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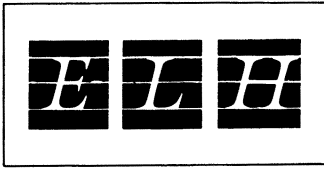
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THE POWER OF FORMALISM: THE NEW HISTORICISM

BY ALAN LIU

Though it will doubtless be required some day to change its character, semiology must first of all, if not exactly take definite shape, at least *try itself out*, explore its possibilities and impossibilities . . . it must be acknowledged in advance that such an investigation is both diffident and rash. . . .

—Roland Barthes

I compare . . . a certain number of structures which I seek where they may be found, and not elsewhere: in other words, in the kinship system, political ideology, mythology, ritual, art, code of etiquette, and—why not?—cooking.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss¹

I. WHY NOT?

To understand the New Historicism, it will be useful to start by considering the version of rhetorical exordium the method uses to place its argument in play. Just as Sidney solicits his audience in the *Apology for Poetry* by beginning upon the anecdote of Pugliano's horsemanship, so Stephen Greenblatt and others—to quote Jean E. Howard's early criticism of the technique—broach their argument through "painstaking description of a particular historical event, place, or experience" whose "supposedly paradigmatic moment" sketches "a cultural law."² So thoroughgoing is such paradigmaticism that exordium is convertible with *digressio*: even when a New Historicist study internalizes a paradigm as its centerpiece rather than its opening, the paradigm retains a throw-away quality. Serendipitous and adventitious—always merely found, always merely picked up—these models compose a *bricolage* substituting for what was once the more methodical *narratio* or

presentation of facts in history of ideas: the recording of such master paradigms, for example, as the Chain of Being, the Mirror, and the Lamp. Where history of ideas straightened the world pictures, Elizabethan or otherwise, New Historicism hangs those pictures anew—seemingly by accident, off any hook, at any angle.³ It not only cherishes paradigms thematizing obliqueness, as in Greenblatt's anamorphic reading of Holbein's *Ambassadors* in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*,⁴ but speaks those paradigms in a vocabulary of anecdotal virtuosity so oblique—itsself tending at times to anamorphosis, paradox, oxymoron, and chiasmus—that the result is a kind of intellectual *sprezzatura*.⁵ To allude to the structuralist strain in the ancestry of the method, the paradigms of the New Historicism bare a shy rashness, a supremely cavalier *why not?* assertive of their marginality.

It is my thesis that the *why not?* of the New Historicism serves primarily to repress the urgency of its real questions about literature and history; and that the reason the repression is necessary is that the urgency of these questions is motivated not by curiosity about literature and history in the past so much as deep embarrassment about the marginality of literary history now. For what most distinguishes the *New Historicism* may be read in the brash nervousness with which it wears its title in an intellectual climate commonly prefixed “post-.” As I will close by suggesting, the spurious, avant-garde novelty of the method (in which my own work has been as implicated as any) is really a rear-guard action spurred by the postmodern fear that in the face of history, *literary* history or any such mere show of intellect is passé.

I want to trace a trajectory, then, from the *why not?* of the New Historicism to a *why* that will allow us to set an agenda for understanding the method's anxiety of marginality. And to begin with (assuming here a barker's voice in advance of future argument): *view* the carnival of New Historicist paradigms; *see* the sideshows of the over-paradigm I will call—why not?—the contest of the Governing Line and the Disturbed Array.⁶

A. Imagine Charles I seated at a court play—at the masque-like *Florimène* in 1635, for example, as Stephen Orgel has reconstructed the scene. Centered in conspicuous visibility amid the audience, who occupy seats along three walls facing him, he sees along the exact medial axis of the hall directly into Inigo Jones's stage with its strongly illusionistic perspective effects—into the recessional avenue between trees and cottages, for instance, hung in the opening

scene. King and vanishing point: the apexes of royal presence and representation rule the universe between them.⁷

This scene visualizes one of the two leading paradigms of New Historicist poetics: a cultural poetics, as Greenblatt names it, whose *donnée* of interpretation is neither the historical nor literary fact but the feigned, illusional, or otherwise *made* structure of cultural artifact encompassing both realms.⁸ The paradigm is that of theatricality, which in Renaissance studies and its Romantic counterpart (the latter increasingly influenced by French Revolution studies) starts in the actual theater but then aggressively spills out of doors to make “*mise en scène*,” “social drama,” “playfulness,” “improvisation,” “rehearsal,” “tragedy,” and “illusion” the master tropes of culture.⁹ With the possible exception of Greenblatt’s study of self-made Renaissance men, theatricality has been used primarily to model the *mentalité* of monarch-centered aristocracy or its overthrow—the experience of the Elizabethan and Stuart court theater as recounted by Orgel, for example; or that of the court spectacle (in another sense) registered by Marie-Hélène Huet at the trial of Louis XVI.¹⁰

As in the case of New Historicist paradigms generally, theatricality models “power.”¹¹ Power, especially in Renaissance studies, designates the negotiation of social, personal, and literary authority that yields a single regulation of culture. But the regulated state, we should immediately note, is so far from being monolithic that at every level its distinguishing feature is inner dynamism—a self-tensed, *internecine* action of power. New Historicism imagines an existentially precarious power secured upon the incipient civil war between, on the one hand, cultural plurality and, on the other (to borrow an apt term from Russian Formalism), the cultural dominant able to bind plurality within structure.¹² Theatricality in particular is the paradigm that stresses the slender control of dominance *over* plurality.

Thus it is that Orgel observes the plural jostle for court rank and ambassadorial privilege in the seating arrangements at *Florimène*; and that Huet reconstructs the multitudinous vivacity, inebriation, and sometimes plain boredom that sounded from the spectators at Louis’s trial in 1793.¹³ But thus it is also that both authors stress the ability of the dominant, in the person of Charles or Louis, to structure plurality into the *show* of a single state. Throned at the only point in the room perfect for viewing the perspective effects, Charles literally ruled: his being-seen-to-watch-the-show, as Orgel

conceives it,¹⁴ organized aristocracy around a single line of perfect vision, a single symbolic rule allowing each participant in the masque universe to calibrate his place near or far, to the right or left of the royal lineage.¹⁵ Just so Louis XVI, even as he was *dethroned*, commanded all eyes in his spectacle-court as powerfully as some Richard II asking for a mirror. The theatricality that once maintained the illusion of a king was now the perfect mirror of magistrates to *disillusion* another king—but in such a way as still to maintain around the king's lineage the symmetry of right and left (those who voted No and Yes to Louis's death) that was constitutive of ruled state. Only when the king had played his last performance, as Huet shows, did the Revolution then propagate plays about Marat and other heroes showing anew the *People's* rule.

Charles and Louis, illusion and disillusion: these two states and their actors, we realize, are finally as indistinguishable in the analytic of theatricality as the two halves of the anamorphic answer Richard II returns Bolingbroke in Shakespeare's deposition scene: "Ay, no; no, ay."¹⁶ Once we premise the theatricality of all culture and enter the bottomless spectatorship of New Historical consciousness, we know that any cultural backdrop, at any time, can turn into its inversion as easily as some Inigo Jones *machina versatilis* (turning machine) opening up a new scene. Every facade is merely the reversal or repetition of a previous facade. A double-paradigm conflating the Stuart and Bourbon, English and French revolutionary scenes comes to mind. As reported with special emphasis in the London press, Louis in his last days took care to read the "account of the death of Charles the First."¹⁷ What Louis-as-actor read, we can imagine, was the script for a prior drama foreshadowing his own—a script, as Patricia Fumerton's researches suggest, that Charles himself performed in an uncanny reenactment of an even earlier theater of act. With high sense of drama, Charles went to his death almost exactly as he would have gone to a masque—through the same sequence of rooms in the Banqueting House at Whitehall, through a window in the hall where masques were performed, and at last out onto the stage of the blade where he enacted a scene of death so self-controlled and riveting that it can truly be said to have been a command performance.¹⁸ Just so, as I have elsewhere recounted, Louis rose to the occasion on his own platform of the guillotine, giving a command performance so self-possessed, devout, and potentially subversive of the new state that the managers of the carefully-staged event ordered a drumroll si-

lencing his soliloquy.¹⁹ Play-within-a-play: in the endlessly receding playhouse that is New Historicist history, there is no death. Finality is only the possibility of theatrical revival, cultural determination a casting call for future improvisation.

B. Again, imagine visiting Penshurst Place. As explored in Don E. Wayne's *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History*, the core of the building consists of a fourteenth-century manor house with its Baron's or Great Hall, while the later additions of the Sidney family sprawl outward—but in such a way as to feign seamlessness. Looking through the newer main entrance at the north, we sight down the perspective recession created by a visto of arches: first the entrance span, then the arch of the service passage through the manor house, and finally the arched aperture of the newer Garden Tower toward the south.²⁰ Fore-, middle-, and background planes frame visual space within a box of time measured with the typological certainty of a Fra Angelico *Annunciation* (in which recessed planes showing the Garden situate Mary's *humiliatio* within the longest visto of human history).²¹ The eye's walk into Penshurst's manorial past has all the stateliness of procession: we are humbled before a history seen in ceremonial review.

Such is a visualization of the architectural and what might be called inventorial paradigm characterizing not just Wayne's intriguing book but also such other inquiries as Jonathan Goldberg's study of the triumphal arches ushering James I into London, Catherine Belsey's sketch of split representation in Felbrigg Hall, Fumerton's work on Whitehall Palace and Renaissance miniature cabinets, and Steven Mullaney's look into Renaissance wonder cabinets.²² Again, the project is to reconstruct the mentality of monarch-centered power—here concretized in the organization of a house or monument, the successive experience of rooms within a house, or, within rooms themselves, such interior galleries as the wonder- or miniature cabinet. And once more, such space projects a ruling line able to dominate plurality.

