view of disciplinarity, sub-disciplinarity, and specialization, Becher goes on to suggest, "can be elaborated in terms of an analogy with nationhood" (p. 334). Becher also proposes that the complicated nature of disciplines can be aptly conceptualized in terms of natural geographic space. "The analogy with nationhood," Becher proposes, "reminds us that nations are comprised of places on the map as much as of people. . .and that their boundaries are not only a product of history and politics but also of natural geographical barriers" (p. 338). According to Becher, disciplinary dynamics can be usefully conceptualized in terms of political and/or physical space, and, as we shall see, interdisciplinary arguments use both political and geographic metaphors as vehicles for conceptualizing disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Yet these metaphors do not happily coexist. Rather, these figures of speech both destabilize and reconfigure disciplinary boundaries, enacting a semiotic process that is at once inclusive and exclusive.

Sociologist Ilana Friedrich Silber (1995) has noted a similar prevalence of "quasi-geographical" images and metaphors in sociological theory of the previous decade, and suggests that these "spatial constructs are especially appropriate to evoke the external and

contextual aspects or underpinnings of social practices" (p. 346). As with sociological theory, the spatial metaphors prevalent in the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity, especially those that delineate political space, aim to reveal the ideological underpinnings of social and disciplinary practices. These metaphors, by figuring disciplines as rigid political spaces, construe traditional disciplinarity as insular, inaccessible, and hierarchical. In these metaphorical conceptualizations, interdisciplinarity is figured as the challenge to the authority that circumscribes these arbitrary boundaries, and is thus valorized as the egalitarian antidote to outdated and authoritarian disciplinary practices.

A letter submitted to the PMLA "Forum" by Sidonie Smith provides a good example of a metaphorically rigid construction of traditional disciplinarity. Describing the bureaucratic difficulties encountered by the neophyte interdisciplinarian, Smith argues that

There are professional and institutional constraints on interdisciplinarity. Departments map out disciplines. Hiring committees define the desirable territory of specialization, and candidates whose work lies outside the boundaries of the job description are often dismissed as nonviable.

(p. 294)

Tellingly, instead of describing work that doesn't "fulfill" or "meet" the hiring committee's expectations, Smith describes the job--not interdisciplinary candidates--as limited. Rather than suggesting that those who have had interdisciplinary graduate training are in some way lacking or inadequately prepared for the professional workplace, the use of "boundaries" in this context shifts the focus from interdisciplinarity to the hiring committee's definition of an appropriate "territory of specialization." In this metaphorical construction, deficiency is not associated with these candidates but with the narrowly

conceptualized view of disciplinarity upheld by traditionalists; thus it is not the candidate who needs to change, but the members of the job committee who need to change.

This metaphor also alludes to the popular notion that interdisciplinary work is a kind of positive social action; the metaphorically implied goal of the dismissed interdisciplinarian is to break down these exclusionary boundaries that lie between disciplines and between disciplinarians and interdisciplinarians. The heroic mission of interdisciplinarity is to challenge the authority that upholds these boundaries and the hierarchies they enclose. In an academy long overdue for reform, socially and politically conscious interdisciplinarians will show the way to a newly egalitarian future that will no longer uphold disciplinary hegemony or disciplinary hierarchies. Democratizing the academy, Clarisse Zimra (1996) argues, begins from within, by resisting the imposition of rigidly allocated specialist space as well as the larger space in which the discipline is too rigidly contained:

. . . the 'divide and conquer' taxonomy of departments (requirements by century and/or by movement, nationally grounded surveys, and so forth) endures. If interdisciplinarity is an invigorating challenge to mainstream departments. . . it has yet to storm the palace. (p. 292)

Presumably the "palace" of which Zimra speaks is the bastion inhabited by the disciplinary old guard, whose insistence on maintaining traditional taxonomies even within the discipline is depicted as a militaristic strategy of "divide and conquer." This metaphorical palace has clearly political and hierarchical connotations. In this scenario, self-crowned protectors of disciplinary definition resist academic democratization by engaging in internecine warfare, relying on strategies that, if left unchallenged, will ultimately bring the

discipline to ruin by impeding interdisciplinary practice and even intradisciplinary specialization. The as yet unrealized antidote to this inhibiting tradition of exclusion is to "storm the palace." These metaphors, by defining the shape of traditional disciplinarity as political space and depicting the corrective in war-like or revolutionary terms, both capture and reinforce the political nature of the interdisciplinary conflict.

Constructed as "palaces" or "territories" staked out on disciplinary "maps" by unseen powers intent on maintaining disciplinary distinction and an intradisciplinary hierarchy, these metaphors valorize the counterhegemonic practices of the interdisciplinarian and the necessity of erasing these restrictive boundaries that, Claire Kahane (1996) argues, "are based on outmoded ideologies that separate literature as a fixed object from the rapidly transforming cultural systems that we inhabit" (p. 301). In this way, metaphors play a role in the metadisciplinary discourse of these interdisciplinarians similar to the discipline-defining role Silber describes as a crucial function of the spatial metaphors she finds prevalent in the work of sociologists. These delineating figures of speech, Silber argues, are limiting and potentially dangerous "master metaphors--that is, metaphors not simply used to adorn or enliven sociological writing otherwise notorious for its often unpalatable style but actually playing a central role in the shaping and controlling of sociological theory and research" (p. 324). As with sociology, the spatial metaphors that depict traditional disciplines as boundaried territories both shape and control theory and research in literary studies by linking these metaphorical spaces with "outmoded ideologies," ideologies that are consequently perceived as authoritarian and undemocratic.

Yet the adoption of diverse theories in literary studies has arguably had a discursive effect very different from the enlivening effects Silber describes in the practice of sociology. Rather than making critical prose more "palatable," many critics argue that interdisciplinary practice and extradisciplinary theory has produced a mode of discourse that is inaccessible, convoluted, and even pretentious.¹⁰ And poststructuralist critics have spent much time and energy revealing the authoritarian and hegemonic ideologies inherent in the discourse of their more traditionalist colleagues. The interdisciplinary debate is very much focussed on and certainly enacted through textual practices, with both groups defining both their ideology and their discourse in opposition to the other. Both sides in this debate emphasize the fundamental difference in their respective views on and modes of discourse; as the Science Wars example demonstrates, the conflicting rhetoric of the interdisciplinary debate is impelled not only by ideological differences, but also by the discursive practices that aim to uphold these explicitly opposed ideologies.

This tendency to use discursive difference as a defining characteristic of social groups is similar to the habits of colonizing nineteenth-century Europeans, who, Gal and Irvine (1995) point out, used linguistic difference as the guiding parameter that arbitrarily defined other "nations." And, these sociologists go on to suggest, "the intellectual justification of today's disciplinary division of scholarly work on language derives from the same source" (p. 968). Considered in light of Gal and Irvine's account of the semiotic processes that construct both social and disciplinary difference, it becomes evident that the

¹⁰ Eugene Goodheart (1997b), for example, argues that much contemporary interdisciplinary criticism produces "a species of sociological prose once held in contempt by literary scholars: ponderous, abstract, obscure, ungainly, jargonish" (p. 140).

spatial metaphors found in pro-interdisciplinary discourse construct these divisions in a similar way, even as their arguments aim to oppose them.

Gal and Irvine describe three semiotic processes that play an important role in the imposition of boundaries between languages and between disciplines. The first is iconicity, which

involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic practices, features, or varieties and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic practices that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them--as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence. (p. 973)

In the case of anthropology, the field-based methodology known as ethnography "has become, in some quarters, the picture--the icon--of what anthropology is." This type of fieldwork, Gal and Irvine go on to point out, "came to be seen as requiring a specific kind of linguistic practice" (p. 989). The iconical linking of the ethnographer/anthropologist also links all anthropologists with the "exotic other." This iconicizing process metaphorically transforms all anthropologists into fieldworkers; as a result, all members of the discipline are, in some quarters, conceived as the homogeneous embodiment of the romanticized view of the ethnographer, a view that does not account for the diversity within the discipline of anthropology.

As with the arbitrary disciplinary boundaries Gal and Irvine describe as the outgrowth of a scholarly practice that defines social groups according to linguistic difference, the interdisciplinary debate reconstructs similar arbitrary boundaries within literary studies. But this defining tendency also creates vast generalizations that gloss over

the diversity within any social group: paradoxically, the pro-interdisciplinary arguments simultaneously smooth over this difference, and the interdisciplinarians come to iconically represent the discipline as a whole. As with the figuring of the ethnographer as the icon of anthropology, the interdisciplinarian is metaphorically conceptualized as a special kind of practitioner who has, for some of these letter-writers, become the icon of what literary studies is and should be.

In the PMLA letters, the interdisciplinarian is often metaphorically construed as the courageous fieldworker who ventures forth into the land of the exotic other, and is thus idealized as the iconic representation of the originating discipline. Zimra (1996), for example, ends her letter with an apparently rhetorical question: "Why, then, do we pursue interdisciplinarity?" The answer, given in an unmistakable reference to Star Trek, is that interdisciplinarians "cannot resist boldly going where no one has gone before" (p. 292). This sci-fi reference makes it clear to any reader who has ever seen television that the goal of interdisciplinarity is to discover previously unknown worlds; by extension, this reference metaphorically depicts the interdisciplinary critic as a trailblazing adventurer. Smith (1996) portrays the interdisciplinarian in a similarly heroic light by metaphorically linking this new breed of scholar with unexplored lands: "Negotiating new landscapes of knowledge," Smith observes, "may be risky" (p. 293). Fedwa Malti-Douglas (1996) ends her letter on an equally valorizing note, declaring that "leaving home always demand courage" (p. 311). All of these metaphors depict the interdisciplinarian as the bold adventurer who willingly leaves the comforts of the disciplinary "home" to explore a risky

landscape with the metaphorical aim of discovering new worlds, discoveries that will pull the traditional disciplines out of the darkened corners of an equally benighted academy.

These metaphors impress upon the reader the danger of the task at hand, but since that task is of the utmost urgency and importance, these intrepid scholars will disregard personal risk in their valiant attempts to further human knowledge. Gal and Irvine thus seem quite right when they suggest that "[t]he implication of necessity is reinforced by the iconicity of the ideological representation" (p. 973). Or, as Zimra puts it, "[w]e must demonstrate that a free society needs and becomes more than literal transmission of useful knowledge. A useful democratic education is interdisciplinary by necessity" (p. 292). In this view, interdisciplinarity holds the promise of meeting the needs and demands of democracy and, by extension, the entire "free" world. In all of these formulations, the interdisciplinarian is the iconic representation of what the discipline is or, at the very least, what it should be.

For these writers, the interdisciplinarian iconically represents the discipline as a whole, at the expense of erasing those who oppose the practice and obscuring the fact that interdisciplinarity can take many different forms. This process of erasure, the second semiotic step in disciplinary definition, is defined by Gal and Irvine as

the process in which ideology, in simplifying the field of linguistic practices, renders some persons or activities or sociolinguistic phenomena invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme may go unnoticed or get explained away. So, for example, a social group, or a language, may be imagined as homogeneous, its internal variation disregarded. (p. 974)

Erasure, it seems, is an inevitable corollary of iconicity. In a similar homogenizing process, the metaphors of these interdisciplinary arguments ignore or at least minimize the differences that do and must exist within the traditionalist opposing group and the diversity among interdisciplinarians. In the case of these arguments, the metaphorical construction of the interdisciplinarian as the iconic representation of an internally diverse disciplinary group, a group that includes those who hold views inconsistent with the interdisciplinarian's ideological scheme, erases the presence of these potential dissenters with the prominence of this single representation.

Iconicity and erasure also act recursively in a third semiotic process.

Recursiveness, Gal and Irvine (1995) argue, is a corollary process in the construction of linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. As they define it, recursiveness

involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level. For example, intragroup oppositions might be projected outward onto intergroup relations, or vice versa. Thus, the dichotomizing and partitioning process that was involved in some understood opposition (between groups or between linguistic varieties) recurs at other levels. (p. 974)

In anthropology, Gal and Irvine later suggest, "the practice of ethnographic fieldwork has long set the anthropologist apart from others who are not members of the discipline." The distinction that is constructed between anthropology and all other disciplines is also "reproduced inside the discipline in a number of ways" (p. 991). This dichotomy is reenacted in a discipline that increasingly values the work of the fieldworking ethnographer over and above that of the archival researcher, even though the latter often makes equally significant contributions to anthropology.

The semiotic process of recursiveness, one that reenacts the interconnected processes of iconicity and erasure, can be seen in the following passage from a letter submitted by John Lowe (1996):

Whether they are old-canon nabobs or doyens of cultural studies, mandarins tend to be interested in serious matters such as aesthetics and ideology. Both camps often disdain anything that strays from the ivory tower of great art on the one hand and from the racial-cultural-sexual battlefield on the other. . . humor studies could enhance the literary and theoretical explorations of both these camps; in fact, it might offer a meeting ground somewhere in between.

(p. 295)

Lowe's interdisciplinary interest lies in "humor studies," which, he avers, has been neglected and/or not taken seriously by either the traditionalist old guard or the avant garde interdisciplinarians working in cultural studies. The metaphorical spaces these opposing groups occupy are the "ivory tower" on the one hand and the "battlefield" on the other; although his area of research could provide a useful "meeting ground" between these polarized groups, neither space is accessible to Lowe. This passage metaphorically reenacts the larger process; the dichotomization constructed between the traditionalists and the interdisciplinarians is recursively projected onto a more micro level. Through this recursive process, the intragroup relations within cultural studies, between the interdisciplinarian who engages in humor studies and those practitioners who focus on more "serious" cultural phenomena, are depicted in metaphors as polarizing as those used to describe intergroup relations.

And these scholars are described in decidedly unscholarly terms that reinforce this sense of opposition and difference: the traditionalists are "nabobs," the interdisciplinarians

are "doyens," and both groups are made up of "mandarins." These metaphors have two important effects. First, all three signifying terms suggest that their respective signifieds both enforce and occupy a privileged position in an ill-defined hierarchy: "nabob," "doyen," and "mandarins" are politically hegemonic--but not clearly legitimate--terms associated with leadership. Second, these metaphors are orientalizing; they connote difference, foreignness, and even incomprehensibility. In this sense, these metaphors conflate everyone who doesn't see things Lowe's way into a single, opposing intellectual Other.

As the above passage from Lowe's letter vaguely suggests, metaphors invoked by the interdisciplinarians can also suggest colonization and appropriation, hegemonic practices that have been closely scrutinized and roundly criticized in much contemporary criticism of interdisciplinary origin. These colonizing metaphors are more readily apparent in Stanley Corngold's (1996) letter:

In interdisciplinarity the frontiers between study objects fall away; things return home no longer carrying the aura of their foreignness; they belong as much as any other object of home study belongs. (p. 287)

In Corngold's formulation, the "frontiers" between objects of study delineated by traditional disciplines are broken down by the interdisciplinarian who ventures forth into this previously unexplored territory. But the interdisciplinarian does so only to claim the other discipline's objects, bring them "home" and appropriate them as part of a practice that is still identified as discipline specific. These objects lose their taint of "foreignness" and become more palatable once they are introduced to the disciplinary culture whence the

bold explorer originated. Sounding remarkably akin to the rhetoric of paternalistic or mercantile imperialism, the assets of the other discipline are metaphorically expropriated on behalf of the colonizing "home" discipline, apparently for the good of both the object and the colonizing group.

This falling away of frontiers also bring to mind notions of globalization, a metaphorical allusion that becomes an explicit concept in Kahane's letter.

Interdisciplinarity, Kahane argues,

has been spurred on not only by a growing impatience with the inadequacy of traditional academic boundaries to answer important questions but also by the inevitable recognition that divisions of knowledge created in another time-space are ill suited to the expanding global consciousness of our time. (p. 301)

The arbitrary divisions that were created in another time and space, Kahane suggests, contradict contemporary global consciousness and thus implicitly work against the interdisciplinary ideology of inclusion. Interdisciplinarity recognizes that academic progress can only be realized in a more global academy, one presumably made up of progressively minded scholars who understand the limitations that boundaries impose. Yet, as Silber (1995) argues, spatial metaphors can also capture the globalization paradox, which sees the simultaneous "resurgence of particularistic and religious identities in an indeed globalized but also increasingly fragmented framework" (p. 347). The fragmentation that goes hand-in-hand with globalization does not escape Kahane, who goes on to acknowledge that interdisciplinarity at this time is "a chaotic heterogeneity." Nevertheless, Kahane argues, this fragmentation "is better than the old binarisms that

rigidify hidden hierarchies, insidiously opposing subject and object, masculine and feminine, the humanities and the sciences, and. . .literature and technology" (p. 301). In other words, chaotic heterogeneity is preferable to the orderly heterogeneity that inevitably leads to the construction of binary oppositions. Yet, in this scenario, a fragmented interdisciplinarity is reunified in its collective aim to subvert the old hierarchies, a unification that constructs another (albeit different) binary opposition. Reinforcing the very boundaries interdisciplinarity aims to oppose by reaffirming intradisciplinary distinction, Kahane's globalized academy still embodies a polarized and adversarial relationship between "us" and "them."