Even as other courtiers talked business in Elizabeth I's innermost bedchamber, Fumerton shows, Elizabeth was able to maintain the illusion that she was taking the ambassador for Mary Queen of Scots ever inward into her confidence: down the labyrinthine line of her apartments at Whitehall, into her bedchamber, into her miniature cabinet, through the wrappings of her miniature portraits (in this case of the Earl of Leicester and of Mary), through the

layered aesthetics of these images of putative dear ones, and at last into the aura of feminine intimacy that was one with her politics of virginal rule.²³ Division of state became a communion of confidantes over the heart's secrets. Just so, Wayne argues, cultural plurality at Penshurst was aligned through a strategem analogous to the ruling line of vision at a masque or the subtler Ariadnean threading of Elizabeth's architecture. How to imagine continuity where there was discontinuity (between the baronial legitimacy of the manor house and the additions of the Sidney clan representing the new court-oriented aristocracy)? One lineage where there were two? The answer, as Wayne compellingly demonstrates, lay in creating the special perspective upon history we have reviewed: the recession that laminated the baronial Great Hall between fore- and far-planes of aristocratic veneer. Thus was an image created which, reinforced by the effect of other architectural and heraldic devices, authored the vision of a single descent of Greatness. Like the ambassador entering Elizabeth's bedchamber, a visitor proceeding to the central hall stepped into an aura of familiarity, into the very hearth-warmth of a mythic family of long possession.

C. Once more, imagine viewing the cells in the rotunda of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison from the central inspection tower—perhaps from the visitor's gallery that Bentham left room for in his plans. Specifically, envisage this panorama of reform in the manner of John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*: as the demonstration of the eye's *omniscience* while it inspects with narratological power the scene of character development.²⁴ Or again, to create a strange sympathy of sights, imagine touring the then-celebrated Lower Rydal Falls in the English Lake District—as described, for example, by Wordsworth in his *An Evening Walk*, where the Falls provides the leading exemplum of landscape. As I have argued in the chapter on the politics of the picturesque in my *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, Lower Rydal Falls naturalizes in its central perspective recession and perfectly reposed bridge-in-the-middle-distance a certain kind of supervision, regulation, and *rule* of landscape. Not a glimpse of proportion or poise but declares the surveillance of picturesque irregularity by an enclosing, correcting, and governing eye.²⁵

There are two paradigms represented here, of course, but we can hang them together to highlight what might be called, very broadly, the “middle-classing” of the New Historicism—the imperative, es-

pecially in studies of the eighteenth century and after, to mold the shaping models of the method to the bourgeois and its ascendant forms: the novel, preeminently, but also the poetry (and prose) of description that foreshadowed Romantic lyric. The two paradigms are the prison and the recreational tour (the latter modernizes a supplementary paradigm of Renaissance studies, the monarch's progress and entry pageant).²⁶ Seen in overview, the common project of these paradigms is to conceive a shift in power from aristocracy and monarchical rule to the middle classes and the rule of the individualistic self. Once more, the picture of power forms around a line dominating plurality. Meditating such penitentiary projects as Bentham's Panopticon, Bender arrives upon the thesis that it was in part the novel (often explicitly concerned with penal themes) that shaped the assumptions about human character necessary to imagine the new prison. Novelistic narrative and the mentality it expressed, that is, helped inculcate the notions of individual consciousness, character development, and the reformatory power of the spectator that gave later eighteenth-century prisons their object of reform. *We*—you and I—novel-reader, are the Inspector at the center of Bentham's prison able to see along the pitiless, radial axis of the Panopticon into each cell of murderous, larcenous, or otherwise plural human character. Misrule is submitted to the rule of omniscience.

Or again, to escape from prison to my own paradigm: *we*—the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourist—rule a British landscape of plural “variety.” But perhaps we have not truly escaped prison, after all. As signaled by Bentham's own description of his scene of reform as “picturesque,” or by Wordsworth's politicized view of landscape from the tower of Lancaster Castle (then a prison) in an essay associated with his *Guide to the Lakes*, the novelistic assumptions Bender recounts communicate strangely with the “nature”—“this lime-tree bower, my prison”—of Romantic poetry.²⁷ Nature was a *cultural* artifact to be ruled by the recreational eye. Sighting down the “visto of the brook” at Lower Rydal Falls, for example (which we may also see displayed graphically in innumerable contemporary pictures), our eye rules irregularity according to a perspective that was also political. The picturesque was liberalism. It was the nation of freedom that Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price propagated in their theories with such Foxite Whiggishness that the public linked their theories outright to the “Jacobinism” of the French Revolution. Like the French

Revolution in the early liberal view, that is, nature was “free” and “bold,” but hopefully never *too* free or bold. It was captured in especially arresting views that framed any too licentious or “violent” irregularities in a sort of checks-and-balances or constitution of nature: “repose” (one of the most common of picturesque epithets). So, too, the picturesque was social structure. As attested by Knight’s and Price’s persistent concern with ownership, nature in repose wedded liberality to security by imagining a nation of exchangeable *property*. Or where the tourist was not himself a large property-owner like Knight and Price, he had to be able (in William Gilpin’s phrase) to “appropriate” the imaginary property of such splendidly waste—i.e., largely unowned—scenes as the Lake District. The picturesque was the enclosure act of the eye.

Perhaps now we can see why Wordsworth would soon become so unhappy with the picturesque eye that in *The Prelude* (11.174–80) he likens it to “despotic” “tyranny.” Consider that Lower Rydal Falls was situated on the estate of Sir Michael Le Fleming—a property-owner, as Wordsworth and Coleridge found out the hard way, who took strict measures with trespassers. The picture-perfect scene could only be seen by *permission*—from a viewing enclosure (a small Summer House at Rydal Hall) specifically designed to frame it through a window, along the perspective recession, as if in a picture. The famously sharawaggian plurality and liberty of picturesque experience thus came under the rule of a central eye not unlike Bentham’s Inspector.

D. Finally, imagine the interior of the Rotunda at Ranelagh as glimpsed (through Canaletto’s picture of 1754) in Terry Castle’s *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. In a scene not unlike Bentham’s Panopticon, a central hub of columns commands the round of revelry. Or to cross the channel to further festivity, imagine the Paris Champ-de-Mars amphitheater during the Fete of Federation in 1790, as recorded in the plan reproduced in Mona Ozouf’s *Festivals and the French Revolution*. A central altar focuses the oath of the nation while, as contemporary prints record, the massed representatives of the People bear witness all around from an earthwork perimeter specially raised for the event. Space itself during *l’année heureuse* was a centered revolution.²⁸

Welcome, at last, to the carnival I earlier barked. If theatricality is New Historicism’s paradigm of high culture and monarchy, the carnivalesque—the other most pervasive paradigm of the method—

is the matching paradigm of the Bakhtinian low, of the universe in which, as the work of Peter Stallybrass, Allon White, and Michael D. Bristol has shown, the Pig and the Fish are as nice an object for study as any king or author.²⁹ The carnivalesque has been imagined with Rabelaisian fullness not only by the Renaissance critics just cited but also such others in the field as Jonathan Haynes, Richard Helgerson, Leonard Tennenhouse, and Leah Marcus (the last of whom, in her book *The Politics of Mirth* fits high and low together by studying the relation between theater and James I's politicization of British pastimes and sports).³⁰ Moreover, as shown by Marjorie Levinson's notice of the Revolutionary fete screened by Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode, festivity is one of our most suggestive approaches to Romanticism.³¹ The child in the ode, after all, *plays* not only theatrically, conning his parts like a "little Actor," but literally, festively: he shapes "A wedding or a festival."

What the carnivalesque conceives is a universe of authority exactly congruent with that of theatricality—but with the opposite emphasis. Rather than stress the dominance of a ruling or central perspective, it watches as perspective itself dips and wavers, gets drunk, gets lost in a plural recession of funhouse mirrors. Part of Castle's argument about the masquerade Rotunda at Ranelagh and other such structures, for example, is that carnival—at least in its English manifestation—was lorded over by a king of impresarios, John James ("Count") Heidegger, and bounded within containing structures that might remind us of the Panopticon. Yet even in such contained, regulated forms (not to mention the street-filling carnivals of the Continent), misrule tumbled rule. Where the court masque once submitted the anti-masque universe to the harmonizing rule of the concluding revels, that is, masquerade reversed the rule to make revel itself an antic discord of plurality.³² In the funhouse, under the great tent, inside the arena of the Champ-de-Mars as it was constructed in a holiday mood by two hundred thousand Parisian volunteers of every description,³³ all the pent-up kinesis of plurality broke forth in dangerous glee.

So ends our show of the paradigms of the New Historicism, appropriately, with the circus animals' desertion of our survey: theatrical play becomes house, prison, tour, and rounds back to play in an altered state. Each of the models I have sketched, of course, would require fuller elucidation to demonstrate the characteristically obsessive detail with which New Historicism thinks through its props. Furthermore, there are many other paradigms that I could

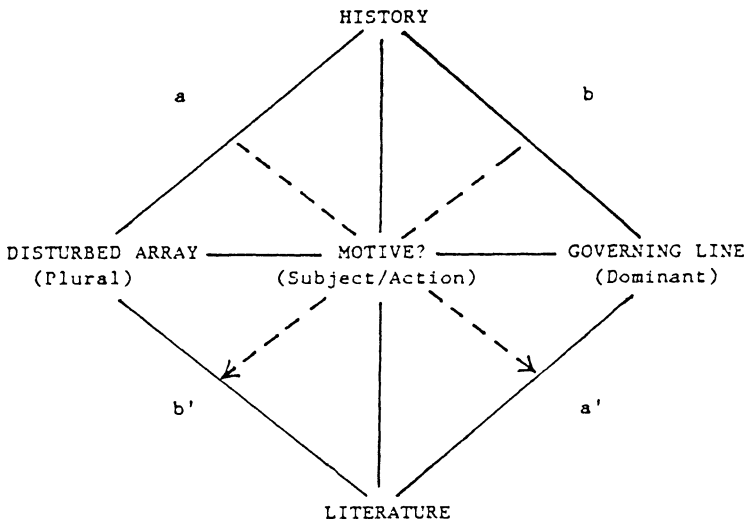
not pack into my already strained categorizations—e.g., the circuit of Renaissance gifts studied by Montrose and Fumerton, the destructive exploration of primitive cultures studied by Greenblatt, the first detailed mapping of England scrutinized with provocative results by Helgerson, or the poetics of Romantic money (economics and property) now seizing the imagination of such Romanticists as Kurt Heinzelman, Marjorie Levinson, David Simpson, and Susan Eilenberg.³⁴ But perhaps I have gathered sufficient material at this point to hazard a generalization and an incipient criticism.