Though all of these metaphorical conceptualizations of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity work in many ways to illustrate and uphold the latter practice's inclusive ideology, these same metaphors also reinforce both inter- and intradisciplinary divisions; as Silber notes, spatial metaphors are ultimately paradoxical, possessing "a unique capacity. . .to capture both unity and fragmentation," "order and disorder" (p. 348). Through their eventual reunification of a fragmented interdisciplinarity, these metaphors evince tendencies toward disciplinary definition commensurate with those of the unnamed traditionalists whose more exclusive notions of scholarship are often interpreted and depicted as evincing a disciplinary will to power. Though the interdisciplinary vision is territorial in a more encompassing and totalizing way, it can never be entirely inclusive; like disciplinarity, interdisciplinary practice depends on identifying an Other in order to posit its own definition.

Most importantly, these spatial metaphors leave unquestioned their primary informing assumption: all of these delineating metaphors presume that rigid disciplinary boundaries do indeed exist. And, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, "a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (p. 10): most insidious in all of these metaphorical constructions is the unchallenged assertion that, disciplines were, and for the most part still are, distinct and clearly identifiable entities. Indeed, little seems to have changed since Edward Said (1982) noted that although literary critics pay close attention to figures and tropes in literary works,

This separation of fields, objects, disciplines, and foci constitutes an amazingly rigid structure which, to my knowledge, is almost never discussed by literary scholars. There seems to be an unconsciously held norm guaranteeing the simple essence of "fields," a word which in turn has acquired the intellectual authority of a natural, objective fact. (p. 12)

As Said pointed out almost two decades ago, the metaphorical construction of disciplinary boundaries assumes the existence of rigid disciplinary structure as an objective fact; the metaphors used to convey the concept of disciplinarity not only leave this "fact" unquestioned, but also reinforce this rigid conceptualization with the ongoing use and addition of metaphorical building blocks. The internalizing and naturalizing effects of metaphor render almost imperceptible the counterhegemonic ideologies that perpetuate this polarizing construction of a scholarly Other.

This metaphorical subsumption of the premises that fuel and justify inter- and intradisciplinary opposition brings to mind Bruno Latour's notion of the "black box."

Latour, a sociologist of science who trained in engineering, has extensively analyzed the ways in which scientific disciplines discursively construct and uphold knowledge. He argues that the authority of science is crucially dependent on burying so-called "facts" within these discursive black boxes; according to Latour, these impenetrable black boxes are never reopened and the discipline's authorizing premises are never again subject to question. As with the cumulatively authoritative discourse of the sciences, these interdisciplinarians have sailed downstream away from the black box and do not return to open it; taking the path of least resistance, they fail to move upstream in order to question the long-buried presumption that traditional disciplines are contained within rigidly boundaried and thus exclusive territories.

The many metaphorical statements that allocate these defined spaces are thus what Latour (1987) calls "positive modalities," or "those sentences that lead a statement away from its conditions of production, making it solid enough to render some other consequences necessary" (p. 23). The necessary consequence arising from the conceptualization of a boundaried disciplinarity that is contained within the black box is, of course, the imperative to break down the walls that surround this insular and authoritarian social group. The spatial metaphors deployed by these interdisciplinarians aim to emphasize the constructedness of disciplinarity, and, in the interest of highlighting the opposition between their views and those of the defining intellectual Other, also tend to naturalize a contrasting academic practice that is metaphorically construed as less rigid and more inclusive.

A good example of this metaphorical naturalization is found in an essay by Arabella Lyon (1992), an English professor at Temple University, entitled "Interdisciplinarity: Giving Up Territory." Lyon is one example of an interdisciplinarian who actually questions the existence of disciplinary boundaries. Lyon considers the conventional territorial metaphors used to describe disciplinarity to be intellectually limiting: "even though the border metaphor prevails," Lyon observes, "the possibility of free trade or the easy exchange of knowledge across demarcation lines is not accepted everywhere" (p. 681). Moreover, these arbitrarily drawn lines belie a much more fluid inter- and intradisciplinary reality:

Like so many discussions of disciplinarity, territorial ones argue for a static structure and fail to allow adequately for either changing aims and actions within a discipline or overlapping aims and actions among disciplines. In addition, territorial metaphors fail to describe adequately the role of language between disciplines, instead emphasizing static structures. (p. 682)

The solution to the limitations imposed by these inadequate spatial metaphors is a metaphorical reconceptualization of disciplines as rivers. The river, Lyon argues, will more accurately represent what disciplinarity has come to mean.

In the following passage, Lyon sets out her proposed metaphorical conception of the new (inter) disciplinarity:

Perceiving disciplines as rivers, one acknowledges the narrow origins from which academic groupings spring and the influences of surrounding geologies or contexts on the flow itself; moreover, the metaphor draws disciples' attentions to the process of their thinking and the potentially oceanic outcomes of the discipline's decisions and research agendas. (p. 682)

The effect of these metaphors is naturalization; disciplines spontaneously "spring" from the ground, and this disciplinary flow naturally converges in a river made up of waters originating in the geologies of adjacent and likewise naturally occurring disciplines. The result of this interdisciplinary convergence is an "oceanic" outpouring of work that far exceeds in strength and volume the output of the narrow springs of the originating, divided disciplines. In this metaphorical conceptualization, what might otherwise be interpreted as an interdisciplinary political will to power becomes part of the natural order.

Lyon's spatial metaphors are drawn not from descriptions of politically delineated space (as with "territory" or "boundary"), but from geographically and thus naturally delineated space. Ultimately, then, this rather poetic metaphor obliquely draws on the epistemological authority of the sciences, disciplines rooted in the natural, empirical world that are also perceived as possessing greater validity and prestige than the humanities. But, as Klein (1993) observes, "[t]he majority of [disciplinary] permeations occur at the level of instrumental borrowing rather than comprehensive conceptual revision" (p. 192). Despite these metaphorical appropriations that seem to sanction an authority rooted in the natural world, Lyon goes on to privilege hermeneutic practice, a practice that is opposed to the empiricism purported to dominate the sciences.

Lyon acknowledges the limits of interdisciplinarity in literary studies, pointing out that while "[s]ome discourse-based disciplines are useful in literary theory; others are not" (p. 684). Lyon does not here valorize unconditionally the interpretive epistemology associated with literary studies and other language-centered disciplines; not all "discourse-based disciplines," she insists, are useful to the practice of literary studies. But, using the

example of literary critics who drew on generative grammar theory developed by linguists, she goes on to argue that these modes of inquiry are incompatible because "[g]enerative grammar seeks universal rules proved through scientific method, whereas literary studies seeks temporal and contingent descriptions of human culture" (p. 684). This is a curious distinction to make. Having just attempted to convince the reader of the validity of the river as a universal metaphor for all types of interdisciplinarity and justifying that metaphor through quasi-scientific analogy, it seems ironic that Lyon goes on to discredit the empirical authority she metaphorically claims. With this refutation in mind, it seems clear that the "oceanic" benefits of interdisciplinarity she imagines will be realized by her interpretively based discipline of literary studies. Drawing on metaphors from the natural world, she obliquely claims empirical authority only to claim the lion's share of interdisciplinary benefits for a wellspring of study that is still taxonomized as epistemologically different. In a metaphorical reworking that is at once inclusive and exclusive, Lyon's argument ultimately privileges the interpretive over the empirical, reconstructing the dichotomy and thus upholding a distinct disciplinary practice, albeit a metaphorically fluid one.

Silber (1995) notes a similar metaphorical pattern in the work of sociologists, observing that sociologists often use metaphors that reveal "an emphatically positive orientation to the natural sciences as a source of inspiration" (p. 324). Like the sociologists Silber describes, Lyon proposes a new "master metaphor" that is arguably inspired by a positive orientation to the natural sciences. This metaphorical orientation, Silber suggests, reveals an underlying will to power in the discourse of sociology:

. . .an important factor seems to be not so much the degree of scientific commitment, but rather the tendency to take inspiration from and even relinquish authority to a specific discipline, scientific or not, external to sociology: the greater the perceived validity or prestige of another discipline, the stronger the tendency to transform some central construct taken from it into a controlling, master metaphor. (p. 326)

These "master metaphors" are equally prevalent in many of the pro-interdisciplinary arguments posited by literary critics; alluding to and thus claiming the authority of other disciplines, these revealing metaphors seem to support Gross and Levitt's notion that literary critics do indeed suffer from an acute anxiety arising from a sense of epistemological inferiority.

This anxiety seems readily apparent in the cultural studies tendency to borrow scientific theories in their analysis of diverse cultural products and phenomena; notably, theories of entropy, chaos, and relativity have all made their mark in both literary and cultural studies. This practice suggests that literary and cultural scholars are indeed interested in claiming the epistemological authority of science, for genuinely intellectual as well as perhaps more cynical reasons. In an academy where the humanities are the first to be affected by budget cuts and are often the subject of severe criticism, this movement into the scientific realm is arguably compelled by the need for "literary" scholars to justify the authority of their own work. In the process of moving toward this end, many cultural studies and literary practitioners draw on theories that originated in scientific disciplines, and thus perhaps also aim to claim the authority of disciplines that carry greater economic and political clout than the much-maligned humanities.

This epistemological and professional anxiety is further manifest in the figurative use of language conventionally associated with the discourse of science; like the naturalizing metaphors found in Lyon's essay, these more explicitly scientific metaphors both destabilize and reestablish disciplinary difference by reinscribing the distinction between the interpretive and the empirical in a way that privileges the former. Some examples of this contradictory tendency are found in Henry M. Sayre's letter. Sayre (1996), "an art historian trained in literary history who writes about hybrid forms of contemporary art," borrows Derrida's metaphorical figuring of "undisciplined critical method" as a floral system that is dependent on "cross-fertilization to survive" (p. 284). Sayre argues that

Interdisciplinary study has always seemed to me a biological necessity, or this is at least a useful metaphor for what has driven me, and others like me, to forsake the narrow range of single disciplines and light out for the territories. (p. 284)

In a naturalizing process similar to that found in Lyon's essay, the term "biological necessity" depicts interdisciplinarity as a natural phenomenon that lies outside of human political control. This metaphorical connection with the natural sciences is strengthened as the argument progresses, and Sayre concludes by noting that "[t]he allogamy that might breed on the winds blowing across this mix, the semes that might be dispersed, would truly be something to see" (p. 284). Allogamy is a technical synonym for cross-fertilization, and seme has the dual meaning of "seed" and "sign" in the writings of Derrida.

This latter metaphor combines the empirical and interpretive by simultaneously alluding to the natural sciences and/or language and literary studies. For the most part, however, these metaphors suggest an orientation toward the natural sciences. These terms were coined by Derrida to describe "undisciplined" critical practice, yet the subsequent use of "territories" links metaphors of political space with those of the natural sciences; thus the metaphors in Sayre's letter also suggest an ongoing allegiance to disciplinarity. Curiously, however, Sayre uses "territories" not to describe the disciplinarity he opposes, but as a metaphor for interdisciplinarity itself. This curious mix of the natural and the political leaves us with a metaphorical paradox: though these territories are seen to lie outside of current disciplinary formations, interdisciplinarity is still practiced in boundaried spaces, even though it is a naturally occurring "biological necessity."

Another letter-writer, Ed Cohen (1996), whose Ph.D. training was in an interdisciplinary humanities programme, claims he is one of the few scholars of his persuasion lucky enough to find tenured employment. But Cohen quickly found himself "sucked into what I now imagine as the force field of disciplinarity. And I am here to tell you it is a palpable field" (288). In an unmistakable reference to physics, the astronomical power of disciplinarity is the palpable manifestation of a lamentable academic economy: "The enormous fiscal constraint and ideological opposition that universities generally and the humanities particularly face have created a crisis of legitimation that has," Cohen argues, "the gravitational force of a black hole" (p. 289). In this metaphorical construction, the English department in which Cohen works becomes menacingly akin to

the world explored and claimed by "hard" science. And the menacing power of this science is linked with the money-controlling powers that be; both the English department and the hard sciences, in Cohen's metaphorical figuring, are the enemy. Though Cohen's metaphorical appropriation of scientific discourse perhaps lends his argument a greater degree of rhetorical force, Cohen appropriates the language of science only to subvert it. In a rhetorical gesture that demonizes both science and the traditional English department, Cohen's figures of speech contradict the interdisciplinary ideology of inclusion by subverting the scientific authority they metaphorically claim.

By either privileging the interpretive or opposing the empirical, these interdisciplinarians obliquely undermine an empirical, scientific authority even as they rely on that authority to make convincing or ideologically consistent arguments. This tendency is, of course, partly accounted for by current academic fiscal anxiety, which in turn likely renders some scholars reluctant to grant too much credence to disciplines with whom they vie for limited available resources. But there is something more insidious than an unstable and limited economy at work here; these metaphors that both validate and discredit disciplinary knowledge reveal an ambivalence commensurate with a process of change. Though some of these interdisciplinarians are explicitly optimistic about the changes the practice has brought, the interdisciplinary project does not always seem to be a happy one. These kinds of metaphorical gestures that aim to affirm the possibility of a truly interdisciplinary scholarship also reveal a lingering sense of ambivalence on the part of the avowed interdisciplinarian.

Perhaps this feeling is partly accounted for by the failure of the interdisciplinary project to be heard in the opposing camp. Despite the massive efforts of interdisciplinarians to demystify the language of science, scientists have generally ignored these critiques; as Ann Cvetkovich (1996) points out in her letter, "the epistemological implications of interdisciplinary work that challenges empiricism have barely been registered within the sciences, where there are both economic and intellectual stakes involved" (p. 293). Yet it also seems that the interdisciplinarian deconstruction of science hasn't fully registered with some of those who challenge the existence of an uncompromised empirical reality, a point that seems justified by the abundance of scientific metaphors found in some of the arguments of these avowed interdisciplinarians. Though one could, of course, argue that these metaphorical appropriations of scientific authority evince the truly interdisciplinary nature of the interdisciplinary project, the tendency of these texts to privilege the interpretive over the empirical strongly suggests that disciplinary distinctions are alive and well in the postmodern academy.

And the discursive difficulty interdisciplinarians face in the final decade of the millennium seems to be not much different from the tension Debra Journef (1993) describes as inherent in the "boundary rhetoric" of an interdisciplinarian physician who lived and worked in the first half of the twentieth century. An eminent researcher, S.E. Jelliffe aimed to combine the "objective" discourse of neurology with the "subjective" narrative of psychoanalysis, an effort that met with limited success in either discipline. Jelliffe worked in an intellectual climate as antagonistic as that of today; as Journef notes, Jelliffe's task was made especially difficult "by the competitive and even agonistic relations

between the two communities with which he was most concerned" (p. 516). "Jelliffe's career," Journet points out, "thus contributes to our understanding of the possibilities of interdisciplinary work, but it also reveals something about its cost--which can be high" (p. 533). Jelliffe's problems, Journet suggests, are common to latter-day interdisciplinarians:

Researchers who negotiate between two or more disciplines face difficulties finding shared theoretical and methodological commitments (what and how much to assume), a common language (whose terminology to use), or even avenues for dissemination (where to publish).
(p. 533)

Successful interdisciplinarity, Journet implies, is dependent upon the successful merging of unduly circumscribed disciplinary conventions, methodologies, and epistemologies; the future of interdisciplinarity depends on cooperation, not antagonism.

Herbert Blau (1996) is one interdisciplinary letter-writer who aims to smooth over an academic antagonism that is both manifest in and exacerbated by the willful polarization of the sciences and the humanities. Blau explicitly acknowledges the necessary interweaving of interpretive and empirical ways of knowing that are always interdependent. Denying the "mode of minimum rationality" Homi K. Bhabha proposes for cultural studies,¹¹ Blau argues that

it is not now and is not likely to be, in any foreseeable future, the heuristic mode of any scholarship, within the disciplines or across them. Nor will the 'radical project' of cultural studies, infinitely extended through alien cultures but, like Einstein's universe, curving back on itself, escape the positivism it deplores--canons of judgment, rules of

¹¹ Bhabha's (1992) essay, entitled "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt," appears in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (Eds.), Cultural Studies, (New York: Routledge).

evidence, and, despite postmodernism's devastating critique of authority, the question of authority nevertheless.

(p. 274)

Blau makes it clear, albeit in a rather convoluted way, that rationality and empiricism are and must be a part of any disciplinary or interdisciplinary project.¹² The dichotomy of empirical and interpretive ways of knowing is a construction, and although the metaphors found in these interdisciplinary arguments draw conceptual figures that gesture toward their validation of a more empirical epistemology, they also tend to metaphorically reconstruct the dichotomization of disciplinary epistemologies that are still perceived as being either primarily interpretive or empirical.

With this point in mind, it seems reasonable to suggest that much so-called interdisciplinary practice is selective interdisciplinarity or what Timothy Murray (1996) aptly calls "a kind of interdisciplinary hegemony in which advocacy of one discipline remains suspiciously neglectful of the material and conceptual legacy of another" (p. 279). This selectiveness is most readily demonstrated by the tendency of interdisciplinarians to work within the confines of two disciplines, such as literature and history or literature and psychology, a tendency that, as Margaret Higonnet (1994) suggests, also means "the interdisciplinary goal is undercut by the binary pairing of forms of study perceived as

¹² Blau is not the only interdisciplinarian to recognize the interdependency of these dichotomized epistemologies. A couple of examples are also found in the letters of Alan Rauch (1996), who concludes by noting that the project's aim is "to help us find our way in a world that is always already interdisciplinary" (p. 274), and Timothy R. Austin (1996), who rightly recognizes "the permeability and fragility of the membranes that surround whatever discipline, subdiscipline, or interdisciplinary field" (273). But, for every interdisciplinarian who acknowledges that the practice has always existed, there seems to be another who is intent on proclaiming something new.

separate" (p. 201). But this selective practice is further manifested by the tendency of interdisciplinarians to metaphorically reap what suits their argumentative needs, while tending to undermine that which may threaten to overrule the epistemology conventionally associated with their originating discipline.

Perhaps interdisciplinarity is, as Linda Hutcheon (1997) suggests, more aptly described as "interdiscursivity." The paradoxical nature of the disciplinary metaphors found in this series of letters suggests that Hutcheon is right when she claims that the process of becoming interdisciplinary necessitates learning another discourse, but "this subsidiary process is taken--and mistaken--for full disciplinary training, especially in discussions of interdisciplinarity" (p. 20). Indeed, Hutcheon seems to hit the metaphorical nail on the head when she bluntly claims that "maybe we can talk the talk of other disciplines, but to do truly interdisciplinary work, we also have to be able to walk the walk" (p. 20). As I have aimed to demonstrate, many of these interdisciplinarians do indeed talk the talk of other disciplines, but it seems clear that they remain reluctant or unable to walk a truly interdisciplinary walk.

In many ways, these interdisciplinary metaphors support and reflect the practice's inclusive ideologies. But this ideology of inclusion is defined by contrast; depicting traditional disciplinarity as boundaried and exclusive, the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity tends to characterize interdisciplinary practice not by what it is, but by what it isn't. And, even though some of the metaphors found in these interdisciplinary arguments seem to acknowledge the authority of other disciplines by metaphorically adopting extradisciplinary concepts, they also uphold disciplinary distinction. But this tendency is

not unique to literary studies; as Klein (1993) notes, "the assertion of disciplinary primacy is a common feature of cross-disciplinary genealogy in most disciplines. Extradisciplinary influences are integrated into, rather than alter, the calculus of discipline" (p. 199). As we have seen, these "outside" influences are often metaphorically rather than substantively integrated into interdisciplinary discourse, and metaphor performs a dichotomizing as well as integrating function in these arguments.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that our worldviews are both reflected in and shaped by metaphor, and "[c]oncepts are not defined solely in terms of inherent properties; instead, they are defined in terms of interactional properties" (p. 125): indeed, these metaphorical conceptualizations capture not the essence of disciplinarity or interdisciplinarity, but rather the often competitive and antagonistic interactions that seem unavoidable in an increasingly fragmented postmodern academy. Emphasizing difference over similarity, these metaphors reinforce a constructed inter- and intradisciplinary dichotomy, thus reflecting the antagonism seen in much recent interaction both between and within disciplines. Though these writers make many metaphorical gestures of interdisciplinarity, they also reinscribe longstanding and perhaps inescapable constructions of difference, both between disciplines and within interdisciplinary practice; as Paul de Man (1979) once observed, "[m]etaphors are much more tenacious than facts" (p. 123). Despite their many gestures of interdisciplinary inclusion, these metaphorical conceptualizations ultimately illustrate the necessarily inclusive and exclusive nature of all academic practice.

Chapter Three

Solidarity and Power: A Conflicting Rhetoric

As I have aimed to show in the preceding chapter, the rhetorical tropes used by many proponents of interdisciplinary practice challenge as well as support the practice's professed ideology of inclusion. Through their metaphorical reinscription of disciplinary boundaries, these arguments reveal an ideological orientation that is not as different from traditionalist views of disciplinary practice as interdisciplinarians would like to believe. The larger academic conflict is thus metaphorically enacted in these pro-interdisciplinarity arguments, arguments that maintain disciplinary distinction while explicitly upholding an interdisciplinary ideology of inclusion. The dialogic conflict embodied in these arguments usefully illustrates the multifaceted and inherently ambiguous nature of language and affirms the Bakhtinian notion that language is always polyphonic, inevitably embodying competing discourses and encoding ideologies that may or may not be consistent with a given speaker's professed worldview.

This discursive tension has not been overlooked by linguists; as Michael Halliday has argued, the complexities of the larger social world are reflected and enacted in language at its most fundamental level, even in its grammatical and syntactical structures. Building on Halliday's groundbreaking work, social semioticians and discourse analysts have further confirmed Halliday's ideas; drawing on the work of some of these theorists,

this chapter will undertake a semantic analysis of the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity in a comparison of selected interdisciplinary and disciplinary texts. This chapter is not, however, intended to be a full-scale study of text semantics; rather, I aim simply to illustrate the ways in which the rhetorical tension found in these texts is also enacted at the semantic level. Because of the detailed approach this mode of analysis entails, I will consider only one interdisciplinary argument and compare its linguistic features to those found in an antithetical traditionalist argument. I hope to show that, despite their professed ideological differences, the texts produced by both of these debaters reinscribe distinct disciplinary boundaries, and that their substantive emphasis of difference belies their underlying ideological similarity.

In order to demonstrate how seemingly divergent arguments can unwittingly express similar ideologies, I have chosen two texts that are typical of the sorts of arguments literary critics tend to make over the issue of interdisciplinarity. Most importantly, I have chosen passages from these texts that most clearly assume polarized positions on the same issues. Arguing in favour of interdisciplinarity in literary studies is Duke University English professor Marianna de Marco Torgovnick in a letter submitted to the PMLA "Forum" on interdisciplinarity. On the other side of the debate is the more conservative literary critic, Yale University professor Richard Levin, in an article published in a multi-authored collection of essays entitled After Poststructuralism: Interdisciplinarity and Literary Theory.

Though these arguments are substantively typical, they are perhaps rhetorical anomalies. Neither of these arguments relies on figurative language nor does either one

engage in the type of obfuscating rhetorical display that has been the target of much recent criticism; nevertheless, semantic analysis of these texts suggests that even the most accessible and straightforward argument can be much more complex and ambiguous than it may at first appear. These texts are thus especially useful examples for this type of analysis; revealing the dialogic tension inherent even in the most apparently unambiguous argument, they provide a useful illustration of the value of social semiotics and critical discourse analysis as means of understanding the way that competing ideologies are embodied in language at the most fundamental level. Ultimately, this illustrative analysis suggests that the discursive reenactment of the larger intradisciplinary conflict within individual arguments seems unavoidable even in texts that may appear to be ideologically consistent.

Let us look at the ideological opposition posited by these critics in their opening paragraphs. "Every discipline," Torgovnick (1996) begins, "has rules and limitations of its own--certain ways of doing things, both for better and for worse" (p. 282). Following this introductory generalization, it becomes clear that the disciplinary limitations Torgovnick describes are upheld more often for worse than for better. The remainder of her opening paragraph reads as follows:

Interdisciplinary study works because people from one discipline are not routinely bound by the same assumptions as people from another. They do not necessarily share the same blind spots, focus on the same things, or think about problems in the same way. So, often, they can see through the assumptions that ground other disciplines so thoroughly that the assumptions have become invisible axioms. People from another discipline can understand problems--and, sometimes, reach solutions--in a new or cogent way. In

other words, interdisciplinarity brings with it the benefits of defamiliarization. It can break through to powerful insights.
(p. 282)

Torgovnick's idealizing view of interdisciplinarity contrasts sharply with the antithetical argument posited in Levin's essay, "The New Interdisciplinarity in Literary Criticism."

Following his contextualizing introduction, Levin (1993) takes his opening shot at interdisciplinarity in literary studies, asserting the practice's lack of intellectual rigour and its failure to meet the criteria of scholarly responsibility:

A good way to start would be to ask how most critics today go about becoming interdisciplinary. They usually do not proceed by first selecting another discipline and then trying to master it, which would take a lot of time and would be unnecessary, as we will see. My impression is that most of them do not even try to acquire an overall sense of the other discipline, of the sort that could be derived from a few good introductory courses. Instead they typically begin by selecting from the discipline a particular theory that they want to use. . . . But since this procedure in effect bypasses the other discipline itself as an organized body of knowledge and mode of investigation, critics do not select a theory on the basis of its standing in its own discipline, and so we must ask on what basis they do select it. (pp. 14-15)

These passages make it readily apparent that Levin and Torgovnick aim to assume opposing ideological positions over the issue of interdisciplinarity.

But Torgovnick's and Levin's polarizing arguments are not as different as they may seem; contrary to their proclaimed positions, both critics produce a paradoxical discourse that is at once both inclusive and exclusive. This external opposition that pits the inclusive language of interdisciplinarity against the exclusive language of disciplinary specificity is a surface polarization that obscures the debaters' reenactment of the conflict within the

discourse itself. Analyzing their texts using selected concepts from the work of Halliday and drawing on some of the tools and theories developed by other social semioticians and discourse analysts, I will attempt to push beyond the surface substantive polarity of these arguments to reveal their similar internal contradictions and their mutual reenactment of the larger conflict. Before going on to explore some of the deeper contradictions embodied in these texts, I will first offer an illustration of the ways in which their respective ideologies are linguistically supported at the semantic level. More specifically, I will consider the ways in which the functional components of language are realized in the grammar of these texts and show how these grammatical choices both reflect and shape the ideologies they aim to support. I will later complement this micro-analysis by looking at some later passages from these texts, with the aim of illustrating some of the ways they work against the ideologies they aim to uphold.

Halliday identifies three functions of language, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual, that operate "within the clause"; in this analysis, I will consider some of the semantic markers that are generally agreed to function as part of the ideational and interpersonal components of language. The ideational function, Halliday (1978) proposes, encompasses all of those aspects of language having to do with the speaker's worldview: "It is the content function of language, language as 'about something'" (p. 112). An important semantic marker of the ideational is transitivity, which, under the experiential subcomponent, "handles all types of processes, qualities, participating entities and circumstances" (Morley, 1985, p. 50). Transitivity expresses processes within the clause, and the process itself is expressed by the verb phrase (Simpson, 1993, p. 88). In the

transitivity structure, the clause is expressed as Agent + Process + Goal (Halliday, 1978, p. 45). In Hallidayan terms, both the subject and the object are "participants"; the explicit presence of two participants (also known as agent and affected) creates a transitive clause, while the presence of a single participant renders the clause intransitive.

Consider Torgovnick's opening clause as a transitivity structure:

A1. Interdisciplinary study works

Torgovnick's flat assertion embodies her own experiential point of view, and she states the proposition as if it were an indisputable fact, even though we already know that other critics express a very different experience with and perspective on interdisciplinary study. The agent in this clause is "interdisciplinary study" and the process is "works". There is no expressed object (what Halliday calls the "affected") and only one explicit participant; thus, in the system of transitivity, this clause is descriptive and inherently intransitive (Morley, 1985).¹³ We have what Halliday (1983) calls an "actor in a non-directed action" (p. 126). In this clause, "interdisciplinary study" assumes the grammatical position of agent.

In the chosen construction, interdisciplinary study is thus conflated with the human agents without whom it ceases to exist; this is a nominalization that deletes the active agent (Hodge & Kress, 1993). Through this nominalizing process, the affected becomes the agent, and the agent in this clause, "interdisciplinary study," is an inanimate and abstract noun. Presumably, though, there are actual people somewhere behind this

¹³ As Halliday (1983) notes, "an intransitive clause is one in which the roles of 'affected' and 'agent' are combined in the one participant" (p. 127).

discourse working in this area of study, yet the two participants--scholars and interdisciplinary study--are combined into a single agent.¹⁴ Even though the subsequent clause opens by identifying the causal agents, it is perhaps revealing that the sentence is constructed in this particular way, rather than "Because of people, interdisciplinary study works. . ." or another of the many available grammatical formulations. Nominalizations are also found in the last two clauses of the paragraph:

A14. interdisciplinarity brings with it the benefits
 of defamiliarization.

A15. It can break through to powerful insights.

In these clauses, scholars who practice interdisciplinarity are again conflated in A14 with an abstract noun, "interdisciplinarity," and then in A15 with a pronoun, "It," which represents the abstract noun.

This type of nominalization is suggestive; in this case, the deleted agents are those literary critics who participate in and presumably uphold the practice of interdisciplinary study. Through the process of nominalization, the fact that interdisciplinary study is the product of human agents is minimized. As far as the available linguistic resources permit,

¹⁴ Hodge and Kress (1993) use the term "nominalization" in a rather specialized sense. In Hodge and Kress's terminology, nominalization refers to what they call a "nominalization transformation," a process that deletes one or more of the participants in a given action. They identify a similar nominalization in Chomsky's work, one that conflates linguists with the study of syntax: for example, "Syntax is the study of the principles and processes. . ." (p. 31). As they go on to suggest, this sort of nominalization presents to the reader "a world without people, where no one thinks or speaks but language is produced, where no one studies or investigates, but investigation proceeds unerringly to its goal" (p. 31). This type of nominalization, they argue, suggests that "investigation can have a goal independent of the investigator" (p. 32). Torgovnick's use of "interdisciplinary study" has a similar semantic effect.

interdisciplinarity is grammatically constructed as a more spontaneous phenomenon, one in which the role of potentially ideologically motivated scholars is secondary to the practice's existence. By subsuming the human agents within the abstraction, these nominalizations work to minimize the concept of interdisciplinarity as an ideologically motivated construct. Thus the overall effect of these nominalizations is naturalization. Or, in Fairclough's (1995) terms, Torgovnick's text naturalizes the notion of interdisciplinarity into "common sense."¹⁵ In this text, the value of interdisciplinary study is not open to question; rather, its merit and continuing practice are assumed in the discourse. At the semantic level, Torgovnick's text both reflects and maintains the ideology of the pro-interdisciplinary group that lies within the larger discipline of literary studies, a group that is not as interested in questioning the practice's existence as it is in assuming that interdisciplinary study does and should exist.

Contrast Torgovnick's presentation of interdisciplinary study with that found in Levin's opening sentence:

- B1. A good way to start would be to ask
- B2. how most critics today go about becoming interdisciplinary.

In this formulation, interdisciplinarity is not a pre-existing, naturalized phenomenon that is merely assisted by human agents; rather, "interdisciplinary" is clearly something that critics consciously and deliberately seek out and become. In this text, interdisciplinarity is not

¹⁵ As Fairclough suggests, "[a] characteristic of a dominant IDF [ideological-discursive formation] is the capacity to 'naturalize' ideologies, i.e. to win acceptance for them as non-ideological 'common sense'" (p. 27).

naturalized into common sense; its constructed nature is affirmed and is consequently open to question and even deconstruction.

But, in clause B1, even though the reader knows that an injunction is being made "to start," the intended agent remains unknown; in this sort of grammatical construction, as Hodge and Kress (1993) point out, even though we know something is missing, "we cannot always be certain of the specific identity of the deleted actor" (pp. 25-27). The structure of this clause presumes that the reader is going to agree that this is indeed "A good way to start." Even if the actor is recoverable (which in this case it is not), the effect of this sort of deletion is often to take "people entirely for granted and to eliminate them from the printed text" (Hodge & Kress, 1993, p. 28). Within the ideational component, Levin's text works grammatically to support the ideology it aims to uphold; in this configuration, it is assumed that we will also question the construction of interdisciplinary practice.

The modality of Levin's opening demand does, however, save the text from being absolutely arbitrary; the use of "would" in this context lends a degree of tentativeness to the sentence, even though we know we are not being offered any other alternatives. This observation leads to what Halliday calls the interpersonal function of language, of which modality is a "major exponent"; as Simpson (1993) defines it, modality "refers broadly to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence" (p. 47). And, most relevant to this discussion, Simpson (1990) also notes that modality is an especially useful tool for analyzing the discourse of literary critics: "examining interpersonal features of language," Simpson suggests, "we can uncover the

strategies that critics use to 'get their point across'--strategies that, in the absence of a close analysis of modal meaning, are often insidious" (p. 66).

There are two major subtypes of modality, epistemic and deontic, that Simpson finds most illuminating when considering the argumentative and discursive habits of literary critics. Epistemic modality, Simpson explains, "indicates various degrees of commitment to the truth of [a] proposition" (p. 67), and this modal relationship with knowledge claims is clearly illustrated by the following examples drawn from Torgovnick's text:

- A4. They do not necessarily share the same blind spots
- A7. So, often, they can see through the assumptions
- A10. People from another discipline can understand problems

These knowledge claims express different gradations of probability in relation to the expressed propositions, ranging from the more tentative "do not necessarily" (A4) and "often. . . can" (A7) to the more certain unqualified "can" (A10). In comparison to the final clause, the modality in the first two clauses expresses a higher degree of reservation. The first suggests that scholars from outside of a given discipline are not necessarily limited in the same way as those within it, but the possibility of their sharing "the same blind spots" remains. In the next clause, those who do not share these disciplinary limitations can "often," but not always, see that which others cannot. In A10, however, "people"--an unqualified term that suggests all people--from another discipline "can"

understand these problems. Though "can" does not express absolute certainty, it is more certain than "do not necessarily" or "often" can; the degree of certainty increases in a way that makes the transition almost imperceptible.