II. WHY: THE MOTIVE BEHIND NEW HISTORICISM

If we review the paradigms we have surveyed, we see a common “dialectic”—one of the most pervasive of the terms the New Historicism (especially in Renaissance studies) has used to describe the interrelated patterns of history and literature.³⁵ The dialectic opposes what I will term the Disturbed Array and the Governing Line. I invoke two elder spirits of the New Historicism, Foucault and Bakhtin. Recall the celebrated “laugh” that breaks from Foucault when, in the Preface to *The Order of Things*, he reads the lunatic “Chinese encyclopaedia” with its disturbed catalogue of dogs.³⁶ Or again, recall the Rabelaisian license that inspires Bakhtin to imagine a universe of carnival not unlike some market square in his own language-rich country: heteroglossic, polysemous, dialogic rather than monologic, babel-like in its insistent toppling of high authority.³⁷ Putting the case cinematically: what Foucault and Bakhtin have taught the New Historicism to film is something like that disturbed array of characters that the hero of Fellini’s *8½* at last sees revolving in the dream circuses of his fantasy.³⁸ The Disturbed Array is the grid that dissolves into moiré pattern, the asylum that erupts in Bedlam, the mardi-gras parade that jazzes up the pedestrian rhythm of everyday life. The Governing Line, on the other hand, is the self-centered, axial gaze of Foucault’s Benthamite Inspector; or again, it is what Bakhtin calls the “centripetal” impulse always striving to rein in the “centrifugal” dizziness of heteroglossia within “centralizing,” “unitary languages.”³⁹ The Governing Line, in short is the whip Marcello Mastroianni cracks: it is the perspective that would see all the Disturbed Array of culture as *pénétré* with rule, structure, authority.

Why such paradigmaticism? To paradigmaticize or, in the root sense, to show side by side (as in the art-historical pedagogy of dual slide projection invented by Heinrich Wölfflin), is to project the ques-

tion, most simply: “what is the connection?”⁴⁰ Given New Historicism’s dialecticism, this question of connection might be rendered Hegelian (“what is the common Spirit?”) or Marxist (“what is the material determinant?”). But it will be useful to suspend the operation of dialectic for the moment to pose the question precisely in Wölfflin’s terms as it influenced Russian Formalism and eventually structural study and its aftermath.⁴¹ In the formalist tradition, to ask “what is the connection?” is to ask “what is the motif?” (Wölfflin) or again, the “motive” (Eichenbaum, Shklovsky, Tomashevsky), linking the Disturbed Array and Governing Line.⁴² What, that is, is the formal principle of connection holding plurality in unity? Furthermore, what is the motive linking historical and literary fact—kings and plays, for example, or pigs and authors—within the unified, cultural artifact? We might schematize the overall coordinate system of New Historical paradigmaticism according to the following quadrate:



What I most want to suggest with this oblique world picture is that the question of connection or motive posed by the New Historicism—which I have broached in a purely formal idiom—resolves in sharper focus into these two complementary issues:

What is the subject of literary history? As witness, I call here upon such works obsessively preoccupied with the “subject” as

Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture," Montrose's essay on "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy*, Helgerson's *Self-Crowned Laureates*, Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy* and many other studies not only in the Renaissance field but in the very heartland of subjectivity, Romantic studies.⁴³ The common enterprise of all these works, it seems to me, is not only the Foucauldian one of critiquing the subject, "humanity,"⁴⁴ but also more basically of *searching* for the subject, *any* subject able to tell us what *it* is (authority, author, identity, ideology, consciousness, humanity) that connects the plural to the dominant, historical context to literary text, and so creates a single movement of culture, a single motivated artifact. Though the New Historicism has renamed formalist motive "power" and complicated any faith in homogeneous culture with its instinct for fracture, the core question it asks is still recognizably: *who* has power? Thus, for example, we may reject as our given the modern notions of self and subjectivity when we study the historical fashioning of identity. But what unit of over-identity—court, household, work-unit, village, parish, class, nation, and so on—do we then assume as the power-field within which to *see* self-formation in its process of empowerment? As such interpretation-oriented historicists as Dilthey knew, historical understanding depends fundamentally on *some* "category of identity," even if any such category able to serve as explanatory ground is inevitably also only the arbiter of "systems of interactions,"⁴⁵ of other spheres of identity in their complex interchange of harmony and dissension.

In a criticism whose hermeneutics serve a History far removed from any divine Spirit or philosophical Truth, in sum, there can be no secure over-Subject able to center the study of human subjects. Where divinity said "I am that I am," the New Historicism is skeptical even of such watered down "humanist" tautologies as "man is man." The tautology of universal explanation must instead be made to branch laterally into an endless quest for definition by alterity ("man is class-, state-, gender-, or ideological-struggle against other men"). Yet such a quest only defers the realization that historical explanation, in order to be satisfying, must at some point round back to tautology. The hidden telos of any analysis of ideological struggle, after all, is that at the end of struggle lies new, free, or true Man (in a relativistic idiom: the salient class or type of man at the time). And so, if only the critical task of searching for the definitive

subject of historical study were to integrate into one equation all its differentia of alterity (class, state, gender, and so on), Man would inevitably reduce once more to being “understood” as Man. Such, it may be said, is at once the failing and promise of the New Historicist search for the subject: though it desires to define man non-tautologically by differentiation from other men (or kinds of identity), the very condition of its desire is made possible by the post-divine faith that there can never really *be* “other men.” Only demons and gods unknown to history could be so other.

The New Historicist search for other subjective experience or *mentalité* is thus doomed to a tragic recognition. Though *we* would understand the historical *them* in all their strangeness, the forms of our understanding are fated at last to reveal that *they* are a remembrance or prophecy of *us*. Historical understanding is validated by the assumption that man is man, and of the two terms, past men and present men, only the latter is concrete evidence. As I will return to below, the New Historicist interpreter is thus a subject looking into the past for some other subject able to define what he himself, or she herself, is; but all the search shows in its uncanny historical mirror is the same subject he/she already knows: a simulacrum of the poststructuralist self insecure in its identity. This is why New Historicist books and essays, despite their splendid diversity of material, “feel” so much the same: the search for the history of the subject is big with the *same* personality of search—the same detached/committed, ironic/awed, playful/solemn intensity betraying in its nervous force the identity of an “intellect” itself our base paradigm of class-, state-, gender-, ideological- (and so on) uncertainty.

It is perhaps not to be marveled, then, that the New Historicism has such talent for theater: the past is a costume drama in which the interpreter’s subject plays. Historical understanding, or what Collingwood called the “re-enactment of past experience,” is an act.⁴⁶

And *what is the action of literary history?* Except in a structuralism that originated in the linguistics of the phoneme and morpheme, subject predicates a *sentence* of action. “It” is as it does; motive *moves*. But in the Wölflinesque slide show of the New Historicism, what moves other than the scholar’s pointer? Here I call as witness not only the long file of Renaissance New Historicists who have made the question of “transgression” or “subversion/containment” paramount but also what is probably the even longer file of Romanticists who have wondered whether to think

their poets incipient revolutionaries or Tory conservatives.⁴⁷ The common plight of all these inquiries, as demonstrated with penetrating clarity in Greenblatt's essay, "Invisible Bullets" (originally subtitled "Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion") is what now seems a genuinely undecidable crux: do literary or even historical subjects *do* anything?⁴⁸ Does the plural movement of a carnival or a satire, for example, truly *subvert* dominant authority? Or to cite the so-called "escape-valve" theory, does the dominant merely release a little gas through the Bakhtinian "material bodily lower stratum," thus acknowledging movement within itself but also containing that movement?⁴⁹ Indeed, what kind of movement *is* subversion anyway—the single action still allowed in a New Historicist universe become like a gigantic, too-quiet house within which, somewhere, in one of the walls, perhaps, insects chew? Given New Historicism's prejudice for synchronic structure—for the paradigmatic moment-in-time in which the whole pattern of historical context may be gazed at in rapt stasis—is any *action* conceivable at all? Or is the subject of cultural and literary history capable only of a static, reversible, self-contained rictus of action not unlike myth in Lévi-Strauss's formulation?⁵⁰

Not only, "Who has power?", then, but also "what is it that power (a concept wholly mythic unless placed in action) *does*?" As Nigel Smith has said in an essay touching upon the journal *Representations*:

"non-literary" texts have been seized by literary and cultural critics and deconstructed in order to understand their location in history, and, to a more limited degree, their role in social or political processes. All well and good, if we simply wish to read the map of the world in its tropological complexity. . . . But what happens after representation? What about circulation, dissemination, affect?⁵¹

Or as I have phrased the problem elsewhere: what is the nature of that moment of propagation when identity and its cultural formations are constituted not as the Subject formed in history-as-representation and -interpretation, virtually the exclusive realm of the New Historicism so far, but as an action formed in politics-as-*active*-representation (publicity or propaganda, for example) and as *active*-interpretation (evaluation, justification, and so on)?⁵² The issue, of course, is not that action is a more "real" ground of explanation than subjective representation, but rather that action—freed

of its old chains of causal explanation—is a hermeneutics necessary to complement interpretations of representation descended ultimately from the Hegelian phenomenology of the subject (in which Spirit is represented or displayed in various historical epiphenomena).

History, in sum, must be studied not just as an expressive action of self-, monarch-, or hegemonic state-display (the purely theatrical “action” of New Historicist unrealpolitik) but also as action *qua* action—as action, that is, seen as an alternate ground of explanation definitive of what we mean by identities and their coercive representations. From the perspective of representation, subject may be the central phenomenon, with the consequence that any causal action allowing subjects to exert power over other subjects is incommensurable with the explanatory logic of identity: causation and influence diminish to, and become mystified as, a sympathetic magic or voodoo of resemblance (the mystery of “reproduction” or ideological action, for example, that Althusser seeks to rationalize in his work on “relative autonomy”).⁵³ But from the perspective of action, the phenomenal basis lies in transitions within material, demographic, and social masses with their attendant re-marshalling of practices, methods, and habits; and *subject* (the ephemeral identity that allows us to narrativize transitional moments in systems of action) is the great illusion. Without both these concepts of subject *and* action, of identities on display and practices creative of such modes of self-fashioning as display itself, there could be no fully satisfying historical explanation.