The other subtype Simpson (1990) considers significant in literary-critical discourse is deontic modality, which he defines as "the modal system of 'obligation' as it is concerned with a speaker's attitude toward the desirability (or nondesirability) of certain actions or events" (p. 67). The modality of the final clause of Levin's text is deontic:

B16. and so we must ask on what basis they do
select it.

The deontic subjective "must" exceeds mere obligation (the degree of commitment that would be expressed had Levin chosen "should ask") and thus conveys what Simpson (1990) calls "strong deontic requirement" (p. 85). The modality in this text has moved from the tentative to the absolute and from assessment of truth to unequivocal obligation; what was implicit in the opening clause becomes explicit by the final clause. Because this paragraph ends with deontic requirement, all of the earlier more tentatively expressed propositions are subsumed within this closing statement of absolute truth. The assertion "we must ask" leaves unquestioned all of the premises on which the requirement is based; what was initially expressed tentatively is finally constructed as an imperative to question with the aim of discrediting interdisciplinary practice.

The certainty imparted by modality in these texts is also communicated through the liberal use of negation. Negations are found in the second and third clauses of

Torgovnick's text, and the negation of the third clause (A4) is further extended to the subsequent two phrases (A5 and A6):

- A2. because people from one discipline are not routinely bound by the same assumptions
- A4. They do not necessarily share the same blind spots
- A5. focus on the same things
- A6. or think about problems in the same way.

Adverb clause A2 is a passivization of a negation. In it, the goal ("people") comes first, the process ("are not bound") comes second, and the agent ("assumptions") comes last. This order reverses the usual formula of Actor + Process + Goal, a reversal that changes the theme of the clause from actor to affected (Hodge & Kress, 1993); thus "people," which comes first in the clause, becomes the theme. This focus on "people" rather than "assumptions" has an important semantic effect; the syntactic structure of this clause gives "people" greater agency to resist the now less potent "assumptions," even though these people are shown to be resisting them already.

Negations are also prevalent in Levin's text. In addition to the negatives "do not proceed" (B3), "unnecessary" (B5), and "do not even try" (B7) found in the examples given above, the penultimate clause of Levin's paragraph contains another negation:

- B15. critics do not select a theory on the basis of its standing in its own discipline

This negation, like Torgovnick's, tells us that the speaker believes that a positive version of this statement exists; the speaker is aware that some critics do select a theory on the

basis of its standing in its own discipline, or at least there are those who would argue that they do. Thus Hodge and Kress (1993) aptly describe negation as a "visible dialectic," where "[e]ven with a simple negative the positive form must be understood so that the hearer knows what is being denied. That is, both speaker and hearer must entertain the positive form in order to understand the negative" (p. 137).

The negations found in both of these texts do indeed reveal the speakers' mutual awareness of an existing competing discourse; both texts construct what Lemke (1995) describes as "its heteroglossic relations to the other." And, like the texts in Lemke's analysis, each of these texts "shows its author to be aware of the divergence between his discourse and the discourse of the other community" (p. 44). This awareness is also more explicitly articulated in the interpersonal relationships that are constructed by these texts in order to maintain a distinction between the human actors on the "right" side of the debate and those who generate the opposing discourse.

The interpersonal function is also enacted by the terms used in these texts to describe their visible human agents; the contrast between the lexical choices Torgovnick and Levin make to describe interdisciplinary practitioners is especially noteworthy. In a striking departure from the academic norm, Torgovnick calls those practitioners "people," rather than the more usual academics, scholars, practitioners, or critics. "People" is used three times in this short paragraph (A2, A3, and A10) and is substituted twice with the pronoun "they" (A4 and A7). Levin, on the other hand, complies with a scholarly norm and describes interdisciplinarians as "critics" in the first sentence; the pronoun "they" is

used three times (B3, B9, and B10) and the pronoun "them" (B7) is used once before Levin returns to using "critics" in the final sentence (B15).

In keeping with the text's ideology, Torgovnick's "people" is a far more inclusive term than Levin's "critics." The former is highly inclusive ("people" can mean anyone and everyone), while "critics" is highly exclusive, given to mean those who belong to a group made up solely of literary scholars. These lexical choices are perfectly in keeping with these texts' opposing positions on interdisciplinarity. In Torgovnick's case, she advocates an interdisciplinary practice that is inclusive both in its objects of and approaches to literary study. Levin, on the other hand, advocates a clearly defined and exclusive disciplinary structure, one where critics do not go ransacking willy-nilly through other disciplines searching for applicable theories they barely understand and are not qualified to assess in terms of scholarly worth.

Crucial, too, to a text's interpersonal function is the use of the personal pronoun; as Fowler and Kress (1979) note, "[p]ersonal pronouns always deserve notice" (p. 201). Only Levin uses the pronoun "we" in his introduction to the issue of interdisciplinarity, a distinction that creates a discursive and ideological paradox. In Fowler and Kress's terms, the "we" Levin uses is an inclusive "we," the implied "we" of the opening phrase "A good way to start. . ." (B1), and one that similarly "implicates the addressee in the content of the discourse and is therefore, ostensibly, more intimate and solidary" (p. 202). Yet the pronoun in this context is also the "we" of strong assumptions, what Fowler and Kress describe as "the 'we' used by a superior partner in an interaction, and which confidently, unquestioningly and unchallengeably includes the other, inferior partner" (p. 203). Levin's

"we" is thus both inclusive and exclusive; it arbitrarily includes the reader in the command "we must ask" (B10), but assumes the superior position of the commander who assumes without question the reader's acquiescence. The "we" in this text appropriates the reader on behalf of its quest to challenge interdisciplinarity and at the same time establishes a hierarchy by placing the speaker in a position superior to that of the arbitrarily included reader.

The text's semantic tension is now becoming apparent: performing the dual and contradictory functions of inclusion and exclusion, Levin's paradoxical "we" is an enactment of Hodge and Kress's notion of the ideological complex. Keeping the significant role of pronouns, as well as the other linguistic features discussed above, in mind, I will now explore some of the ways these texts reenact the larger conflict in selected passages that follow Torgovnick's and Levin's opening discussions of interdisciplinary study; as Lemke (1995) suggests, a linear or "dynamic" reading of a text should always be accompanied by looking at the textual fragment within the larger text.¹⁶ This more synoptic view will show the ideological complex at work, revealing the ways these texts not only uphold their professed ideologies at the semantic level, but also contradict them.

Hodge and Kress's (1988) "ideological complex" is a semiotic system that expresses "a functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively

¹⁶ Though the above analysis has not been a strictly linear, step-by-step unfolding of these texts, it has, like the dynamic reading, focussed on small fragments of text. This sort of close analysis, as Lemke argues, "should always be complemented by synoptic reading in which, as literary criticism does, we interpret each part of the text in relation to the whole" (p. 46).

imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its own distinctive interests" (p. 3). These social semioticians apply their theory and methods largely in the analysis of "popular" written and visual texts, such as newspaper reports, comic strips, and television broadcasts, and their aim is to show how the dynamic relationships of a complex and hierarchical society are enacted in semiotic and semantic systems. Though academic argument is an inherently insular genre and academic texts are far from popular, the academy is as hierarchical and complex as the larger social world. And, despite its many gestures of egalitarianism, the English department has its own complex and often hierarchical structure.

The work of any discipline is evinced by its texts, and academic discourse both reflects and supports disciplinary structure. Innately dependent on the texts it produces, disciplinary authority is maintained through what Hodge and Kress (1988) call a "logonomic system." A logonomic system, as Hodge and Kress define it, is "a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances" (p. 4). Though an unfamiliar mode of discourse outside of the academy, the interdisciplinary debate within literary studies deploys a coercive discourse that does indeed encapsulate an ideological struggle between those who uphold the established logonomic system and those who challenge it. The interdisciplinary debate is a site of contestation that sees the new wave of interdisciplinary critics challenging the disciplinary ideology of their more traditional colleagues, who are most often older and more established. And the arguments of the latter group are not

inappropriately interpreted as reactive, impelled by the established critic's desire to maintain disciplinary continuity in the face of rapid change.

According to Hodge and Kress, this sort of complex intermingling of contradictory worldviews within a given context is reenacted in texts produced within that context. Thus the ideologies explicitly upheld by those texts are also challenged and ultimately contradicted; as Hodge and Kress point out,

Far from an ideology being a single consistent but biased version of reality, it normally comes complete with its own negation, in a deeply contradictory set of versions of reality whose contradictions are intrinsic to their function. (p. 157)

This simultaneous presence of conflicting views of reality is manifest in the ideological complex, which consist of two components that represent these opposing views. One component, which they call the "solidarity function" or the "S-form," "represents the world in a way that blurs differences, antagonisms, conflicts of interest." The other component they call the "power function" or the "P-form," which "expresses the interest of the group against its others, so that it exacerbates difference, hostility, superiority" (p. 157). The contradictions that combine to form the ideological complex are perhaps most apparent in Torgovnick's text, where the logonomic status quo is simultaneously and paradoxically upheld by the very discourse that aims to subvert it.

As we have seen, Torgovnick's introductory paragraph in many ways reflects and supports the text's professed ideological stance at every level of meaning; nevertheless, this text that argues on behalf of substantive, methodological, and textual inclusion in literary studies becomes increasingly exclusive as the argument progresses. The second

paragraph of her letter gives a brief summary of some "[i]nterdisciplinary success stories" surrounding psychoanalytic criticism, the significant contributions literary criticism has made in the study of art history, and the benefits poststructuralism has had for the practice of anthropology. The third paragraph of the text reads as follows:

Literary studies has played an important role in all these developments. It was unlikely, to give one example, that a trained psychologist would have thought about Freud as a storyteller or a master of metaphor; both perceptions were natural for literary critics. Interdisciplinarity has enhanced the power and prestige, not to mention the available subject matter, of my discipline--important benefits of interdisciplinary studies to members of the MLA. (p. 282)

This paragraph begins with "Literary studies," a nominalization that not only eliminates the human agents who do this sort of work, but also arbitrarily includes all its practitioners, regardless of their position on interdisciplinarity in literary studies. This sense of inclusion is reinforced by the use of "literary critics" in the subsequent sentence, which suggests that all practitioners would think about Freud as a creative writer; in this sense, all literary critics become interdisciplinarians. In the next statement, it is not these literary critics, but the abstract noun "interdisciplinarity" that has performed this important service to "my discipline." As Hodge and Kress note, these sorts of lexicalizations "naturalize a transformational sequence. They distract attention from its constructedness and its prior sequences" (p. 183). In this sequence of lexicalizations, disciplinary practitioners are initially conflated with an abstract noun, then described with the more concrete but still inclusive "literary critics," who are then conflated with another abstraction, "Interdisciplinarity." By the time we get to the final abstraction, the practice is again

naturalized into common sense. Most importantly, these lexicalizations allow a single voice to speak "common sense" on behalf of an internally diverse social group.

As Hodge and Kress (1993) suggest, lexicalizations are crucial to the function of the ideological complex in that "finally, they indicate that this transformation is accepted by a group, no longer the product of an individual" (p. 183). In the final clause, the "enhanced power and prestige" that interdisciplinarity has brought to literary studies has important benefits to the group, "members of the MLA." Despite the previous imposition of commonality, interdisciplinarity is now a highly exclusive practice that belongs only within the realm of literary studies and is only rightly practised by Torgovnick and other members of the MLA. In this contradictory construction, literary studies is performing the P-function, speaking on behalf of a diverse group of people who are conflated with the practice and its ideology.

The first human agent that appears in this passage is "a trained psychologist," but this psychologist is constructed as the disciplinary Other who could not possibly have seen Freud as a "storyteller or a master of metaphor." Despite the trained psychologist's presumed familiarity with Freud's work, she does not possess the perceptions that are "natural for literary critics." The psychologist fails not only to fully comprehend Freud, but, because she lacks the "natural" perceptions of literary critics, would also be incapable of doing literary criticism. Anyone who has not been trained in literary criticism, then, falls into this single solidary category; this "one example" represents every scholar outside the discipline and collapses their distinctions. This conflation performs what Hodge and Kress describe as the solidarity function. The psychologist and every other academic who

is not a practising interdisciplinarian and a card-carrying member of the MLA is simultaneously figured in this S-form; the text thus makes a very sharp distinction between "us" and "them."

In this formulation, theoretical inclusiveness works only one way; interdisciplinarity is best practised by "my discipline." An argument that began with practitioners either conflated with the abstract term "interdisciplinary study" or described under the broadly inclusive term "people," has become arbitrarily exclusive. Interdisciplinarity is now practised within the highly exclusive confines of "my discipline." As it is now constructed, this discipline excludes all those who fail to practice interdisciplinarity, for it is precisely this practice that has brought "power and prestige" to "my discipline." This discipline of power and prestige, then, can only include those who have brought these enviable qualities to the discipline--everyone else must belong to some other discipline that lacks this power and prestige. Most importantly, the professional cynicism expressed in the equation "interdisciplinary study brings power and prestige therefore it is good" blatantly contradicts the inclusive and egalitarian ideologies on which the practice is both founded and justified.

Conversely, Levin's text becomes more inclusive as his argument progresses:

We should not place all the blame for the present state of interdisciplinarity upon these critics, since a share belongs to the rest of us, or rather to the discipline of literary criticism. It can hardly be a coincidence that our discipline is so hospitable to discredited theories from other disciplines and is able to prove that they "work" in interpreting literature. This must be related to our interpretive procedures, which seem to operate without any rules. (p. 26)

In a striking contrast with Torgovnick's "my discipline," Levin now speaks of "our discipline," a discipline that overtly includes the very practitioners whose ideology the text aims to oppose. Levin opens this paragraph with "We": presumably, this is the same "we" found in the earlier passage, the "we" that the text assumes will agree with its anti-interdisciplinarity argument; as an arbitrarily inclusive pronoun used to represent the "right" side of the conflict, it is a P-form. Those on the other side of the ideological divide are "these critics," who represent the S-form. The S-form and the P-form both work to obfuscate differences within these separate, ideologically opposed groups. But the P-form, after initially uniting a group against the equally solidary others it opposes, works to "exacerbate differences" within that group (Hodge & Kress, 1993, p. 157). "We" shouldn't blame only the avant-garde critics who commit these intellectual crimes since "a share belongs to the rest of us." Yet this acceptance of partial responsibility is a rhetorical gesture; the text quickly qualifies this acceptance of responsibility by shifting it from the shoulders of the critics who agree with Levin to an abstract noun, "the discipline of literary criticism."

The reason for the discipline's ready adoption of "discredited theories from other disciplines," Levin goes on to suggest, "must be related to our interpretive procedures." Yet we already know that it is the intellectually irresponsible interdisciplinarians who adopt these "discredited theories," and the quotation marks around "work" signal to the reader that these theories really don't work at all. Though this sentence begins with the inclusive term "our discipline," by the end of the sentence, the distinctions within that discipline are reestablished; we now know that not everyone is in fact "hospitable" to the

alien and rejected theories the text describes. The final sentence becomes inclusive once again, where the text describes "our interpretive procedures." These procedures, we are told, "seem to operate without any rules": the solution to the problem of interdisciplinarity, then, is to make rules, rules that would eliminate this destructive adoption of discredited theories.

This passage is fraught with contradictions. It is at once both inclusive and exclusive, including interdisciplinary practitioners within "our discipline," only to insist that they need to be re-disciplined. The P-form and the S-form thus perform their contradictory functions of smoothing over the contradictions on the surface of the text while simultaneously reaffirming the difference between the opposing groups they represent and blurring the distinctions that we know must also exist within the groups represented by both the P-form and the S-form.

Though the above passages from both Torgovnick's and Levin's texts call for and affirm the value of reuniting this fractious and divided discipline in heterogeneous harmony, these gestures of inclusion are challenged by their respective reconfigurations of an exclusionary disciplinarity, one that does not really allow a space for the disciplinary Other. In Torgovnick's text, the inclusiveness implicit in interdisciplinary practice is contradicted by her eventual construction of a highly exclusive discipline with clearly delineated practices; even though she advocates a different kind of practice, she nevertheless takes an ideological position that seems practically indistinguishable from the ideology of exclusion that marks the traditionalist opposition. In Levin's text, the exclusiveness implicit in any anti-interdisciplinary argument is compromised by the

arbitrary inclusions he makes only to break; though on the surface it appears to adopt the inclusive ideology of the opposition, this text, like Torgovnick's, ultimately upholds an ideology of disciplinary exclusion. Thus, although the professed ideologies of these texts are repeatedly encoded within the semantic system, this grammatical reaffirmation of the necessary polarization of their expressed worldviews is also challenged in many ways.

Any discourse that is meant to support a given ideology works in many ways to smooth over evidence of any internal ideological conflict, but the evidence cannot be completely destroyed; as Hodge and Kress (1993) suggest, the contradictions at work in every text "do not strike a discordant note" because "[t]he ideological complex can easily absorb them" (p. 163). Our dependence on language to express either resistance or domination also means that the ideology of the opposing view, despite our intentions, will enter our discourse in unintentional and sometimes surprising ways; as Hodge and Kress (1993) point out, "unity is an achievement that has to be won and maintained in and through language, in order for domination to be effective and resistance to be mobilized" (p. 154). Though the professed ideologies that mandate these discourses are clearly visible on the surface of these texts and are further supported in many ways by the available rhetorical and grammatical resources, the resulting texts are also unavoidably contradictory: as such, these intensely dialogic texts embody a discursive reenactment of the ideological clash that impels this intradisciplinary struggle.