Neither, I suggest, could there be an explanation that meliorates satisfaction with method. We can put the case intuitively in this way: we want to know what *they did*; but between such terms as “they” and “did,” subject and action, historical being and historical becoming, opens a slight misfit. This misfit is the mystery of predication, the core puzzle of any historicism. If subject and action are explanatory frameworks each separately understandable, each is also made strange in its interplay with the other: was what Charles I “did” supportive or subversive of his *identity* as King, for example? and is not any predication more complex than the copula (“Charles *is* King” or, in a Romantic context, Coleridge’s “I AM” the imagination) a moment of perilous vulnerability in syntax, genealogy, law, and all the other institutions created to shelter the exercise of predicative power in a convention of regularity? When

subject impinges upon predicate nominative or object, after all, there is necessarily a contact—and thus a confusion or undermining—of identity. Witness the confusion in the language of subjectivity itself that the New Historicism, under the sway of Althusser, plays upon—phrased schematically: the kingly Subject (noun) subjects (verb) its subjects (object).⁵⁴

The result of the misfit in historical explanation between the frameworks of subject and action, I suggest, is an instability that reproduces in our own understanding the sense of transition and incommensurability characterizing historical *mentalité* itself. Only through such mimetic instability can we know the sense of history, and *also* know it with the only kind of objectivity possible. If historicism begins as the desire to interview the other across a temporal divide, then we require a seminal otherness or alterity within the very mode of our explanation to ensure that the interview is conducted not just in a single discourse—wholly according to the narratives of self-fashioning or the annals of action, for example⁵⁵—but in a complex dialogue of the two. Only so can the ultimate recognition that *they* are really *us*, as I set forth above, be mediated by method. Code the identification between *us* and *them* into our interviewing procedure (by making method harbor an interior otherness, a will to estrange its own most comfortable assumptions), and the identification between *them* and *us* will no longer be quite so naked. When *they* are in our method, then—as in the moment of tragic recognition—the realization that man is finally man and we only who we are (the tautological statement of historicism) will be redeemed by a detachment akin to that once signed by the *deus ex machina*. This is why my choice of exempla (“I am that I am”) and perhaps very tone intimate that historical understanding is bound to forms of interpretation seeming as inevitable as the gods or fate. There is a Hermes in hermeneutics: it is precisely the sense that we are being led by a method of understanding as puzzling, inconsistent, and alien as any historical Other (from the viewpoint of single explanatory models) that saves our knowledge of the past from too immediate an act of identification.

What begins to become clear, I suggest, is that these two interwoven questions—what is the Subject? and what is the Action such Subject predicates?—bring New Historicism into the fold of the general structuralist and poststructuralist enterprise of rethinking mimesis. It was Aristotelian mimesis, after all, that first dictated to

literary history not only the relation between unified structure and plural episode but the canonical relation of history to literature. To recover the ghost-form of mimesis embedded within the New Historicism, we need only operate upon the schematic quadrature I posed earlier (see Figure) as follows. Make History as Aristotle saw it—specific, discrete, bound to accidental reality—stand for cultural plurality (establishing the representational linkage *a* in my figure). Correspondingly, make literature—the more general and probable truth—represent (along *a'*) the dominant unity, the ruling line of beginning-middle-end. Once the quadrature is thus resolved into a binary, then a fully motivated *imitation* becomes possible. Posit in the middle a Subject (named the Hero) whose entire Action consists of “discovering” or “recognizing” in the plural episodes of lived history a fearsome unity that is chorused as sacral, other-worldly, *literary*. Thus does plurality become unity, and history from the first implicitly literary, implicitly a mimeable action. This is the meaning of Aristotelian mimesis: a total integration of the realms of the many and one, the real and fictive into that original monism, the universe of tragedy.

But now premise that nineteenth-century subversion of mimesis at the well-spring of Russian Formalism and ultimately of structuralism (and, on Anglo-American shores, New Criticism): Symbolism. Caught in the wake of the modern flagship of mimesis, the realistic novel, the drunken boat of Symbolism saw history not as discrete and plural so much as massive and monolithic—as a line of determination as normative as the “same middle-class magic” Rimbaud imagines wherever the “mail train puts us down!” in his “Historic Evening” (thus establishing the linkage *b* in my schema).⁵⁶ Correspondingly, the literary was that which dissolved history into whirling orbits of plural indeterminacy, into the “imagery” of Potebnyaism that Russian Formalism struck with its hammer to forge its first thinking tools (*b'* in my schema).⁵⁷ Once the quadrature was thus resolved into a new binary, then a wholly different concept of motivation became possible. Whereas before the action of the Hero discovered historical plurality to be literary unity, the “expressive” action of the new hero, modern subjectivity, discovered just the reverse. *History* was now the dominating unity that had to be expressed as literary plurality. The light of everyday existence now had to be transmitted through a subjectivity more dispersive and diffractive than any Shelleyan many-colored glass to become the

estranged imagery that Russian Formalism knew as its peripety: defamiliarization.⁵⁸

Formalism and its sequalia (up to and including the New Historicism) can be understood at least provisionally, I hazard, as a reflection upon the transition between mimetic and symbolist credos. Here I supply the missing piece in my broad account of the history of New Historicism. The transition may be located most conveniently in the Romantic period between the classic and symbolist: the period in which history originally became a *historicism* transitional between the universes of the Governing Line and Disturbed Array, with the corollary that literature simultaneously became undecided.⁵⁹ Very schematically: was the French Revolution, for example, a movement of tyranny or of plurality? And was history in general a line dominated by political event, or a congeries of diverse political, economic, and social movements whose composite *Weltanschauung* was as much decentered as centered? What the Germans called *Historismus*—as deployed from Thierry and Michelet through Ranke and Burckhardt—effected a transition in the answers to such questions. Simultaneously, Romantic poets and novelists altered the notion of literary structure. Schematically once more: was *The Prelude* or Goethe's *Faust* unified? Or episodic? Or again, was Scott's *Waverley* about one world, or two? Caught in the flux of such historicist and literary transition, the very notion of the Subject had to be rethought in the shape of that strangely unmotivated or unconsciously motivated being haunting both literary and historiographical Romanticism: the Folk with its post-Hegelian Spirit. So, too—as demonstrated in England's self-consciously defensive posture during the invasion scares of the Napoleonic wars or in such excruciatingly inactive characters as Mortimer in Wordsworth's *Borderers*—Action had to be rethought. Action, as Michelet, Burckhardt and other historicists demonstrated, occurred on many quieter, social fronts flanking the point of obvious political or military event.

We might apply anew Empson's celebrated criticism of the "something far more deeply interfused" passage in "Tintern Abbey":

Whether man or some form of God is subject here, [Wordsworth] distinguishes between *things* which are objects or subjects of *thought*, these he *impels*; and *things* which are neither objects nor subjects of *thought*, through these he merely *rolls*. . . . The

only advantage I can see in this distinction is that it makes the *spirit* at once intelligent and without intelligence; at once God and nature. . . . There is something rather shuffling about this attempt to be uplifting yet non-denominational. . . .⁶⁰

What is the Subject of this shuffling poem, Empson asks; and what variously impelled or rolled Action is that subject taking? Thus does a modern reflect upon Romanticism, the period in which (in my initiatory history of the New Historicism), the mimetic turned symbolist.

We are not very far here, it may be seen, from modern formalism full-blown and the long sequence of criticisms that brings us at last to the New Historicism: a further reflection, as I called it, upon the transition between mimesis and symbolism initiated in Romanticism and its sequalia. To move from Empson's denunciation of "shuffling" to Russian Formalism's atomization of "motive"; to Saussure's hugely demotivated *langue* (a structure of the arbitrary, contentless, unconscious); to Lévi-Strauss's savage mind; to Foucault's agentless archive; to mindless (i.e., Logos-less) difference; and to New Historicism's paradigms uncertain in their Subject and Action; is only to change our valorization. Empson's "shuffling," we may speculate, was a demobilized, post-World War nightmare of the Action the nineteenth century accounted to its problematized Subject: the mob, crowd, folk, race, nation, and ultimately Spirit of the Times. Mob-like "*spirit* at once intelligent and without intelligence" is what formalism in its successive states from Russian Formalism and American Neagrarianism on has attempted to find a safe, a literate, way to enact.

Form, after all, is that which contains the mobility of subversive plurality within a myth of organic wholeness, "ambiguity" within "unity." Or where organic wholes have been demystified, form contains "difference" within paper-tiger wholes (in many ways just as compulsive and necessary to the system) on the order of Derrida's "entire history of metaphysics" or poststructuralism's boundless, and all-containing, "textuality." Whether offered as myth or demystification, the unity of the New Critical poem and omnium-gatherum of deconstructive metaphysics-into-textuality are finally only very delimited wholes—like schoolyards—designed to allow formal thought to play safely. They shelter a place where Subject and Action may be mobilized (ambiguously or differentially) by claiming preemptively that such place is all there is; it is total,

global (in the deconstructive reversal, abyssal). Thus is denied cultural history, the truly global abyss in which are risked the deepest plays of social mobility.⁶¹

III. THE EMBARRASSMENT OF THE NEW HISTORICISM

I now venture upon my primary thesis. The New Historicism is our most embarrassed “safe” enactment of the forces once mobilizing the old historicist Spirit.⁶² In its very motive (not to mention critical vocabulary and often style), it is our newest version of the movement that first taught criticism how to be embarrassed by history: formalism.

Early formalism, we know, was embarrassed enough of the historical subject or Spirit (whether in the avatar of the author’s biography or the story of his times) to transform poems into artifacts as seemingly emptied of historical subject as a Grecian Urn. Yet still, a recalcitrant concern for general culture survived in the preoccupation of the Russian Formalists with the *skaz* or folktale-like narration (not to mention the movement’s late, desperate accommodation to state ideology) and of the New Critics with general society and religion—even if such concern was marked as outside the bounds of specifically literary study. Indeed, while Russian Formalism was eventually curtailed by ideology, New Criticism in the academy was free to elaborate such nouveau Subjects as “unity” and Actions as “irony” within its chosen bounds precisely because it ceded responsibility for the out-of-bounds history of literature to a neutral counterpart of critical ideology: the scientific historicism of history of ideas.

Of course, the neutrality of history of ideas was itself a style of ideology. With its unit-ideas analysis of historical spirit and quasi-causal laws for the transmission and combination of such ideas (“influence”), history of ideas was a science of subject and action.⁶³ But in the era after the Scopes trial of 1925, which so deeply affected Ransom as well as others in the early Nashville milieu of the New Criticism, “science” was an issue as fully political as the divide between the New and Old Souths.⁶⁴ In essence, we may say, the physics-model atomism of Lovejoy and other historians of ideas helped write the political constitution of an individualist and pluralist Platonic Republic of intellect eminently adapted to the spirit of the “New.” Scientific rationalism was a kind of enlightened liberalism. We may adduce, for example, Lovejoy’s celebration of the diverse “life-histories” of his intellectualized individual, the unit-

idea; or again, his implicit panegyric on pluralism in “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms.”⁶⁵ Or again, there is George Boas’s credo of pluralistic tolerance:

Hence it is clear that before one can write the history of an idea one must disentangle it from all the ambiguities that it has acquired in the course of time. One must expect to find it appearing in contexts that vary from age to age. One must not be puzzled to find it used as a basis for praise and blame. To do all this requires very wide, indeed indiscriminate, reading, tolerance of inconsistency in a given man or book, and a willingness to accept wobbling from fact to value and from value to fact. In doing this, one is always tempted to quarrel with the men whose ideas one is discussing. This temptation is hard to avoid but nevertheless argument is not historical narration. . . . Let me say for myself that this book is written from the point of view of one who believes—or assumes, if you prefer—that ideas may be held regardless of their relevance to economics or politics or religion. . . .⁶⁶

It was under the constitution of such a universal pluralism disentangled from all the fractious “ambiguities . . . acquired in the course of time” and integrated within a single diverse republic of Ideas that New Criticism in the academy became ever freer of ideas—i.e., disencumbered of the direct responsibility for thinking ideas by the very atmosphere of intellect encouraging the divestiture of study areas into other specialties in the university.⁶⁷ Or rather, we can say that the New Criticism seceded to pursue in an *interiorized* realm its characteristic early political agenda—a stance at once celebratory and denunciatory of the spirit of the New; and similarly at once praising and condemnatory of the Old. It became free, that is, to create its Fugitive, Agrarian, and at last academic state (a fifty-first state, we might say) of embarrassed, recidivist, and contestatory pluralism: first in the circle of intellectuals gathered around Sidney Mtttron Hirsch in Nashville (as well as the subsequent versions of the circle),⁶⁸ later the quintessential New Critical seminar in the university, and finally the sublimated state of the “poem.” In this interior world, the spirit and actions of modern pluralism could be accepted in such a way as to retain all the old antebellum charm of internal dissension: “ambiguity,” “paradox,” “irony,” “tension,” and so forth. Dissension in the intellectual circle, classroom, or text was sanctioned because it was a “discussion” always implicitly presided over by a philosopher-king (whether Hirsch, the seminar teacher, or textual “unity”).

In short, it is certain (though often today forgotten) that early

formalism cared deeply about historical spirit and action; but it did so in a complex antithetical manner that surrendered the direct regulation of historical understanding to history of ideas with its adjuncts in other disciplines on the campus so that the literary critic (now aggressively differentiated from the literary scholar or historian) could regulate the same province of concerns in internalized, marginalized, and sublimated form—as art to be talked about, argued over, *battled* over in an enduring civil war of polemical dissension.⁶⁹ To refuse to paraphrase ideas (in Brooks's formulation), was to be ironic; and to be ironic—ambiguous, paradoxical, tense, and so forth—was to be recusant. Or again, it was to be subversive in the manner of gadfly Socrates in relation to the dominant understanding of the plural republic and of the way such a republic influences ideas. It is thus appropriate, perhaps, that one of the most comprehensive testaments of the views of the New Critics—at once explicitly ideological and strangely innocent in feel—is the long Socratic dialogue that Warren constructed from talks between himself and Brooks on literature, culture, and religion.⁷⁰ This, we feel, is the home form of the method.

Now we can understand the acute embarrassment that is the New Historicism. If, very crudely, the New Criticism was an embarrassed subsumption of the Civil War and of the dominantly plural (and industrial) society that followed, and if deconstruction is an inheritor of New Criticism, then the New Historicism is Reconstruction—or, rather, a highly fastidious and inhibited version of reconstruction. The New Historicism would pour the Spirit of the *skázka*—of the combined tragedy and jokework of the Folk—directly into the literary text once more and so reunite the primary republic of society and the marginal republic of literature within a single “culture.” But the entire interdisciplinary realm of history of ideas that once *thought* the border between historical society and literature—that organized the mediating zone of “ideas” and “influence” according to a science, respectively, of subject and action—has fallen away. Though still often applied in practical form, the apparatus of unit-ideas and influence has become unviable at the theoretical level under the assault of a host of competing notions: *mentalité*, *episteme*, *longue durée*, Althusserian “ideology,” and (more generally) structural or quasi-structural rebuttals to positivist explanation.⁷¹ Historical “context” and literary “text” thus now confront each other and interpenetrate directly—the desideratum of the New Historicism—but with the disturbing

collary that they do so in what seems an unthought and unregulated manner.

More precisely: the diverse body of structural or quasi-structural thought I indicate above *could* substitute for history of ideas in the modern understanding of the relation between context and text; but in most works that follow a New Historicist approach it is surprisingly underthought at the theoretical level and, it would appear, poorly grasped. At best, the New Historicism is either pseudo-Foucauldian in “feel” or, when it alludes to its methodological base at all, merely points without reflection or overall perspective to select extrapolations of the structural development of formalism—e.g., to anthropology or Althusser. It then too often overleaps the whole domain of the structural intervention to borrow from a deconstruction that, decapitated from the structural body integral with its foundation, appears merely Orphic, merely a lyrical invocation of “*mise en abyme*” or some other neo-symbolist whirl of “vertiginous” possibility.⁷² In the end, the title conferred upon this wonder cabinet of ill-sorted methods is then “interdisciplinary study,” the most seriously underthought critical, pedagogical, and institutional concept in the modern academy.

Such, I suggest, is the deep origin of the “paradigm.” A New Historicist paradigm holds up to view a historical context on one side, a literary text on the other, and, in between, a connection of pure nothing. Or rather, what now substitutes for history of ideas between context and text is the fantastic interdisciplinary nothingness of metaphor (more fully, the whole province of “resemblances” Foucault charts in his “Prose of the World” applied *without* its historicized and theorized basis).⁷³ As I can attest from experience, “metaphor” is the most frequent and pointed charge against New Historicist approaches that pose a context, text, and in between a relation of pure suggestiveness. Physical concepts originating in positivist explanations of reality—“power,” for example—drift over the gap to figure the work of texts; and, inversely, the *exact* forms of a formalism the New Historicism claims to have left behind (“ambiguity,” “paradox,” “contradiction,” “irony” and so forth) drift from their origination in literary study to figure the operations of history.⁷⁴ What is merely “convenient” in a resemblance between context and text (in Foucault’s sense of contiguity) soon seems an emulation; emulation is compounded in analogy; and, before we know it, analogy seems magical “sympathy”: a quasi-magical *action* of resemblance between text and context (akin

to the action that once seemed to make the warm and light fire strive sympathetically upward into the air).⁷⁵ Instead of the influence that had organized the cross-flow between context and text, in short, now there is only a metaphorical transference pointed out (again we may see the back-and-forth shuttling of the scholar's pointer) through a deft manipulation that might well seem to older historians of ideas a wave of the wizard's wand.

The overall result is that the New Historicism is at once more frank than the New Criticism—because it makes no bones about wishing to establish a subversive intersubjectivity and interaction between texts and their contexts—and excruciatingly more embarrassed (literally, “barred, obstructed”). While driven to refer literature to history (most literally in its notes referring to historical documents), it is self-barred from any method able to ground, or even to *think*, reference more secure than trope. Indeed, the very concept of reference becomes taboo. Ignoring the fact that historical evidence by and large *is* referred to in its notes (which has the effect of lending documentary material an *a priori* status denied the literary works and anecdotes it reads and re-reads), the New Historicism proceeds tropologically *as if* literary texts and historical con-texts had equal priority. Literary “authors” thus claim an equivalence with political “authority,” and “subjected” intellects with their monarchical “Subject,” through an argument of paradox, ambiguity, irony, or (to recur to dialectic) Lordship/Bondage not far removed at base from the etymological wordplay of deconstruction. As deconstructive “catachresis” is to reference, then, so subversion is to power—but *without* the considered defense of tropology allowing deconstruction to found a-logical figuration in the very substrate of its version of historical context: the intertext. New Historicist contextuality is an intertextuality of culture without a functional philosophy or anti-philosophy. No Derrida of the field has made of the subversive relation between authors and authority what deconstruction makes of its subversion of reference: deferral. After all, it would be too embarrassing to admit that subversion of historical power (and of all the ontological and referential hierarchies still retained by Althusser in the gestural phrase, “in the last instance”⁷⁶) is just another difference. Such would be to confess the formalism of the New Historicism.

Put reductively: when I compare Wordsworth's picturesque eye to Bentham's panoptic inspector or the New Critics to the Civil War, I am embarrassed. All New Historicists embarrass themselves

in this manner; all create a metaphysical conceit of text-like-context as crypto-formalist as a Donne poem interpreted by the New Criticism. But I know how to change my embarrassment into a special bravura: a thrown-glove *why not?* unsecured upon any considered defense of figure, trope, or conceit (i.e., “language”) comparable to that of deconstruction and, we might remember, of the New Criticism itself with its theorems of “icon” and “image.”