Thus both Torgovnick's and Levin's texts embody and reflect the social dynamics that mark the larger disciplinary community. Indeed, the discipline's diverse ideologies seem unavoidably manifest in texts that must, at least to a degree, reflect and embody the

discursive and argumentative tendencies that are a crucial and shared part of any disciplinary identity and practice. Despite their marked differences, this shared disciplinary legacy cannot be completely effaced, a point that becomes more clear when these texts are considered from the larger perspective of register. Inevitably, their common "context of situation" means that these texts share some striking registerial similarities, and, as Halliday (1978) suggests, the theory of register helps us "to understand what situational factors determine what linguistic features" (p. 32).

The ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language that operate within the clause are connected, respectively, with the registerial components of field, tenor, and mode that operate "above the clause." Field, as Halliday defines it, "is the social action in which the text is embedded; it includes the subject-matter, as one special manifestation" (p. 110). The social action and the subject of these texts is interdisciplinarity in literary studies; despite their professed ideological differences, these texts share the same contextual field. Tenor, according to Halliday (1978) "is the set of role relationships among the relevant participants" (p. 110).¹⁷ At the least delicacy of analysis, the explicit participants in these texts are the writer and the reader. Nevertheless, other participants are implied; the assumed participants include both those who would agree with their expressed ideologies and those who uphold the opposing point of view. Mode "is the channel or wavelength selected, which is essentially the function that is assigned to

¹⁷ The participants Halliday refers to here need to be distinguished from other participants--the agent and affected--found "within the clause." Describing how language functions "above the clause," Halliday uses the term "participants" in its more usual sense, referring to the explicit participants (the writer and the reader), as well as to those presence is implied.

language in the total structure of the situation; it includes the medium" (Halliday, 1978, p. 110). Considered in light of the components of field, tenor, and mode that function "above the clause," the registerial similarity of these texts comes into sharper focus.

Years of training and practice means that the habits of the literary critic cannot be entirely absent from these texts, and, considering that their field and tenor are related either to the practice or practitioners of literary studies, it seems reasonable to suggest that the mode of both texts is, more specifically, literary-critical argument.¹⁸ Seen in this light, it seems arguable that although both of these texts represent metadisciplinary argument, they are only superficially different from the seemingly more explicatory genre of literary criticism. On the other hand, however, these texts share a markedly straightforward style, a mode of delivery that seems very different from much recent disciplinary discourse.

As MacDonald (1990) points out in her study of literary-critical writing, literary critics, ignoring the advice repeatedly given in a multitude of handbooks aimed at teaching students how to write clear and effective prose, typically use longer than usual sentences with complex clause structures. This phenomenon is most apparent in newer and more interdisciplinary critical approaches to literature; "vanguard" critics, MacDonald suggests, produce more syntactically complex texts than their "traditionalist" colleagues. But neither Levin nor, curiously, Torgovnick rely on the lengthy and often complex syntactical structures MacDonald finds in the work of vanguard critics; thus both of these critics seem

¹⁸ Though neither of these critics is writing in the more explicatory mode often conceived as primary in literary-critical writing, the distinction between argument and interpretation is at best ambiguous; as Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor (1991) observe, "literary criticism, whatever its strategy, remains argumentative in its purposeful support of claims and in its attempt to gain its audience's adherence" (p. 78).

to be responding to the type of reformist demand found in MacDonald's concluding remarks, where she insists that "[p]rose that aims to convey information or to bring outsiders into a circle of informed readers needs to adopt the grammar of clarity" (p. 58).

Compared to the work of many contemporary critics, both Torgovnick and Levin do indeed deploy a consistent "grammar of clarity." Torgovnick's text gives little evidence outside of vocabulary that serves to identify the text as typical of vanguard interdisciplinarians whose "theoretical proclivities," as MacDonald demonstrates, contribute to the syntactical complexity¹⁹ of their texts. Torgovnick's text doesn't comply with the vanguard conventions of rhetorical and syntactical complexity, and its straightforward style doesn't seem to contradict the ideology of inclusion that is concomitant with interdisciplinary practice. Both Torgovnick's and Levin's text seem far removed from the inaccessible mode of discourse attributed to vanguard literary critics, a mode of discourse that, as many critics would argue, aims to persuade by convincing the reader of its erudition with a demonstration of rhetorical virtuosity.

This shared stylistic simplicity seems to indicate their mutual rejection of current disciplinary conventions. The similarly clear and comprehensible style of their prose is perhaps motivated by a shared desire to counter the exclusionary ideology attributed to

¹⁹ I am not using the term "syntax" in a strictly Hallidayan sense. Halliday (1985) does not use syntax to refer to sentence structures, but rather as a means of discussing the relationships between and within clauses, what he calls the "clause complex." "A sentence," Halliday points out, "is a constituent of writing, while a clause complex is a constituent of grammar" (p. 193). Rather than considering syntax as a constituent of grammar, I am using the term in its larger and more usual sense as a constituent of writing, considering syntax in light of the rhetorical effects produced by the comparatively simple sentence structures found in both Torgovnick's and Levin's texts.

much contemporary critical discourse. On the other hand, however, there are perhaps some cynical reasons behind this apparent accessibility. A less sophisticated readership (undergraduates, for example) would be more likely to seek out literary-critical work than metadisciplinary argument; thus there seems little need to assert the intellectual hierarchy in the absence of an audience more likely to be cowed into belief in the face of an epideictic display of scholarly sophistication.²⁰ In light of the topic, the anticipated readers are most likely initiated academics, and their matter-of-fact tone and style also lends these texts the air of discourse addressed to equals. Both the field and the tenor of Torgovnick's and Levin's texts suggest they are intended for the consumption of their colleagues. Arguably, then, the mode adopted by both Torgovnick and Levin is perhaps informed by a desire to avoid the kind of rhetorical criticism that is often levelled at literary critics.

Additionally, although the mode of these texts seems very different from that typical of much current criticism, the overarching aim is the same; as critical linguist Karl Sornig (1989) points out, the will to persuade predominates even in seemingly polarized modes of communication. In his discussion of linguistic strategies of persuasion, Sornig affirms MacDonald's findings when he notes that specialist discourse tends to rely on gestures of scholarly sophistication to win over its audience, what he calls "the strategy of using exotic and marked forms to arouse attention and feign the sound of scientific [i.e., specialist] language" (p. 110). But there are other equally purposeful forms of discourse

²⁰ As MacDonald (1990) so aptly puts it, the refusal to use a grammar of clarity suggests that "vanguard writers are primarily involved in an elaborate ritual of gamesmanship to position themselves in an elite and to maintain the boundaries of the circle against those outside it" (p. 59).

that are more accessible, forms that attempt to win over the reader with strategies of openness and familiarity. Torgovnick, in particular, writes with a measure of what Sornig calls "home-spun unmarkedness," and the text's ready accessibility reflects a style that Sornig describes as "apt to be identified with naturalness, honesty and intimacy" (p. 110). Though neither Torgovnick nor Levin can be accused of relying on an obfuscating and exclusive rhetoric to convince readers of the validity of their arguments, this comparative clarity does not necessarily make their textual tactics any less strategic.

This apparent simplicity and honesty is also imparted through their shared reliance on assertive statements. In Torgovnick's text, every sentence in her opening paragraph contains an assertive statement, an assertive tendency that is consistently maintained as the argument progresses. The text is largely made up of these sorts of statements:

"Interdisciplinary success stories abound," "there is no getting away from interdisciplinarity," and "Interdisciplinarity has no promises to keep" (p. 282) are clearly assertive statements, statements which appear in the second, fifth, and sixth paragraphs of the text and are consistent with the overall rhetorical style found in Torgovnick's letter. Levin's text reveals a similar rhetorical consistency. His essay opens with an assertion: "It seems clear that one of the best things a literary critic can do today is to become interdisciplinary" (p. 13), a declarative statement that not only comments on the cynicism he attributes to interdisciplinary practice, but also sets the generally assertive (yet often ironic) tone of the argument that follows.

This assertive tendency is common in the literary-critical register; in their discussion of the rhetoric of literary criticism, Fahnestock and Secor (1991) observe that

"[t]hough it appears that the gesture in many literary studies is that of informing rather than persuading, the distinction between the informative and the arguable is often more of degree than of kind" (p. 78). The sort of decisive statements on which literary-critical arguments often rely suggest that the speaker is intent on impressing upon the reader the accepted truth of what is said, providing information discursively constructed as indisputable information rather than personal opinion.²¹ Both Levin and Torgovnick do indeed assume the gesture of informing rather than persuading; in Levin's case, his statements are made in the interest of affirming the self-interested cynicism inherent in current interdisciplinary practice, while Torgovnick repeatedly affirms the value of interdisciplinary study. Nevertheless, their seemingly unambiguous delivery of antithetical statements may obscure--but does not erase--a shared disciplinary impulse.

Simpson (1990) has found that literary critics tend to posit statements that "seemed not to be particularly controversial" more tentatively. Conversely, "statements that in substance seemed particularly weighty were couched in the form of categorical assertions" (p. 89). This "curious paradox" Simpson identifies as common in the writing of literary critics expresses the most debatable in the most absolute modal form, and the less debatable in a more tentative modality; like their colleagues, Torgovnick and Levin tend to posit their very different and highly contentious views in the form of categorical

²¹ Disillusioned literary critic Mark Bauerlein (1997) suggests that the "argumentative habit" of making "decisive assertions" is "to couch one's general statements, descriptions, or interpretations, debatable though they may be, in an air of indisputability" and "[t]he fact that the premises remain largely unsubstantiated and the conclusions unproven easily goes unnoticed when scholarship is cloaked in a rhetoric of caniness and certainty" (p. 35).

assertions. The rhetorical and psychological effects of this paradoxical use of modality seem both clear and argumentatively strategic.

Expressing that which is least open to question in a more tentative modality is likely to prompt the reader to focus first on these equivocal statements in any kind of a counter-argument, while expressing that which is most open to question in more a certain modality likely has the opposite effect, making the reader less apt to question (at least initially) these unequivocal and seemingly indisputable assertions. The reader's attention is thus deflected away from that which could most easily be challenged and drawn toward that which is less likely to be disproved. Yet this tendency perhaps also reflects an underlying ambivalence on the part of those who rely on this sort of rhetorical strategy. Overstating the disputable is perhaps a compensatory strategy that obscures argumentative uncertainty; Torgovnick's and Levin's mutual reliance on assertive statements perhaps reflects a shared, underlying awareness of the paradoxical nature of their arguments and the ambiguous nature of disciplinarity, a point that seems further substantiated by their texts' many semantic contradictions.

Their mutual awareness of the complex and overlapping nature of disciplinarity is also explicitly communicated. Recognizing the limitations imposed by the dichotomization of epistemologies that are wrongly believed to belong to specific disciplines, both Levin and Torgovnick suggest that literary criticism is or should be informed by both interpretive and empirical ways of knowing. Levin affirms the importance of epistemological convergence when he argues that the discipline's interpretive procedures are lacking because they "seem to operate without any rules." Levin realizes that interpretive

knowledge claims cannot be upheld without some sort of empirical grounding; interpretation on its own is highly subjective, and it needs to be tempered with a degree of objectivity, an objectivity that can be established and maintained through the development of tried and tested agreed-upon rules. As Levin points out,

The disciplines have been constructed by human beings and have evolved through time. But as a result of this evolution they have developed organized bodies of knowledge and methodologies for producing and testing new knowledge that deserve our respect, for even though they are fallible, they are still the best means we have for learning about the world. (p. 33)

Acknowledging the inescapable subjectivity of academic inquiry, Levin suggests that this subjectivity can be somewhat alleviated by working within a disciplinary tradition that has proven to be "the best means we have" for making knowledge claims. In other words, the only way to make credible interpretive claims is to ground those claims within more empirically oriented methodologies, ways of knowing that have withstood the test of time.

Torgovnick, by claiming that interpretive perceptions come "naturally" to literary critics, also allows a disciplinary space for a degree of objectivity, for that which is not socially constructed. Seeming to affirm the value of empirical evidence, Torgovnick suggests that these perceptions must exist because we can see the effects of their presence. Torgovnick also more explicitly recognizes the crucial, informing role of both empirical and interpretive ways of knowing and their necessary convergence in any sound academic project. Recognizing the necessary convergence of the interpretive and the empirical, Torgovnick suggests that interdisciplinary critics "need to learn more about statistical documentation, interviewing and sampling techniques, and fields that require special

expertise, like math and music" (p. 282). Like Levin, Torgovnick believes that fruitful and credible intellectual enquiry must be grounded in complementary ways of knowing, in epistemologies that have become wrongly and artificially polarized.

Ultimately, though, this epistemic convergence is deemed to benefit Torgovnick's own discipline, not necessarily the ones that supply these crucial empirical methodologies: "the rise of interdisciplinarity, and its future," Torgovnick argues, "are tied to cultural studies and cultural criticism" (p. 282). Though Torgovnick explicitly acknowledges the reciprocity of disciplines and the necessary interaction of their respective epistemological orientations, this version of interdisciplinarity is perhaps most aptly described as the relexicalization of literary studies and criticism; as cultural studies and criticism, the disciplinary boundaries may be renamed and somewhat adjusted, but they still exist.

In the final analysis, both Torgovnick and Levin recognize the importance of learning from other disciplines, but at the same time also recognize the necessity of working within a distinctly disciplinary framework. Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, this simultaneous enactment of interdisciplinary inclusion and disciplinary exclusion reflects an ambivalence commensurate with a process of change, an ambivalence that also suggests that any movement into the future must bring the past along with it. As Halliday (1978) points out, "linguistic structure is the realization of social structure. . . .Because it stands as a metaphor for society, language has the property of not only transmitting the social order but also maintaining and potentially modifying it" (p. 186); though these interdisciplinary arguments aim to modify the academic and, ultimately, the social order, they also maintain and transmit a disciplinary legacy that cannot be entirely denied.

Despite their explicit and distinct differences, close analysis of these texts reveals their many similarities. Ultimately, this analysis suggests that although disciplinarity can take many different forms, a distinct disciplinary orientation seems inevitable in any academic practice. These texts aim to emphasize the irreconcilable nature of their expressed ideologies, but their ideological orientation is not as different as it may seem. Both of these texts illustrate the exclusive and inclusive nature of all academic practice, regardless of whether it is rhetorically styled as interdisciplinary or distinctly disciplinary.

Levin concludes his argument with a similar observation, noting that

There are many different political positions and many different critical positions. . . . And in most of them we find well-meaning, intelligent people who have useful things to tell us about our discipline and interdisciplinarity and the world we share. (p. 34)

The problem in the postmodern academy, as Levin's conclusion suggests, is not that academic work continues to evolve; rather, the problem lies in the fact that academics of various factions have stopped listening to each other. Deploying a rhetoric of polarization that emphasizes difference, both sides in the debate seem to have little choice but to square off in their respective corners; even so, the ideological opposition expressed in these arguments can't entirely obscure their mutual embodiment of continuity and change. Nor do either of these critics deny the interactive nature of epistemologies that are most often construed as irreconcilable: both implicitly and explicitly, these texts affirm that disciplinary interaction and disciplinary distinction are not only inevitable but also desirable in any form of intellectual inquiry.

Chapter Four

Transformations and Classifications: The Rhetoric of Exclusion

A discourse community, as Patricia Bizzell (1992) tentatively defines it, "is a group of people who share certain language-using practices." According to Bizzell, these practices are conventionalized in two ways. First, "[s]tylistic conventions regulate social interactions both within the group and in its dealings with outsiders," and, second, "canonical knowledge regulates the world views of group members, how they interpret experience" (p. 222). If Bizzell is right in defining a discourse community as a site of canonical and stylistic consensus, the English department is divided into two distinctly different communities. Though there is, of course, much diversity within and overlap between the two communities, it does seem safe to say that interdisciplinarians and their more traditionalist colleagues have very different views of what should and should not be a part of the discipline's canon, and that they are equally divided in their views of discipline-appropriate stylistic practices. These canonical and discursive differences reflect and shape differing worldviews that inform a third important distinction: these discourse communities also have distinctly opposing views of the discipline's role in the larger academic and social communities, a distinction that is informed by their differing opinions on the discipline's appropriate objects of and approaches to literary study.

As Levin's argument suggests, members of the traditionalist disciplinary community tend to posit less encompassing and thus more explicitly exclusive definitions of literary studies than their interdisciplinary colleagues. Disciplinary arguments differ from those of interdisciplinarians in their more specific articulation of the discipline's fitting objects of study, in their more exacting definition of the discipline's appropriate mode of discourse, and in their corollary delineation of the discipline's role, a role that is most often defined as culturally, rather than politically and socially, significant. In these three ways, the ideology of disciplinarity opposes the ideology of inclusion that informs the interdisciplinary turn in literary studies. Interdisciplinarians argue in favour of a practice that embraces a wide variety of cultural and scholarly genres, while their more traditionalist colleagues aim to maintain generic distinction, both of the literary work and of the criticism it inspires. Seen in this light, it becomes clear that the antagonism between these two discourse communities is fuelled by issues related to genre, and that this generic divide is both reflected in and shaped by the ideological polarization of interdisciplinary and traditionalist critics.