Finally, however, I do not mean to be reductive. If the New Historicism continues in a higher register the embarrassment that formalism first experienced in the face of history, we must also grant it its own place and occasion. The New Historicism is a uniquely postmodern personality of intellect transuming all the earlier personae by which formalism had out-braved the embarrassment of history (the aggressive voice of the polemical “critic” in the New Criticism, for example, or the Mosaic persona of the critic-in-the-wilderness or critic-as-artist in deconstruction). Specifically: if the method braves out its embarrassment with its characteristic *why not?*, such bravura is at last also self-effacing—but only in a manner carrying effrontery to a second-degree. New Historicism *declares* its self-effacement in the face of history; it authoritatively arrogates to itself the lack of authority that is the perceived role of the intellectual in latter-day society. The New Historicism, I will thus at last define, is the supremely *self-conscious* embarrassment of the postmodern intellect as expressed in the medium of historical consciousness. It is the sense of history become one with what we might call the interpreter’s intentionality of embarrassment.

By intention here, I mean that there is understood to be no “influence” (subject acting causally) in the void between literary text and historical context because there is finally only the marginalized and consciously figural intentionality underlying all New Historicist conceits of culture: the interpreter’s own self-conflicted subject or intellect in its acknowledged failure of influence. Or to psychologize slightly: what emerges from the endlessly impeded effort of the New Historicism to know the spirit of past culture without the history-of-ideas apparatus once mediating such knowledge is the chagrin of the postmodern interpreter in his too naked and futile *desire* for the old Spirit. “Like all authors, critics, and other intellects,” we might hear the interpreter saying, “I wish to be engaged with general culture and history. But I also want to study literature. Therefore, I am without influence.” Nostalgia for history thus embarrasses literary appreciation; literary appreciation

embarrasses historicism; and at the intersection of this chiasmic flux of chagrin forms the only subject and action still possible: the critic (and the historical author serving as his type of intellect) thinking about subversion.

This is what I mean at last by defining the New Historicism as a “reflection” upon Romanticism (keeping in mind that I use Romanticism synecdochically as the key intervention from the early nineteenth century on). To return to my earlier suggestion that the New Historicism *we* finally sees only itself in *them*: the New Historicism is in effect a profoundly narcissistic method. It romanticizes the Renaissance, to take the most prominent example, but wakes up to the realization that what it sees in the other of the past through lenses of subjectivity, dialecticism, or the very notion of “literature” inherited from the nineteenth century and after is the image of its own anxiety of intellect. Disbelieving in any regulated method of reaching the historical other from the domain of the text, it at last studies itself in the anxious pose of reaching for the other. “Power” is the interpreter’s figure for powerlessness.

The evidence, I believe, is overwhelming. Most signally, there is the consistently heightened self-reflexivity of the New Historicism. Whether in its aspect as British cultural materialism, which aggressively deploys self-consciousness as a political stance in the present, or as the American “*Representations-school*,” whose self-consciousness has no ready outlet, reflexivity is more than a matter of chiasmic, oxymoronic, or otherwise self-conflicted style. We could look at any number of American studies, for example, to notice that if the method tends to open on a paradigm of historical otherness it also frequently closes on an acutely self-aware passage—at times, indeed, no less than a meditation on the postmodern condition. Thus there is the striking Epilogue to Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, the last paragraphs of Montrose’s essay on “The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text” (together with that of its brief precursor, “Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History”), or the last paragraph of Tennenhouse’s essay on “Strategies of State and Political Plays.” More broadly, New Historicist studies, however they begin or end, can at any moment open out into a meditation upon postmodernity. The two components of this overall meditation can be articulated as follows (where I ventriloquize a composite voice of the New Historicist interpreter modeled primarily on the work of Greenblatt and Montrose):

(1) *I am embarrassed of my marginality as interpreter—specifically, of the whole enterprise of literary history, the academy, and the intellect in which I am implicated.* The extent to which the origin of such chagrin may be traced to a particular period and locale of failed politics (e.g., the carnival/tragedy of the academy in the aftermath of May 1968 or 1970) is contested.⁷⁷ But certainly the recognition in the New Historicism that postmodern intellect is a failed political “power” cannot be mistaken. In a moment of piercing self-reflexiveness, Montrose writes:

Many of those who profess “the Humanities” see themselves and their calling as threatened by marginalization within a system of higher education increasingly geared to the provision of highly specialized technological and preprofessional training. In its anti-reflectionism, its shift of emphasis from the formal analysis of verbal *artifacts* to the ideological analysis of discursive *practices*, . . . the emergent historical orientation in literary studies is pervasively concerned with writing as a mode of *action*. I do not believe that it compromises the intellectual seriousness of this concern to see it as impelled by a questioning of our very capacity for action—by a nagging sense of professional, institutional, and political impotence.⁷⁸

Or again, in the original lead-in to this passage in its earlier published form:

One way to view the recent revival of interest in questions of history in literary studies may be as a compensation for that acceleration in the forgetting of history which seems to characterize an increasingly technocratic and future-oriented academy and society. To the painfully dismissive expression, “Oh, that’s academic,” we must add another, more pernicious: “Oh, that’s history.”⁷⁹

A remembrance of Sidney would not be out of place. “Oh, that’s poetic,” we might hear Sidney say in mimicry of the *mysomousoi* or “poet-haters” featured in his strong compensation: the *Apology for Poetry*. “Oh, that’s academic history,” New Historicism mouths instead in a genuflection before general culture before launching upon its own compensation: a defense of literature, historiography, the academy, and the intellect that, while it respects general culture, would make a space of subversion/containment in it for the monastic “impotence” of scholarship to continue.

(2) *I would compensate for my embarrassment at the postmodern intellect by making a “Renaissance.”* Here the root of “fact” is useful. The cultural artifact within which the New Historicism

places the text in proximity to factual context is very definitely a made or done thing. Made-up or done-up in New Historicist fashion as the age of subversion, oppositionality, contestation, or transgression, the “Renaissance” is the romanticization of the postmodern scholar. Relevant are the explanations that have been offered for the precedence of the Renaissance field in New Historicist study. After the passage on academic impotence above, for example, Montrose concludes “The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text”:

That Renaissance literary studies should now be alive to such concerns is not to be explained in terms of any single cause. But one of the determinations here may be that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the separation of “Literature” and “Art” from explicitly didactic and political discourses or from such disciplines as history or moral and natural philosophy was as yet incipient. Both the pervasiveness of rhetorical models in Renaissance poetics and the predominance of patronage as a mode of literary production may have worked to foreground rather than to efface the status of texts as social and not merely literary productions. Such texts may more actively invite socio-historical analysis than do those later works of our literary canon that have been produced within an ideology of aesthetic disinterestedness. Because we now seem to be moving beyond this modern, essentialist orientation to “Literature,” we can begin to grasp it as an historical formation that was only beginning to emerge at the end of the sixteenth century. Interpreters of Tudor-Stuart literature thus find themselves now particularly well placed to rearticulate literature as a social practice—and, by so doing, to rearticulate criticism as a social practice. In reflecting upon my own practice in the foregoing essay, I am aware of a strong stake, not in any illusion of individual autonomy but in the possibilities for limited and localized agency within the regime of power and knowledge that at once sustains and constrains us.⁸⁰

We are now most interested in the Renaissance, Montrose says, because the discourse of that epoch shares our standards of interestedness—of the implication of literature in politics—and so is most “inviting” to current sensibility. Yet as sounded most loudly in the first-person self-reflexiveness of the last sentence here (“In reflecting upon my own practice”), the hospitality of the Renaissance is perhaps a little too generous, too unresisting before the intrusion of the postmodern. By the time of Montrose’s last sentence, the “Renaissance” is all about the anxiety of the postmodern intellect in its academic confines. Or to look up the page to the

penultimate sentence: “interpreters of Tudor-Stuart literature” are indeed “particularly well placed to rearticulate literature as a social practice—and, by so doing, to rearticulate criticism as a social practice.” They are well placed because the “Renaissance” they articulate is really a simulation, a dream academy. Like the Spenserian text and other Tudor-Stuart tomes literally locked away in the academy and its adjuncts (e.g., the Newberry, Huntington, Beinecke libraries; the Elizabethan Club at Yale), the New Historicist “Renaissance” is coincident with the corridors and vaults of the postmodern intellect. It is the quiet room, muffled by that great silencer of politics, History, where the postmodern intellect fantasizes safely about subversion and transgression against “the regime of power and knowledge that at once sustains and constrains us.”

To support this interpretation of the self-reflexiveness of the New Historicism, I turn to its even more suggestive formulation in Greenblatt’s work. To begin with, we can observe that the membrane of history between the Renaissance and postmodernity in Greenblatt’s studies sometimes stretches so thin that there is virtually no separation at all. Speaking of More, for example, Greenblatt speculates, “There are periods in which the relation between intellectuals and power is redefined, in which the old forms have decayed and new forms have yet to be developed.”⁸¹ What we read in the plural “periods” here is that the “Renaissance” is the primal scene of any number of other intellectual dis- or re-empowerings extending up through the revolutions, cultural or otherwise, of the twentieth century. It is a repression or sublimation of our own scenes of intellectual trauma. Addressing directly the modern perception of the past in his “Invisible Bullets” essay, Greenblatt argues in a provocative passage that the “subversion” recent interpreters see in the past is a function of their own condition:

Indeed we may feel at this point that subversion scarcely exists and may legitimately ask ourselves how our perception of the subversive and orthodox is generated. The answer, I think, is that the term *subversive* for us designates those elements in Renaissance culture that contemporary audiences tried to contain or, when containment seemed impossible, to destroy and that now conform to our own sense of truth and reality. That is, we find “subversive” in the past precisely those things that are *not* subversive to ourselves, that pose no threat to the order by which we live and allocate resources: in Harriot’s *Brief and True Report*, the function of illusion in the establishment of religion, the displacement of a providential conception of disease by one fo-

cused on “invisible bullets,” the exposure of the psychological and material interests served by a certain conception of divine power. Conversely, we identify as principles of order and authority in Renaissance texts what we would, if we took them seriously, find subversive for ourselves: religious and political absolutism, aristocracy of birth, demonology, humoral psychology, and the like. That we do not find such notions subversive, that we complacently identify them as principles of aesthetic or political order, replicates the process of containment that licensed the elements we call subversive in Renaissance texts: that is, our own values are sufficiently strong for us to contain alien forces almost effortlessly.⁸²

That which the postmodern interpreter champions as “subversive” in the past is an enlightened attitude that recognizes “illusion in the establishment of religion” and so forth and thus sympathizes with “ourselves”—the only substantive meaning of which in Greenblatt’s usage is the postmodern, academic community. (After all, whole segments of current society, no matter their actual secularism, *would* be threatened by deliberate “exposure of the psychological and material interests served by a certain conception of divine power.”) Conversely, that which the postmodern interpreter in his academy sees as “order and authority” in the past (“religious and political absolutism,” etc.) sympathizes with such current trends as Montrose’s “preprofessionalism” to endanger the disciplines of intellect. Or rather, past absolutism *would* be dangerous to intellect if the latter did not have a mechanism by which to avoid taking “seriously” any connection between past and present absolutisms. Suspended belief is provided by intellectual “values . . . sufficiently strong for us to contain alien forces almost effortlessly”—i.e., to make past dominance appear precisely *alien* and thus removed from present possibility.

The overall relation between present and past in the New Historicism can thus be schematized as follows. The postmodern intellect identifies its own desire to subvert dominance with the subversiveness of an earlier era (where identification is experienced as fascination with, and comfortable acceptance of, past resistance). Yet what the strange mirror between postmodernity and the “Renaissance” obscures is the total process of contestation—a differential process in which subversive values play only one part. The subversion of the present, after all, can only truly be mapped over that of the past if the *relation* between subversive and dominant elements in the present is like that of the past. Yet the too-easy

identification of the present will-to-subversion with that of the “Renaissance” blocks any hard look at the relation constitutive of contestation because it merely assumes a correlation between Renaissance and postmodern dominants each of which is left in assumption. Essays or books on subversion thus often spotlight the subversive and leave in unexamined cliché or convention the detail of dominant norms.⁸³ (Some open questions for research, for example: was the “providential conception of disease” that checked belief in viral “invisible bullets” wholly effective in everyday folk life in England, let alone the new world? or again, how effective or exclusive in practice is the current “preprofessionalism” that aims students straight as bullets toward medical or other professional schools?)

The consequence of such selective identification with the past is that in the mirror of desire named the “Renaissance” the interpreter can *fantasize* about subverting dominance while dreaming away the total commitments of contestation. While the interpreter assumes his values to be minority opinions transgressive of society, he also deflects any serious consideration *of* that society or of the political and institutional costs exacted of those committed to the practical application of subversion. Such costs are merely presumed to be *like* those of past contestation between subversion and dominance, and the effect of such assumption is paradoxically to make the costs of subversion more comfortable in imagination (since hangings, drawings, and quarterings, for example, are now less palpable a punishment than loss of tenure). In short, the real resistance of the New Historicist interpreter is to any conscious appraisal of what it means to resist powers inimical to intellect. No weighing of risk or gain, no cost/benefit analysis (to speak in bureaucratese) disturbs the academese of historicist study. And the dreamwork that makes such repression possible is a scholarly page overwrought with subversions of passé kings, queens, creeds, or—at best—Tillyards.

Howard observes about the New Historicism: “at *this* historical moment, an analysis of Renaissance culture can be made to speak to the concerns of late twentieth-century culture.” And later: “In short, I would argue that the Renaissance, seen as the last refuge of preindustrial man, is of such interest to scholars of the postindustrial era because these scholars construe the period in terms reflecting their own sense of the exhilaration and fearfulness of living inside a gap in history, when the paradigms that structured the past

seem facile and new paradigms uncertain.”⁸⁴ The truly operative word here, I suggest, is “refuge,” which would have no place in historicism if *postindustrial* man (already fiction is at work here) did not reshape the past with teleological foreknowledge of industrial “preprofessionalism” so as to open for himself a refuge of pure mind named the “Renaissance,” an ultimate academy hidden from the exigencies of the present within History itself.

“I think, therefore I am powerless,” is the credo of the postmodern Cartesian, with the corollary: “I am powerless, therefore I would make a Renaissance.”

The New Historicism, I conclude, is our latest post-May 1970, post-May 1968, post-1917, . . . post-1789 (and so forth) imagination of an active role for intellect in the renaissance of society—an imagination that elides the fact that truly subversive renaissances on the scale of revolution have had an uncanny habit of immediately disempowering, containing, or recuperating subversive practitioners of intellect. To apply my period-synecdoche for this process of imagination once more: it is our latest Romanticization of the Renaissance, our latest use of the assumptions that achieved their most intense form in the epoch of the original historicism to restore a past that images (and we at last know it) our best selves. I do not mean to exempt Romantic studies from this thesis, of course. But Romantic studies, besides being an as yet fainter echo of Renaissance New Historicism, has had its great chastener in Jerome McGann, whose *Romantic Ideology* sets out precisely to embarrass romanticizers of Romanticism—critics, in other words, who open a channel of indiscriminate cross-flow between past and present concerns by using Romantic assumptions to read Romanticism.⁸⁵ The New Historicism is our latest Romantic ideology unable to differentiate meaningfully between then and now, unable—at least at its present level of thought—to do more than be driven toward a refuge of intellect lost in History.

Toward a fuller consideration of the New Historicism—which I criticize but to which I continue to be committed—I set forth as my *peroratio* an agenda of three future areas of improvement. The main thrust of this agenda is that the narcissism of the New Historicism is not at last weakness so much as the possibility of a strengthened method to come. I suggest:

(1) *A New Historicist study of New Historicism*. Recognizing the necessary “intervention” of the postmodern interpreter in the past,

Howard concludes her evaluation of the New Historicism in Renaissance studies:

Finally, it seems to me that the historically-minded critic must increasingly be willing to acknowledge the non-objectivity of his or her own stance and the inevitably political nature of interpretive and even descriptive acts. . . . I am not suggesting that it is desirable to look at the past with the willful intention of seeing one's own prejudices and concerns. Nonetheless, since objectivity is not in any pure form a possibility, let us acknowledge that fact and acknowledge as well that any move into history is an *intervention*, an attempt to reach from the present moment into the past to rescue both from meaningless banality. . . .⁸⁶

I would go further. I *do* suggest that “it is desirable to look at the past with the willful intention of seeing one's own prejudices and concerns” as a first step to filling in what “acknowledgement” of non-objectivity must become to be a serviceable critical tool. A concept with eminently academic overtones, “acknowledgement” of the present's intervention in the past should blossom into disciplined study. We *should* see our own prejudices and concerns in such constructs as the “Renaissance,” in other words, and that which will redeem such vision from mere partiality is research into the contexts and texts of the prejudices intervening between past and present.

A fully-capable New Historicism should be able to overcome the embarrassment of its own implication in history to take a hard look first at the assumptions it carries over from the nineteenth century. As I have already intimated, truly to understand the method (and its close analogue in current historiography proper: the recently named “new cultural history”)⁸⁷ requires that we place it in a long view reaching back to the original historicism. In this sense, the title of the New Historicism is wholly deceptive. Whether the term was invented by Greenblatt or should be traced back to Wesley Morris's 1972 *Toward a New Historicism* is immaterial: wherever we look in the New Historicism we see resemblances to the original historicism so striking and deep—even down to the epithet “new”—that it might provoke speculation that the category of the new is the oldest instinct of historiography.⁸⁸ Thus it is, for example, that the very excitement over a “new history” first peaked in France in the early nineteenth century; that it followed a period of revolutionary fervor not unlike our own 1960s; that it expressed

itself in a few key journals analogous to our own *Representations*; that it became interdisciplinary in the combined efforts of its historical, literary, legal, economic, and philological researchers; and that it problematized the notions of subject (individual, nation, or Spirit) and action (“event”).⁸⁹ And thus it is as well that the original historicism turned from the *wie es eigentlich gewesen* of Ranke to the skeptical relativism of Ernst Troeltsch during the “crisis of historicism” of the early twentieth century, and so predicted the embarrassment at the heart of New Historical concern. If each culture of the past “as it really was” consisted of a self-contained complex with its own unique Spirit, how could it ever be known, since the modern historian lives in his own cultural complex? Thus was the basic hermeneutical question activated leading to the so-called crisis in historicism and the tentative solutions offered in the early part of this century: R. G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of History* (1946), for example, which postulated that the modern historian can only know history by reenacting it in consciousness through an act of “historical imagination.”⁹⁰

But by itself, research into the nineteenth-century precedent of the New Historicism is finally too restrictive. We need also to study other culturally-rooted senses of history both prior and posterior to *Historismus*. In the posterior realm especially, the documentation is all around us. To take one example: why are we too embarrassed to study the relation, whether of subversion or containment, between New Historicist discourse and the language of the protest movements of the 1960s? Or between the discourse of modern protest and that of current academic “interdisciplinarity” with its recuperated instinct of transgression (across boundaries, periods, canons, paradigms, etc.)? Or perhaps most constructively: how can we turn the sources of postmodern intellectual embarrassment into resources of historical understanding? How, that is, build the awareness of postmodernity into our criticism as *method* rather than as the narcissistic, *indisciplinary* nostalgia for subversion that is the secret indulgence lurking within *interdisciplinary* cultural study?