Unlike their interdisciplinary colleagues, traditionalists tend to define literary genres in terms of their aesthetic value, a generic distinction that in turn informs their views on disciplinary production. Paul de Man (1986) argues that the traditionalist "resistance to theory" is a response to two important shifts in thinking about literature. First, the focus shifts away from "historical and aesthetic" considerations as theory comes to play a more prominent role in literary criticism; the ascension of theory means that "the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but the modalities of production

and reception of meaning and of value" (p. 7). Second, the ascension of theory also means that literary criticism moves away from the realm of the intuitive, where "aesthetics occupies a prominent place" (p. 8). As de Man suggests, the primacy of aesthetic value is challenged by the prominence of theoretical approaches to literary studies, and resisting theory also means privileging the aesthetic.

In their resistance to theoretical and textual inclusion, traditional disciplinarians can be seen as advocates of an academic practice that is, as de Man's argument suggests, necessarily exclusive. Yet this practice is not as exclusive as it may seem. Unlike the interdisciplinarians, these critics do not rely on concrete spatial metaphors to uphold their disciplinary ideology. They do, however, rely on notions of the aesthetic and of genre in a similar way; like the boundaries and territories invoked by the interdisciplinarians, these circumscribing terms makes things appear to be simpler than they really are. In this chapter, I will explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between disciplinarity and the genres that define it. I will suggest that, because traditionalist notions of literary-critical practice are shaped by the aesthetic and its representative genres, disciplinarity is not and cannot be defined in absolute and unambiguous exclusionary terms.

As the unifying tropes behind these arguments, both genre and the aesthetic play a role similar to that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as a function of the "ontological metaphor." According to these theorists, ontological metaphors reduce complex and diverse experiences into a single inanimate noun; this type of metaphorical conceptualization, they argue, is "necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our

experiences" (p. 26).²² Because they organize and shape their conceptualizations of a larger disciplinary whole, the concepts of genre and the aesthetic allow these critics to make arguments that would otherwise be incoherent or impossibly unwieldy, assuring the audience and perhaps even the rhetors themselves that they really do understand all that the terms imply. But, as with the interdisciplinary opposition, the rhetoric of this discourse community embodies an irresolvable tension; like the aesthetically defined genres that inform traditionalist notions of disciplinarity, the practice is at once definable and indeterminate, exclusive and inclusive.

I will begin by demonstrating the ways the aesthetic serves as the defining focal point for the discipline and thus informs and reflects a disciplinary ideology of exclusion. This nominalization of necessarily diverse and complex reading experiences into a single noun, the aesthetic, transforms what is variable and ephemeral into something that seems more concrete and more readily comprehensible; as a generic criterion, the aesthetic performs a transforming, classifying, and thus exclusionary function. Yet this reduction of diverse and complex experiences within the aesthetic does not occlude the multifaceted and inclusive nature of all that the term aims to encapsulate, nor can it obfuscate the indeterminate nature of the disciplinary genres it is invoked to define. With this point in

²² "Ontological metaphors," Lakoff and Johnson suggest, "serve various purposes, and the various kinds of metaphors there are reflect the kinds of purposes served. Take the experience of rising prices, which can be metaphorically viewed as an entity via the noun inflation. This gives us a way of referring to the experience. . . viewing inflation as an entity allows us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it, see it as a cause, act with respect to it, and perhaps even believe that we understand it" (pp. 25-26). If we substitute the words "rising prices" with "literature" and "inflation" with either "genre" or "the aesthetic," this explanation seems equally appropriate, especially with regard to the last item on the list.

mind, I will show how the primacy of aesthetic value in these generically oriented arguments simultaneously challenges the exclusions it ostensibly upholds; ultimately, these disciplinary arguments prove to be as conceptually slippery and paradoxical as those posited by the interdisciplinarians. I will conclude by exploring the ways the complex and dynamic relationship of form and content complicates the notion of aesthetic value and of generic definition. As I hope to demonstrate, the necessary interaction of form and content further challenges the disciplinary ideology of exclusion by both enacting and affirming an epistemological orientation that is at once subjective and objective, interpretive and empirical.

As I have aimed to show in the preceding chapters, even though interdisciplinarians may express a wholehearted commitment to the practice's ideology of inclusion, the tendency to inscribe disciplinary boundaries is not exclusive to traditionalist disciplinarians. Not all interdisciplinarians, however, endorse interdisciplinarity as it is currently practiced. The PMLA letters show that interdisciplinarity has its committed adherents, but they also demonstrate that not all interdisciplinary practitioners support all of its current practices. Susan Balee (1996), for example, notes that colleagues from other disciplines have convinced her that the enthusiastic adoption of many theories that have been rejected as unsound or outdated in their originating disciplines has dampened the credibility and the scholarship of literary critics. Balee's own interdisciplinary practice has led her to take a more generally dim view of interdisciplinarity: "we popularize notions from other disciplines," Balee concludes, "but we don't really understand them in any

depth" (p. 290).²³ Contributors like Balee approve interdisciplinarity in theory, yet they cannot endorse many of its current practices. Other respondents take a more pragmatic critical view of interdisciplinarity, rejecting the approach because their graduate training has failed them in a discipline-oriented job market. Jonathan Boyarin (1996), for example, notes that his scholarly interests straddle "three fields"--history, anthropology, and literary/cultural studies--but he has given up looking for academic employment because his work resists disciplinary definition; ironically, Boyarin is now attending law school, adding yet another discipline to his myriad and apparently unmarketable credentials.

Many of the interdisciplinary voices in the PMLA "Forum" do indeed take a critical view of current interdisciplinary practice. Contributions from traditional disciplinarians, however, are conspicuously absent, an absence that seems odd considering the heated and divisive nature of the debate in other forums. Perhaps this underrepresentation of less interdisciplinary dissenting voices can be attributed to a lack of interest on the part of more traditional scholars, who may be weary of quarrelling or, alternatively, see little point in promoting their disciplinary beliefs in a "Forum" that is specifically about interdisciplinarity. On the other hand, the letters chosen for publication could indicate editorial bias on the part of PMLA, which, like all academic journals, serves a gatekeeping function. As the discipline's flagship journal, PMLA plays an important role in regulating who will and will not be admitted to this discourse community of successful

²³ Daniel Boyarin (1996) draws a similar conclusion, noting that although he supports responsible interdisciplinary scholarship, "I find myself increasingly distressed, however, with advanced undergraduates (and, more rarely, with graduate students) who are majoring in 'something studies' and don't seem to have any of these [basic analytical] tools, let alone an array of different ones" (p. 291).

literary scholars, and thus plays a role in defining acceptable literary-critical genres by determining the scholarly and discursive standards of that academic community. Though the PMLA "Forum" gives a fair sense of the diversity within interdisciplinary practice, the two larger communities--traditionalists and interdisciplinarians--are not equally represented.

According to one critic, PMLA acts as a gatekeeper in favour of theoretically oriented (and thus interdisciplinary) scholarship, a view that seems to be supported by the absence of traditionalist voices in the "Forum" on interdisciplinarity. In a recent article published in Daedalus, Charles Bernstein (1997) suggests that PMLA's defining role in the practice of literary studies is one that favours the theoretical and political over the aesthetically valuable. In literary studies, theory means theories that are often borrowed from practically any discipline, and theoretically oriented scholars can deploy any or many of these theories in their analysis of a limitless supply of cultural products and phenomena. Yet, despite this substantive diversity, PMLA seems to have very limited ideas of the forms the journal's ostensibly diverse content should take.

Despite its apparent ideological and interdisciplinary progressiveness, Bernstein suggests, PMLA demands rigid stylistic conformity from its contributors. What appears to be the journal's substantive inclusiveness is belied by a tendency to impose rigid generic criteria; according to this critic, "its attitudes set a tone of conformity and hypocrisy that governs the profession and sharply delimits the possibilities for the writing styles of graduate students and untenured faculty--that is, the groups most likely to do innovative work." If Bernstein is correct in his analysis of the journal's criteria for publication, this

means that professional success in a discipline that is intensely focussed on the politics of representation is dependent on conforming to PMLA's exclusionary ideology of representation. As Bernstein suggests, disciplinary domination relies on "domination over the form of expression" (p. 189).

PMLA, Bernstein avers, upholds a kind of "Elements of Style fundamentalism" (p. 190), and, although the journal "welcomes talk about poetic function," it only does so "as long as one does not actively engage in poetic acts" (p. 188). As these comments suggest, Bernstein's primary complaint is that the aesthetic has disappeared both as a defining criterion of literary genres and from the prose of those whose professional business it is to discuss and illuminate those works:

. . .critique without aesthetics--that is, the sort of institutionalized critique that dominates the American university--is empty, a shell game of Great Books and Big Methods, full of solutions and cultural capital, signifying nothing. (p. 179)

Bernstein is not an avowed disciplinarian; in fact, he objects to "disciplinarity for the sake of disciplinarity and not in the service of inquiry," and finds it "deplorable that the academic profession is, well, too academic" (p. 187). On the other hand, Bernstein doesn't support current interdisciplinary practice: "Just as we now insist that literary works need to be read in their sociohistorical context," Bernstein argues, "so we must also insist that they be read into the present aesthetic context" (p. 180). Bernstein's complaint is echoed by other, more traditionalist scholars who believe the theoretical "Big Methods" tendency in literary studies has done the discipline an intellectual and cultural disservice. The damaging effects of a contemporary "institutionalized critique," many would agree,

are obfuscated by the rhetorical recasting of the discipline's primary role as one of social and political urgency.

Conversely, many interdisciplinary critics believe that the tendency to valorize the aesthetic has limited the discipline's vision and thus its potential, and argue that this generic specificity blinds scholars to the anti-egalitarian agenda that disciplinary ideology inherently supports. Many contemporary critics argue that the aesthetic is a highly exclusive and distracting criterion of literature, one that obscures more important and socially relevant issues of race, class, and gender and thereby upholds intellectual and cultural elitism. Vincent Pecora (1995), for one, notes that

The academic cultivation of aesthetic response, especially when it occurs as if untouched by social interest, has often been made to serve politically conservative ends. Simply acquiring the "good taste" that comes with aesthetic training can help to create allegiance to class formations that take it upon themselves to preserve not only the cultural heritage but the social status quo itself from attack and transformation. (p. 205)

Thus, the argument goes, the traditional brand of literary criticism represents an oppressive practice, one that privileges aesthetic value in literature while ignoring or obfuscating myriad issues of greater social and political importance and valorizing those critics who have been trained to appreciate fully the literary work's artistic sensibility.

"At stake," Pecora argues, "is the power of a university education to bestow through humanistic training the marks of a certain elite class distinction--that is, good taste--and hence implicit moral and political authority" (p. 206). The elite class distinction of good taste hinges on a cultivated ability to discern the aesthetically valuable text from

its inferior, non-literary counterparts; thus the arguments of literary critics who oppose a politically motivated interdisciplinarity in support of an aesthetically oriented disciplinary practice do indeed enact an ideology of exclusion that is commensurate with an elitist ideology. The aesthetic approach to literary scholarship is, from this perspective, an exclusionary practice, and moving beyond this limiting elitist perspective demands approaches, theories, and methodologies that are necessarily interdisciplinary.

Richard A. Posner (1997), in a recent essay entitled "Against Ethical Criticism," posits a more exclusionary view than Bernstein. Unlike Bernstein, Posner does not argue that the aesthetic is as important as the sociohistorical; rather, he adamantly privileges the aesthetic over all other aspects of literary study: "the proper criteria for evaluating literature," Posner insists, "are aesthetic rather than ethical" (p. 2). In Posner's view, the aesthetic's proper place is at the top of the criteria hierarchy: "by the Left we are told that 'the ideology which saturates [Shakespeare's] text, and their location in history, are the most interesting things about them,'" ²⁴ a statement that "is bizarre in its subordination of aesthetic to political values in evaluating the greatest poet and playwright in history" (p. 7). This privileging of the aesthetic over all other generic qualities in evaluating literature is an exclusionary practice, one that ignores social, cultural, and political concerns in favour of an artistic ideal. In light of Posner's exclusionary defense of aesthetic value, Pecora seems quite right to suggest that the traditionalist tendency to privilege the

²⁴ Posner quotes from Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's essay "History and Ideology: The Instance of Henry V," in J. Drakakis (Ed.), Alternative Shakespeares (London: Methuen).

aesthetic serves politically conservative ends, affirming and perpetuating rather than challenging and destabilizing an oppressive status quo.

Eugene Goodheart (1997b) makes a complaint similar to Posner's in a brief opinion piece published in Philosophy and Literature. In "The Demise of the Aesthetic in Literary Studies," Goodheart opens with an anecdote, describing an interview with a young job candidate. This candidate was able to speak widely and intelligently about Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" from a feminist and New Historicist perspective. But this scholarly fluency came to an abrupt halt when she was asked an apparently simple question, "Is it a good poem?" As Goodheart tells it, the candidate became inarticulate, even dumbfounded, by this surprising request that she discuss the poem in terms of its aesthetic qualities. This lamentable loss of the defining touchstone of literary genres, Goodheart believes, has also adversely affected academic work: "That aesthetic judgement," he laments, "is not one of the current professional practices is clear not only from its absence in the content of literary study but from the styles of the discourses."

Expressing his disapproval of the mingling of literary criticism and politics, a union that diminishes the quality of and even erases the practice of literary criticism, Goodheart goes on to note that

Contemporary literary discourse tends to appropriate works and turn them into texts for purposes that are not literary. What needs to be recovered, it seems to me, is a reading of literature which allows us to listen to its voices, to make its claim on us, that resists our premature impulse to appropriate it to an ideological agenda, a cause for social change. (pp. 142-143)

Literary criticism, as Goodheart sees it, should focus on concerns and purposes that are specifically literary; without this focus, the special qualities that make a work "literary" are unjustly obfuscated by a widespread impulse to appropriate those works on behalf of political causes. By advocating a more traditional literary practice that reads and produces literary and literary-critical genres definable in terms of their aesthetic value, Goodheart, many critics would argue, supports an exclusionary and elitist disciplinary practice.

Some critics have become so disgruntled with the interdisciplinary cultural studies turn of the discipline that they believe the internally fractured English department should formally separate. Frank Kermode (1997), for example, seconds Bernard Bergonzi's motion to divide cultural and literary studies into two distinct and separate disciplines, the latter composed of those who "want to read literature, and possess, or hope to develop, 'literary sensibility.'"²⁵ But, as Kermode suggests, the concept of a specifically literary sensibility presents some serious problems in today's intellectual climate:

Opponents will contend that notions such as "literary sensibility" are precisely part of the battered luggage of the past--loaded with the broken fragments of the aesthetic ideology, tradition, grands recits, canonical works distinguished from all others by centuries of bourgeois propaganda--that must be discarded. The "aesthetic ideology," they are sure, belongs to a superseded episteme.
(p. 176)

Literary criticism, many believe, that focusses on (or even acknowledges) aesthetic value aims to assign some universal truth to literature, an act that simultaneously denies social

²⁵ Bergonzi (1990) makes this suggestion in his book, Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture (Oxford: Clarendon) pp. 100-101.

diversity and the impossibility of a universal human truth in a world where few people occupy positions of cultural privilege.

For Bernstein, Posner, Goodheart, and Kermode, the genres of the literary canon and literary criticism should first and foremost represent aesthetic value, the ultimate criterion that distinguishes the literary from the non-literary. The aesthetic shapes these traditionalist views of the literary canon, the practice of literary criticism, and, consequently, the role of the discipline as maker and explicator of culture. In their attempts to circumscribe the practice of literary studies, these disciplinary definitions both express and enact an exclusionary disciplinarity that is intensified by their privileging of a single criterion over all others in their definitions of both literary and literary-critical genres.

But not all traditionalist critics explicitly uphold the value of the aesthetic as a primary criterion in their definitions of the texts, the practice, and the role of literary studies. One of the most influential of these critics is Duke University's "contemporary sophist," Stanley Fish. Fish is a fierce if avowedly pragmatic advocate of academic professionalism, but he is also a guarded and masterful rhetor. Though he clearly espouses a traditional brand of literary criticism, he somehow manages to avoid any discussion of aesthetic value; in his carefully constructed arguments, the interconnection of traditional disciplinarity and the aesthetic is not readily apparent.²⁶ Fish is somewhat

²⁶ As Brian McCrea (1990) observes, "any professional group seeks to avoid defending the value of what it does; the group assumes the value of what it does and succeeds insofar as it gets the larger society to do the same. English professors achieve this end by refusing to discuss the literary canon" (p. 12), a discussion that would surely lead to notions of aesthetic value. McCrea's point is clearly not applicable to all English professors: as we have

reticent and sometimes cryptic in expressing his views on what the discipline is and should be, but a sampling of his essays on the topic does provide enough evidence to allow for an extrapolation of his disciplinary definition.

Fish addressed the interdisciplinary issue nearly a decade ago, when his article "Being Interdisciplinary is So Very Hard to Do" (1989a/1994) was first published in the MLA journal Profession.²⁷ Fish's overriding objection is not to the reconfiguration of the discipline, but to an interdisciplinary practice that is valorized through its frequent "claims of liberation, freedom, openness" (p. 242). The interdisciplinary project, Fish rightly points out, does not eliminate partiality and parochialism. Rather,

The blurring of existing authoritative disciplinary lines and boundaries will only create new lines and new authorities; the interdisciplinary impulse finally does not liberate us from the narrow confines of academic ghettos to something more capacious; it merely redomiciles us in enclosures that do not advertise themselves as such. (p. 237)

Reenclosure, Fish argues, is still enclosure; in Fish's view, interdisciplinarity is justified only through the self-interested and self-promoting valorization of an academic practice that, in reality, only appears to be egalitarian and inclusive.²⁸

seen, interdisciplinarians are most intent on redefining the literary profession by justifying the value of what they do, but it does apply to some established professionals who often uphold a more traditional scholarly practice.

²⁷ This article was later reprinted in a 1994 collection of Fish's essays, There's No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It's a Good Thing, Too (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁸ In his book that appeared in the same year as "Being Interdisciplinary," Fish agrees with the critics who argue that the practice of literary studies has become both inaccessible and cynical. In his chapter entitled "Profession Despise Thyself: Fear and Self-Loathing in Literary Studies," Fish (1989b) notes that "[l]iterary critics can hardly defend themselves

The so-called crisis in English, Fish (1989b) argues, "is one that we have in part created by taking ourselves too seriously as a priesthood of a culture already made, and not seriously enough as professionals whose business it is to make and remake that culture, even as we celebrate it" (p. 214). In Fish's formulation, the profession errs by over-emphasizing its role as custodian of an inherited culture and under-emphasizing its role in making and remaking culture. What Fish is really saying is that the task of making culture should be given priority over the task of preserving a culture already made; in this formulation, the literary critic is not simply the preserver and explicator of literary art, but actually makes literary art.

Both determining what is and is not literary and producing texts that reflect and uphold that literariness means that literary critics corner a highly exclusive cultural market, fixing the parameters that define literary consumption and literary production. This disciplinary imperialism, Fish believes, is a good thing; in fact, Fish (1989a/1994) finds "the imperialistic success of literary studies heartening and the emergence of cultural studies as a field of its own exhilarating" (p. 242). Although imperialistic success is heartening when it is realized by the English department, it doesn't make the discipline more inclusive; like Kermode and Bergonzi, Fish excludes cultural studies from the realm of literary criticism--it is "a field of its own."

Fish has more recently published his views on interdisciplinarity and cultural studies, in an essay that bears the telling title, "Them We Burn: Violence and Conviction in

against the accusations of irrelevance and self-promotion when the source of those accusations is what they themselves think and write" (p. 202).

the English Department." In this article, Fish echoes the premise of his earlier essay, where he insists that even if "disciplines are not natural kinds," they are "as real as anything else in a world in which everything is constructed" (1989a/1994, p. 240). Disciplinary distinction, Fish (1996) reiterates, is crucial to scholarly function: "the existence of sharp disciplinary boundaries, along with the attendance of supposedly hermetically sealed vocabularies, is not an unhappy accident, an excrescence, on the purity of our task; it is in fact what makes our task possible" (p. 163). Politics is politics and literary criticism is literary criticism, and "[i]f you want to explicate Paradise Lost, fine; if you want to alter the present structures of the United States, fine" (p. 167).

Fish's rule of thumb is that literary study and politics are distinct and separate activities; to focus on the latter means you are no longer performing the former. Literary studies, then, can only remain a distinct and exclusive discipline, but interdisciplinary reconfiguration presents a potentially terminal threat to the originating discipline: devoting one's attention to the practices behind the literary text, the "'forces and factors' that underlie the performance," Fish (1989a/1994) argues, means that "literary criticism is no longer what you are performing" (p. 240). In Fish's view, literary studies is and should continue to be a highly distinct and thus exclusive practice.

Yet Fish refuses to articulate that distinction, insisting "that the kind of thing we do around here is not positively defined in a list, or even in a very precise single statement; it is defined by our being able to have a share of a franchise to which no one else can lay a plausible claim" (1996, p. 162). The closest Fish comes to definition is by way of illustration, by positing an example of a "literary question." Asking oneself with the aim of

answering "What's the best or most accurate or most illuminating reading of Paradise Lost?" proposes a distinctly literary task that is not to be confused with a very different task proposed by the political question, "Which reading of Paradise Lost will best enable us to topple patriarchy, or subvert the war effort?" (p. 166). Fish adamantly argues that neither the path of cultural elitism nor the interdisciplinary moral high road are fitting routes for literary studies to take, yet his resistance to defining literary studies suggests the practice is neither as distinct nor exclusive as he would like to believe.

Disciplinarity is, however, obliquely defined by Fish in three ways: the discipline should focus on specifically "literary" texts, its exploration of these texts should be conducted by asking clearly "literary" questions that are answered in a necessarily exclusive mode of discourse that relies on "hermetically sealed vocabularies," and the discipline is only a discipline if it is made up of literary scholars, scholars whose "imperialistic success" is laudatory. But, like the PMLA "Forum" contributors, who most often define interdisciplinary practice in opposition to an exclusionary disciplinarity, Fish tends to define disciplinarity not in terms of what it is, but in comparison to what it isn't. Indeed, no one can lay plausible claim to this practice if it remains undefined; disciplinary exclusion is upheld by the practice's mystique--a practice cannot be shared if it cannot be articulated.

This resistance to articulating disciplinary definition is closely linked with the equally mystifying view that some works are distinctly "literary" while others are not, a distinction that inevitably leads to discussions of aesthetic value. Though not explicitly stated in Fish's essays, the aesthetic is implicitly present in his insistence that literary

criticism is a particular kind of study of a particular kind of text, and in his repeated references to Paradise Lost, a work that is deeply and controversially political yet also contains some of the finest poetry in the language. Milton's magnum opus has greatly influenced Fish, but it is also a paradigmatic example of the dead-white-European-male centered version of canon-making that is a primary target of leftist academics.²⁹ Many less conservative critics would argue that to continue to value Milton's work, which has been roundly criticized as elitist, classist, and misogynist, is to endorse the anti-egalitarian offenses it purportedly commits by favouring its perceived value as literary art: seen from this perspective, the continuing canonical status of writers on the basis of aesthetic merit obscures and even ignores social diversity, and by so doing upholds an exclusive and elitist intellectual ideology.

The classification of a text as a literary genre has traditionally been based on its perceived aesthetic value, that indescribable quality that transforms the ordinary into art, mystifies and valorizes the popular text, and thus allows literary critics to claim their professional expertise through generic classification. This process, one that determines

²⁹ McCrea quotes a passage near the end of Fish's well-known work on seventeenth-century poetry, Self-Consuming Artifacts, in which he explains his reason for choosing the texts discussed in the book: his selection of difficult poetry that is virtually unknown outside of English departments, Fish suggests, is more likely "a reflection of a personal psychological need than of a universally true aesthetic" (qtd. McCrea, 1990, p. 143). McCrea notes that "Fish's 'personal psychological need' corresponds very nicely with the need of the English department for texts that are complicated and ambiguous, texts that are not easily available to readers and thus require interpretation" (p. 143); in other words, Fish's view of appropriate objects is more universal in its endorsement of traditional disciplinary definitions of "literature" and less a matter of personal preference than Fish is willing to admit.

which works are worthy of study by professional literary scholars and their students, entails what social semiotician Robert Hodge (1990) describes as a "domain-shift":

Most literary genres were originally produced for consumption in the relatively private domains associated with leisure. When they are studied in educational contexts, they undergo a domain-shift, in terms of which one crucial type of meaning (pleasure) which is legitimate in these private domains becomes marginalized, along with the kinds of semiotic relations that predominate in those domains (solidarity, equality, spontaneity). (p. 23)

The transformation of the written work to the generic class known as "literature," Hodge argues, is also a means of social control:

A system of genres is the product of an act of classification, and classification is always a strategy of control. What is classified and controlled is not just texts. The classification of texts are also classifications of people--readers and writers--and of what they write or read about and what they should think and mean. (p. 21)

As a fitting object of study, the literary work is moved from the domain of private pleasure to the domain of public work; thus, Hodge concludes, the discipline embodies a contradiction at its very core, one that pivots around "notions of public and private, pleasure and morality" (p. 23).

Hodge suggests that when a literary work's primary function is private pleasure, it is generically a constituent of the private sphere. Conversely, a literary work moves into the public domain when it becomes institutionalized within the discipline; the now "public" text becomes less accessible, fully available only to those who have had the training that authorizes and enables them to illuminate these works. Like Fish, Hodge resists using the ideologically loaded term "aesthetic," but does talk about "pleasure," a specifically literary

"type of meaning" that, he suggests, becomes marginalized through this type of domain shift. Granted, this domain shift does transform the literary work's widely accessible "pleasure" into the more exclusionary aesthetic; on the other hand, this pleasure, though transformed, is nevertheless still a part of the literary experience.

Considered from the perspective of aesthetic pleasure, these domains are perhaps not as distinct as Hodge suggests. Hodge is right to suggest that in the professional realm "[l]iterature is meant to be enjoyable, but not too enjoyable, and the pedagogic practices of English are designed to both incorporate and transform the pleasures of the text" (p. 24), yet he does not insist that this type of literary meaning entirely disappears. Moreover, even though the relexicalization of literary "pleasure" into "the aesthetic" is both transforming and rhetorically exclusionary, the terms have the same referent; regardless of the domain claims made on a text and the role that text plays within that domain, this type of literary meaning is available to anyone who can read.

Though this literary "pleasure" may indeed become marginalized in the public sphere, it is nevertheless present in either domain; the aesthetic, like the genres it is invoked to define, arguably bridges the private and public, the individual and the collective.³⁰ Thus, regardless of their canonical status, literary genres seem difficult to classify exclusively within either the private or public sphere; the best answer seems to be that, despite the proprietary claims made on them, these genres simultaneously inhabit the

³⁰ Genre theorist Carolyn Miller (1994a) identifies a similar dynamic, suggesting that genres of any kind are not exclusive to either the discourse community that claims and produces them or to the private individual who reads or writes them: "[a] genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence," Miller affirms, "it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent" (p. 37).

public and the private. This generic indeterminacy is informed by the fact that, in either domain, the literary genre is prized for its aesthetic value, regardless of whether it is construed as the object of pleasure in the private sphere or the object of a profession in the public sphere.

Contrary to Hodge's claim that the literary critic's aim is to suppress the pleasures of the text through its institutionalization, critics like Bernstein, Posner, Goodheart, and Kermode call for a return to the pleasures of the literary text, a rekindling and re-recognition of its aesthetic value. In their view, the importance of the aesthetic has been minimized and even eradicated by an interdisciplinary political agenda, an agenda that insists that the notion of aesthetic value is invoked on behalf of elitist and conservative values and is thus an unacceptable ideological impediment to progressive, socially-conscious literary scholarship. But literary study, as Posner rightly points out, is always hierarchical; whether one is a tenured radical or a traditionalist, the practice always involves privileging one aspect of literature above all others.

At the same time, however, the ambivalence and the unarticulated gaps in all of these arguments suggest that these critics aim to reserve a space for that which is not socially or politically determined in an intellectual milieu that, as Fish points out, is increasingly intent on demonstrating that everything is constructed. The aesthetic, the je ne sais quoi of literary art, resists definition and, consequently, deconstruction. Seen in this light, the traditionalist tendency to deploy the aesthetic in their disciplinary definitions can be construed as evincing a cynical tendency toward professional self-protection; if the primary premise that upholds disciplinary definition can't be articulated, it can't be

deconstructed. An awareness of the aesthetic's more practical value seems manifest in these critics' collective inability or refusal to articulate the notion of aesthetic value or, as in Fish's case, even to acknowledge the informing role of the aesthetic.

This arguably imperialistic and perhaps self-interested privileging of the aesthetic in these traditionalist attempts to circumscribe disciplinary practice subsumes and subordinates all other aspects of textuality; as Said (1982) once noted, "the organized study of literature. . . is premised on the constitutively primary act of literary (that is, artistic) representation, which in turn absorbs and incorporates other realms, other representations, secondary to it" (p. 20). But these traditionalist attempts to inscribe generic definition in terms of artistic representation are ultimately untenable because their proponents cannot and will not attempt to define the single, most important distinguishing criterion of those genres. Ultimately, the traditionalist tendency to rely on notions of aesthetic value and of genre as determining and defining categories works against the ideology of exclusion that literary classification aims to uphold.

In other words, these arguments seem exclusive only because their primary reliance on a reductive conceptualization belies the aesthetic's complexity and resistance to definition; as these critics surely realize, the aesthetic can't be articulated even in many words, yet this inexpressibility is obfuscated by its expression in a single word. Thus the term aesthetic, by giving the appearance of a comprehensive understanding of all of the complexity it aims to contain, lends the critic who invokes it an exclusionary authority. On the other hand, the refusal or inability of these critics to articulate the meaning of the aesthetic suggests that they are, to varying degrees, aware of the elusive and constructed

nature of an authority that, because of its dependence on that which is undefinable, can only be provisional.

A sense of this awareness is imparted by the ultimate inability or refusal of these critics to define the aesthetic, even though they, like Kermode, seem certain that literary sensibility does indeed exist; as Kermode (1997) points out, it "is a shamefully vague expression," but it nevertheless "corresponds to something that certainly exists; those who have it know it exists and easily recognize its absence in those who do not" (p. 176). This indescribable literary sensibility, a sensibility that is realized only through appreciation of aesthetic value, informs notions of disciplinarity that are, as Fish's strategy of avoidance also suggests, equally elusive. But, in their shared knowledge of what deserves a place in the disciplinary canon and in their collective consensus that the discipline should uphold stylistic conventions that reflect the canon's aesthetic value, this discourse community is unified through and defined by these elusive genres. Thus, although these definitions seem highly exclusive in their generic specificity, these arguments, because they rely on aesthetically informed generic distinctions that, in turn, inform their notions of disciplinarity, can only contradict these exclusionary gestures.

The abstract concept of the aesthetic is impossible to define concretely because it is both ephemeral and infinitely variable, as are the genres it is invoked to define and the disciplinary role it is used to circumscribe; or, in Terry Eagleton's (1998) words, "the aesthetic word or image is characterized by a certain slipperiness or opaqueness, which. . . makes it a poor instrument of political authority" (p. 7). In other words, the very flexibility of the concept also means that it cannot be controlled by authority; as Eagleton

goes on to suggest, "[w]hat the radicals rebuke as elitist or escapist can thus, ironically, be a form of political resistance in itself" (p. 7). The aesthetic's resistance to definition, together with its allegedly universal appeal, also means that the concept is highly inclusive, even though it has, as Pecora and others suggest, been used in the service of exclusionary ideologies.

Eagleton (1990) rightly points out that the aesthetic embodies a contradictory duality, a duality that is manifest in "a certain indeterminacy of definition which allows it to figure in a varied span of preoccupations: freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination, autonomy, particularity and universality" (p. 3). Thus, even though the aesthetic does uphold exclusionary ideologies, it simultaneously and paradoxically challenges those ideologies. Although

The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artefact is thus inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society. . . .the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms. (p. 3)

The traditionalist reliance on the aesthetic, what Eagleton so aptly describes as an indeterminate and "eminently contradictory phenomenon" (p. 3), renders both the genres and the discipline it is invoked to define equally indeterminate and contradictory.

The indeterminate nature of the aesthetic seems to be intensified when it serves as the metaphorical touchstone for the discipline and its genres; like the aesthetic, both genre and metaphor are dual and contradictory concepts. Like the aesthetic, the nature of genre is two-pronged. Genres are, as Bakhtin (1986) suggests, "the drive belts from the history

of society to the history of language." As such, genres embody both the individual and the collective: "There is not a single new phenomenon," Bakhtin argues, "that can enter the system of language without having traversed the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification" (p. 65). Genre allows a space for both what is new and what has been conventionalized; in this way, genres, as Carolyn Miller (1984/1994) affirms, connect "the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent" (p. 37). Moreover, genres embody a temporal duality, bringing along the conventions of the past even as they move through the present and into the future: genres, Miller also points out, are "recurrent, significant action," but they also "change, evolve and decay" (pp. 36-39). And, as a conceptual bridge between the concrete and the abstract, metaphor reflects and embodies a similar duality. The concept of metaphor, like the aesthetic, encapsulates what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call an "imaginative rationality" (p. 235) and, like genre, metaphor also connects the singular and recurrent, the individual and the collective; it is a means of "partially communicating unshared experiences" (p. 225).

But not all of these critics are blind to this duality; though he advocates the objectivity the aesthetic outlook can ostensibly bring, Goodheart also recognizes the concept's inescapable subjectivity. If traditionalists insist on a theoretical explanation of the aesthetic, Goodheart (1997b) suggests, "we will end up speaking. . . of its contingent and subjective status (it is in the eye of the beholder and every beholder sees things differently) or we may find that the aesthetic is inescapably contaminated by political, moral, and philosophical interests" (p. 140). The solution Goodheart proposes is to emphasize the aesthetic not as a theory but as an experience: "The theoretical project of

aesthetics may prove vulnerable," Goodheart admits, "but its vulnerability is not proof against the actuality of the aesthetic experience" (p. 141). Seemingly unwittingly, Goodheart captures "the experientialist alternative" that Lakoff and Johnson associate with metaphorical thinking.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that metaphor "permits an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another," allowing for expression of the unique and individual in a collectively comprehensible way. In this way, they argue, metaphor collapses the imposed dichotomization of subjectivism (the world is constructed by the individual) and objectivism (the world is external to the individual). In the same way, both genre and the aesthetic are at once subjective and objective; they are both external to the individual and constructed (or transformed) by the individual. Thus, despite their claims to the contrary, these traditionalist arguments cannot uphold the dichotomy they propose; rather, they (perhaps unwittingly) subscribe to a more inclusive experientialist alternative. Lakoff and Johnson argue that the experientialist view is a more inclusive perspective, one that is unencumbered by "either the objectivist obsession with absolute truth or the subjectivist insistence that imagination is totally unrestricted" (p. 228). Yet the traditional and objectivist approach to literary study, in its often explicit denial of postmodern relativism, tends to be associated with an epistemological ontology that is closer to objectivism than subjectivism. On the other hand, because the aesthetic cannot be observed and has no physical manifestation, aesthetic value is highly subjective and its existence can only be established through interpretation.

Thus these traditionalist arguments, arguments which are linked either explicitly or implicitly to the aesthetic, embody a contradictory tension that works against an ideology that only appears to be exclusionary. But this necessary meeting of objectivity and subjectivity also applies to more theoretical, interdisciplinary approaches to literary scholarship; as de Man (1986) so aptly puts it, "[t]he attempt to treat literature theoretically may as well resign itself to the fact that it has to start out from empirical considerations" (p. 5). The success of any abstract theory, de Man argues, "depends on the power of a system (philosophical, religious or ideological) that may well remain implicit but that determines an a priori conception of what is 'literary.'" Though this literariness is often determined "by starting out from the premises of the system rather than from the literary thing itself," it is collectively and thus objectively identifiable. Even so, the meaning of these or any other empirical considerations can only be posited through interpretation, a way of knowing that, because it is founded on individual perceptions and is constructed through language, can only compromise that objectivity with its inherent and inescapable subjectivity.³¹

These critics seem to be aware that any argument driven by the insistence that aesthetic value is somehow objective and apolitical, detached from a genre's content or its sociocultural context, risks undoing that proposition simply by attempting to articulate the nature of aesthetic value, an articulation that threatens to reveal its inescapable duality. As

³¹ As Martin Jay (1990) observes, "the intrusion of a narrative, authorial voice in the most apparently impersonal texts, means that we are never able to efface entirely the dual structure of writing, projecting an effect at once subjective and objective" (p. 25); neither the interdisciplinarian nor the traditionalist arguments succeed in effacing entirely this unavoidably dual structure of writing.

Said (1982) suggests, "all this institutional weight has precluded a sustained, systematic examination of the coexistence of and the interrelationship between the literary and the social" (p. 20)--or, in parallel terms, the interrelationship of form, content, and context. Indeed, systematic examination of this interrelationship undoes the exclusionary generic claims made in these arguments, and it undoes them not only because they are generally unsustainable, but also because they are specifically dependent on defining genres in terms of aesthetic value.

In what is perhaps an attempt to avoid the ideological criticism his privileging of the aesthetic is bound to attract, Posner destabilizes the polarization of public concerns and private pleasure: "The aesthetic outlook," Posner argues, "is a moral outlook, one that stresses the values of openness, detachment, hedonism, curiosity, tolerance, the cultivation of the self, and the preservation of a private sphere--in short, the values of liberal individualism" (p. 2).³² Although it upholds a rather conservative political stance--that of liberal individualism--this configuration both defines the aesthetic as a particular quality that makes a literary work exclusively literary, while at the same time suggesting that the aesthetic outlook is not a disinterested perspective appropriated for use as a political tool; rather, Posner suggests that the aesthetic includes social and political values.

Though Posner's blurring of his own criteria hierarchy gestures toward an ideology that is more inclusive than his adamant privileging of the aesthetic alone can suggest, this

³² Clearly, Posner's notion of the "aesthetic outlook" as admirable in its resemblance to the values inherent in liberal individualism should not be confused with the more socialist politics that inform much cultural criticism, but this conflation of aesthetic disinterestedness and sociopolitical interest does blur the hierarchical distinction between art and politics, between form and content.

meeting of literary form and political content on an equal plane is very short-lived. Posner ends his essay on a decidedly exclusionary note, reestablishing a generic hierarchy that privileges form over content: "The formal properties," Posner argues, "do not exhaust the worth and appeal of literature, but the moral properties, I suggest, are almost sheer distraction" (p. 24). Posner reverses the usual equation of leftist critics, suggesting that an emphasis on the political obfuscates a literary work's primarily aesthetic value; Posner's insistence on the primacy of the aesthetic thus lends much credence to the leftist claim that the aesthetic is limiting in its service of politically conservative ends. Yet, even an ultra-conservative argument such as this cannot consistently uphold the aesthetic perspective solely as one of disinterestedness; even though Posner emphasizes the primacy of the aesthetic, he does not clearly and consistently maintain the distinction between literary form and political content.

But the critic who attempts to define the nature of the aesthetic risks positing an argument as contradictory as Posner's. To attempt to define the aesthetic is to risk revealing the necessary interconnection of literary form and political content, an act that threatens to prove the ideological opposition right. As a result, these critics gloss over this tension, aiming to uphold the aesthetic as a formal generic property that is somehow separate from content and context. These critics enact what de Man (1986) calls a "resistance to reading," a resistance that is manifest in their insistence on defining literature in terms of aesthetic value. This erroneous distinction allows these critics to posit a single, right reading of the role the aesthetic plays both within and between genres, or, in Fish's case, a right reading of the discipline's appropriate canonical texts and its discursive

conventions. This right reading is crucially dependent on the notion that there are distinct disciplinary genres, genres which cannot be as distinct as these critics insist because their primary defining criterion, the aesthetic, is ultimately undefinable and inherently contradictory. In the arguments of these traditionalists, the disciplinary focus is indeed directed toward particular features of its defining genres; nevertheless, this occluding rhetoric cannot completely obscure the inconsistencies within that conceptualization.

In these disciplinary arguments, the aesthetic serves as a means of persuasion and as a formal, generic criterion, and both genre and the aesthetic shape and reflect the larger disciplinary context. As metaphorical tropes that represent the traditionalist version of disciplinarity, the aesthetic and genre are inextricably entwined; as functions of both form and content, both are also inseparable from context. As Miller (1984/1994) has argued with great success, the substantive and formal features of genre cannot be separated from sociocultural context. More importantly, the conceptualization of genre in literary studies, as genre theorist Anne Freadman (1987/1994) notes, is based on two erroneous assumptions. The first misguided assumption is that a text "is primarily, or solely, describable in terms of the rules of one genre;" the second is "that the features of a text will correspond to the rules of the genre" (p. 48). Both of these assumptions inform the rhetoric of disciplinarity, which suggests that both literary and literary-critical genres are or should be describable in terms of their aesthetic value and that the features of these texts will correspond with the aesthetic ideal. These assumptions, as Freadman suggests, are quickly challenged with the recognition that genres embody a complex and dynamic interrelationship of form, content, and context.

Another way to conceptualize the interactive and overlapping nature of these generic constituents is through metaphor. Richard M. Coe (1994) suggests that metaphorical tropes are "substantive, ideological, shapers of discourse, not merely a matter of style" and "genres (and other forms) function similarly" (p. 183). As such, metaphors embody attitudes: in much the same way, generic forms reflect and shape the attitudes of a given discourse community. These disciplinary arguments aptly illustrate Coe's point; as the informing trope that upholds a generically defined, traditionalist view of disciplinarity, the aesthetic ideologically shapes (and also reflects) the resulting discourse. As Coe goes on to suggest, "commonplaces associated with the metaphorical term direct a person's attention to particular features of the principal subject" and away from features that are inconsistent with the metaphorical conceptualization (p. 183). As reductive conceptualizations, genre and the aesthetic are metonymical tropes that both encapsulate and shape the canon, the discourse, and the role of a literary practice that is much more complex and unstable than these reductive terms suggest.

The collective inability of these critics to articulate the nature of the informing premise of their disciplinary arguments suggests that, at some level, they recognize that their arguments are more unstable than they would like to believe. The rhetoric of disciplinarity embodies an ambivalence similar to that Geertz (1980) once identified in the changing rhetoric of social science, a rhetoric increasingly dependent on the game analogy. The game analogy, Geertz suggests, is one that "mixes a strong sense of the formal orderliness of things with an equally strong sense of the radical arbitrariness of that order" (p. 169), an observation that seems equally applicable to a discipline that is analogously

shaped in relation to aesthetically defined genres. In much the same way, the generic trope in these disciplinary arguments conveys a belief in formal orderliness that is undercut by a sense of the arbitrariness of that order, a recognition that is implicit in these critics' collective avoidance of any discussion of the aesthetic itself.

Thus, although disciplinarity in literary studies seems to be construed by traditionalists as an exclusive practice, their arguments embody a simultaneous ideology of inclusion that seems inevitable in any disciplinary argument that is informed by notions of the aesthetic or of genre. The primacy of the aesthetic, in its dual role as the informing and authorizing trope behind these arguments and as the generic bridge that links the literary text, the community's discursive conventions, and the discipline's sociocultural role, can only work against the ideology of exclusion it is invoked to uphold. As Miller (1984/1994) suggests, any taxonomy of genre, whether it is imposed by an ostensibly formal feature, such as the aesthetic, or another attribute, can only be provisional. In the same way, the discipline that studies, produces, and is shaped by these literary and literary-critical genres is not static nor can it fully escape its disciplinary legacy.

Conclusion

The aesthetic is a formal quality upheld by traditionalists as a singular feature of "literature." This interest in maintaining the primacy of aesthetically defined genres is the rhetorical manifestation of a traditionalist resistance to change, a resistance to the interdisciplinary impulse and to the theoretical orientation that both reflects and impels the interdisciplinary movement. But tradition, as Goodheart (1997a) suggests, "entails both change and continuity," and it is a mistake to believe that tradition is opposed to innovation (pp. 158-159). Traditionalists who invoke the aesthetic in support of what appear to be exclusionary arguments do not necessarily believe that the aesthetic should or even can continue to inform the discipline in the same way as it did twenty, fifty, or a hundred years ago; rather, it seems that their aim is to avoid burying and denying a valuable disciplinary past within the interdisciplinary discourse of a rapidly changing present. In these arguments, the relationship of the canon, literary criticism, and the role of disciplinary practice to the aesthetic also means that the arguments of these disciplinarians inevitably enact a process of inclusion even as they argue on behalf of what seems to be an arbitrary and exclusionary disciplinarity.

But it is not only these traditionalists whose arguments are challenged by the simultaneous presence of change and continuity: as we have seen, the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity is as slippery and as contradictory as that posited by these defenders of the literary aesthetic. Despite this ideological similarity, a similarity that is obscured by

their continuing reliance on a polarizing rhetoric, these antagonistically opposed groups insist on maintaining their distinction. Indeed, little seems to have changed in the decade since Gerald Graff (1987) pointed out that a long tradition of theoretical approaches to literary studies is wrongly effaced by the discipline's internal dichotomization: "not only have theory and traditional humanism parted company," Graff observes, "they define the polar extremes of the literary-critical spectrum" (p. 248). As I have aimed to demonstrate, this dichotomy is, to borrow Coe's turn of phrase, both repressive and false.

Literary and literary-critical forms are not separable from the disciplinary or interdisciplinary content they reflect and inform; as genre theorists have pointed out, the genres that define a given discourse community both reflect and shape that community's ideology, ideologies that become tacit, almost invisible, to that community and to those who write within it. Whether one explicitly advocates disciplinary exclusion or interdisciplinary inclusion, the interactive nature of form and content means that an expressed ideological orientation toward either literary form or sociopolitical content does not and cannot exclude the other; as Miller (1994) suggests, "[i]t is this inclusion of sameness and difference, of us and them, of centripetal and centrifugal impulses that makes a community rhetorical. . . . In a paradoxical way, a rhetorical community includes the 'other'" (p. 74).

As I have aimed to show, the rhetorical communities engaged in the debate over interdisciplinarity in literary studies do indeed include the ideological Other. Even the extreme polarization and overt hostility that is so readily apparent in the conflicting rhetoric of the Science Wars cannot fully obscure the discursive presence of the

opposition, a point that seems more readily apparent in the dichotomized but less polarized rhetoric of traditionalist and interdisciplinary literary scholars. The discourse deployed by these debaters reveals an ideological similarity that is obscured by an explicit and insistent commitment to difference; regardless of their professed beliefs, scholars on both sides of this ideological divide enact a rhetoric of disciplinarity that is at once inclusive and exclusive, interpretive and empirical, enabling and constraining.

The problem, however, lies not with this simultaneous manifestation of apparent contradictions, but with the belief that these concepts are in fact contradictory. It seems helpful to remember that what is contradictory can also be complementary; we live in an inescapably dialogic and heteroglossic world, and recognizing that binary oppositions can occupy the same space rather than being relegated to opposite poles of the intellectual spectrum offers many possibilities for revising and expanding our often constraining habits of thought. As Caryl Emerson (1997) notes in her recent discussion of Bakhtin's reception in Western intellectual culture, this influential thinker had a multiple identity of his own: a "literary scholar, culturologist, and ethical philosopher," Bakhtin lived "outside each discipline" and was "native to none."

Emerson goes on to ask a very important question: "With their competing methodologies and different validating logics, are these various professions eroded when combined in his person?" The answer, I will suggest, is a resounding "no"; rather than suffering from erosion, it seems that these diverse professions have and will continue to feel the benefits of this multiple identity, especially if they can recognize the possibility of multiple identities. Yet at the same time, as Emerson suggests,

there is much to recommend professionalism. An internal consistency of argument, an obligation to assess what others have researched and registered, a consensus over basic terms, an agreement as to what constitutes a misuse of evidence, the modest placement of oneself within an established language; in the best of worlds these are virtues that professional insidership can foster. (pp. 205-206)

In the best of worlds, it seems to me, intellectual enquiry will find a way to combine multiple identities with a professionalism that provides a necessary infrastructure yet at the same time recognizes the complex, overlapping, and dialogic nature of knowledge producing communities that are not as different as they may seem.

The larger conclusion that can be drawn from this inference is that the ideological and epistemic polarization of disciplines and interdisciplines is an erroneous, constructed belief; as Bakhtin (1986) himself notes, "our thought itself--philosophical, scientific, and artistic--is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thoughts" (p. 92). As Bakhtin's comment suggests, not only the ideology of diverse social groups, but also the mode of thinking associated with a particular disciplinary orientation shapes both our thought and our language. The simultaneous presence of social and intellectual diversity is inevitably manifest in any verbal utterance; despite what may be these debaters' best efforts to dismiss the credibility of the ideological opposition, their arguments cannot fully subsume or deny ideologies and epistemologies that, it turns out, are only believed to be irreconcilable.

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- Zimra, C. (1996). Letter to Forum. PMLA 111, 291-292.

Appendix

Text A: Marianna de Marco Torgovnick (1996). Letter to "Forum." PMLA 111.2. 282.

- A1. Interdisciplinary study works
- A2. because people from one discipline are not routinely bound by the same assumptions
- A3. as people from another.
- A4. They do not necessarily share the same blind spots,
- A5. focus on the same things,
- A6. or think about problems in the same way.
- A7. So, often, they can see through the assumptions
- A8. that ground other disciplines so thoroughly
- A9. that the assumptions have become invisible axioms.
- A10. People from another discipline can understand problems
- A11. --and, sometimes, reach solutions--
- A12. in a new or cogent way.
- A13. In other words,
- A14. interdisciplinarity brings with it the benefits of defamiliarization.
- A15. It can break through to powerful insights.

Text B: Richard Levin (1993). The new interdisciplinarity in literary criticism. In N. Easterlin & B. Riebling (Eds.), After poststructuralism: Interdisciplinarity and literary theory (pp. 14-15). Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.

- B1. A good way to start would be to ask
- B2. how most critics today go about becoming interdisciplinary.
- B3. They usually do not proceed by first selecting another discipline
- B4. and then trying to master it,
- B5. which would take a lot of time and would be unnecessary,
- B6. as we will see.
- B7. My impression is that most of them do not even try to acquire an overall sense of the other discipline,
- B8. of the sort that could be derived from a few good introductory courses.
- B9. Instead they typically begin by selecting from the discipline a particular theory
- B10. that they want to use.
- B11. This is the obvious connection between the new interdisciplinarity and theorizing noted earlier,
- B12. for in the current critical scene to theorize usually means to adopt a theory from another discipline.
- B13. But since this procedure in effect bypasses the other discipline itself
- B14. as an organized body of knowledge and mode of investigation,
- B15. critics do not select a theory on the basis of its standing in its own discipline,
- B16. and so we must ask on what basis they do select it.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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