(2) A *full-scale theory of New Historicism*. Only on the basis of an adequate history of the New Historicism, I suggest, can an adequate theory of the method be articulated. This is because only an awareness of shared cultural contexts will provide the missing medium in which to see the commonality of the New Historicism and those criticisms it has so far sought to distinguish itself from. As I have throughout implied, it is simply not the case that the New

Historicism is essentially different from formalism. It is more true to say that it is an ultimate formalism so “powerful” that it colonizes the very world as its “text.” The New Historicism opens the door between text and context in a spirit of seeming equivalence such that the metaphoricity I earlier signalled ultimately confuses tenor and vehicle: the context *is* the text and vice versa (e.g., Montrose: “The new orientation to history . . . may be succinctly characterized, on the one hand, by its acknowledgement of the *historicity of texts*. . . [and] On the other hand . . . by its acknowledgement of the *textuality of history*. . .”).⁹¹ But from the perspective of literary studies, we recognize, the result is an imperialism of textual and specifically formal analysis: a sudden expansion of methods of thought previously segregated to paradoxical, ambiguous, or ironic literature. To “read” the world, after all, is not an ideologically neutral act. It is to appropriate the world from the masses of the less articulate and literate. It is a statement of privilege.⁹²

A theory of the New Historicism, then, should not eschew its formalist origins but embrace those origins together with the historical conditions that prompted them. It would seek to explain both contextually and textually its borrowings from formalisms early and late, New Critical or deconstructive. Particularly suggestive, for example, is the resemblance between the interpretation of history as understood by Greenblatt and Montrose and the hermeneutics of allegory or figure as understood by de Man.⁹³ To argue as Montrose does repeatedly that texts are historical, and history textual, I suggest, is to draw yet another version of the hermeneutic circle. But to argue also that the literary historian is implicated in, yet historically distanced from, his object of study is to emphasize a particular vision of that circle. As in the case of de Man, such vision places textual interpretation or “reading” always at a temporal remove from the historical inscription it desires to approach—a temporal remove identical with figural remove. Put simply, and in a way that explains why it is sometimes so guiltily easy for sophisticated readers of literature to change into readers of history: the New Historicism is an allegory for history. It erects an intricately-wrought veil of allegory that figures not any holy of holies behind the veil (History) so much as the shadow cast by the interpreter in his complex posture of adoration/skepticism.

(3) *A renewed rhetoric*. Here I place in play the incipient argument I have sustained in invocations of *exordium*, *digressio*, *narratio*, and *peroratio*.⁹⁴ The New Historicism, I earlier suggested, is

a method of metaphor or cultural intertextuality void of any rigorously considered philosophy of cultural figure, trope, conceit, or “language.” While joining text and context figuratively to create its Geertzian “symbolic” of culture, it lacks the means to *think* the interdisciplinary medium of conjunction except by rote allusion to a miscellany of “discursive systems” and other borrowed methodology. Of course, “philosophy” or “thought” may be too Aristotelian a goal. In its implicit rewriting of the *Poetics*, the New Historicism should not ask which is the more philosophical, poetry or history, but instead how both poetry and philosophy engage history. The New Historicism thus requires a method or “language” of contextualization founded upon some *historically-realized* philosophy of discourse—i.e., some notion of rhetoric, or more broadly, of language as historically situated event. The ultimate rationale of the proliferating paradigms of the New Historicism, I submit, exists in an uncanny relationship of sameness/difference with the de Manian and deconstructive impulse to reinvent a *classical* rather than Romantic or dialectical concept: the notion of rhetoric. The limitation of the New Historicism is that in its failure to carve out its own theory by way of a disciplined, high-level study of the evolution of historically-situated language, its discoverable theory has been too assimilable to the deconstructive view of rhetoric as an a-, trans-, or uni-historical figural language: in de Man’s terms once more, as allegory instead of symbol (the latter, whatever its philosophical validity, the historically operative concept of the nineteenth century). The promise of the New Historicism, perhaps, is to develop the philosophy of allegory into a true speaking in the agora: a rhetorical notion of literature as text-cum-action performed by historical subjects upon other subjects. That which needs to be unthought, in other words, is the very concept of the “text” itself.

The beginnings of such a development are clear, for example, in Orgel’s insistence that theater in the Renaissance was primarily a rhetorical discourse or again, more broadly, in a recent wave of books experimenting in what John Frow has called a “general rhetoric” at once social and literary.⁹⁵ New Historicism can proceed to a further stage of inquiry if a colloquy can be created between its Renaissance and Romantic participants, as well as its practitioners and theorists; and thus a sufficient parallax established to calibrate our most recent rediscovery of that old concept of literature to one side of Aristotelian mimesis: rhetorical action.

In short (reading through my proposed program of study in reverse): no understanding of text as action is possible without a theory; and no theory of the New Historicism is possible without a fully historical sense of the method. "Renaissance" New Historicism in itself is a dead end. So, too, would be a "Romantic" or "Modern" New Historicism. What is needed is a New Historicism that, like the process of history, finds itself crossing the periods so that it sees the "Renaissance" opening out in calibrated stops into Enlightenment, Romanticism, Symbolism, Modernism, Postmodernism or whatever other stops of the camera lens we denominate in our effort to see at once the object of our study and the shadow of the photographer.

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NOTES

This essay was presented in earlier versions in 1986 and 1987 at Northwestern University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I am grateful to my audiences on these occasions for more than normally searching discussion periods, and have incorporated some of this experience. Since the completion of this essay, several articles have appeared that reflect on the New Historicism and bear upon concerns I share, including Walter Cohen's "Political Criticism of Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987); Joseph Litvak's "Back to the Future: A Review-Article on the New Historicism, Deconstruction, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30 (1988): 120-49; Carolyn Porter's "Are We Being Historical Yet?," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (1988): 743-86; and Don E. Wayne's "Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text: Recent Criticism in England and the United States," in *Shakespeare Reproduced*. I regret that I have not been able to incorporate these works in more than passing mentions. All touch at some point upon formalist or deconstructive traits in the New Historicism. Litvak's well-informed study of the complex affiliation between the New Historicism and deconstruction is especially insightful in this regard.

¹ Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 11; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 85.

² Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 39. For examples of such paradigmatic or "anecdotal" openings, which since the time of Howard's essay have become a favorite stalking-horse for readers critical of the New Historicism, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), 11-12, 74, 193; "Invisible Bullets," in his *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 21 (see also the original opening to this essay as it appeared in *Glyph* 8 [1981]: 40-41); Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983), 1-2; Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 26, 60, 88,

116, 135; Patricia Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets," *Representations* 15 (Summer 1986): 57.

³ On the relation between Renaissance New Historicism and E. M. W. Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture: A Study of the Idea of Order in the Age of Shakespeare, Donne and Milton* (1943), see Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," 14, 18; Wayne, "Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text," 48. In general, Renaissance New Historicism has enjoyed knocking the Elizabethan World Picture off its hook. See for example, Louis Adrian Montrose, "The Purpose of Playing: Reflections on a Shakespearean Anthropology," *Helios*, n. s. 7, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 54; and "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, eds. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), 303-304. (The reference to "the now-tarnished 'world-picture' approach" in this essay was originally worded to specify the "Elizabethan world picture" in "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 [1986]: 6. With some variation, this latter, short essay is repackaged as the theoretical opening and close of the longer, more substantive "Elizabethan Subject" essay. I will in the main cite from the longer essay; but it will sometimes be useful to recover the wording and emphases of the shorter.) See also Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 6-8; "Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism," in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 5-6; Richard Helgerson, "Review Article," *Comparative Literature* 35 (1983): 362; and Thomas Cartelli, "Ideology and Subversion in the Shakespearean Set Speech," *ELH* 53 (1986): 1.

⁴ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 17-26.

⁵ To conserve space, I have excised what was originally an appendix to this essay documenting the critical vocabulary of the New Historicism. In the main, the method bears the imprint of a massive borrowing from New Criticism ("paradox," "irony," "ambiguity," "tension," "contradiction," "fusion"); from deconstruction ("play," "vertiginous," "deferral," "absence," "abyss," "mise en abyme"); from "dialectic" and its components ("antithesis," "affirmation"/"effacement," "submission"/"negation"); and from complementary terminologies in Foucault, Geertz, and Althusser. Most germane to my purposes in this essay is the influx of the formalist vocabularies (cf. Litvak; and Porter, 779-80).

For the influx of the New Critical idiom, see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 26, 30, 54, 57, 58, 63, 65, 72, 110-11, 152, 154, 192, 195, 254; "Invisible Bullets," in his *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 30, 35, 52, 62-63, 65; "King Lear and Harsnett's 'Devil-Fiction,'" *Genre* 15, nos. 1-2 (1982) (special issue on *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*, ed. Greenblatt): 241; "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion," *Representations* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1983): 11-13, 20-21; Montrose, "'Eliza, Queene of shepherdes,' and the Pastoral of Power," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 155, 159, 162, 166, 168, 169, 170, 171, 179, 180; "The Purpose of Playing," 57, 61, 64, 66, 71; "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 64-65, 74, 75, 82, 85; "Elizabethan Subject," 309, 322, 330, 332; Goldberg, *James I*, xi, xiii; Stephen Orgel, "Making Greatness Familiar," *Genre* 15 (1982): 44-45; "Prospero's Wife," *Representations* 8 (Fall 1984): 3, 8; Leonard Tennenhouse, "Strategies of State and Political Plays: A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*," in *Political Shakespeare*, 113, 118, 122, 125 (this essay has since been included in revised form in his *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* [New York: Methuen, 1986]); Helgerson, "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England," *Representations* 16 (Fall 1986): 51-52; Mullaney, 62, 63, 64, 69, 72, 74, 85-86. (See

also Mullaney's chapter on "Lying like Truth: Riddle Representation, and Treason" for a thematization of "amphibology" or "ambiguity" as the language of treason in the Renaissance.)

For borrowings from deconstruction, we can look first of all to the massive cooptation of "play," a concept mapped over culture, as I discuss below, through the paradigms of theatricality and the carnivalesque. See also such terms as "vertiginous," "deferral," "absence," "abyss," and "*mise en abyme*" in Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 25, 58, 220, 224; "Invisible Bullets," in his *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 63; Goldberg, "The Politics of Renaissance Literature: A Review Essay," *ELH* 49 (1982): 530. The latter, 530-31, discusses the relation between Greenblatt's approach and Derridean deconstruction. On the interface between New Historicism and deconstruction or intertextuality, see also Litvak; Cohen, 29, 32-34; Wayne, "Power, Politics, and the Shakespearean Text," 60-61.

The imprint of the New Criticism and deconstruction in particular (and to some degree also of dialectic) gives New Historical discourse what I here characterize as its obliqueness—its combined theme and air of paradox, contradiction, vertiginous regress, and dialectical reversal. Such obliqueness is magnified by the method's habit of *enacting* paradox, contradiction, etc., in a theory-speak that is self-consciously oxymoronic in effect (e.g., "pastoral power," "*otium* and *negotium*," "holiday and policy," "awesome intimacy," "sophisticated quaintness") and heavily predisposed to chiasmus or reversal of subject and object (e.g., "The Historicity of Texts and the Textuality of History," "The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms," "the power of virginity and the virginity of power," "creates the culture by which it is created, shapes the fantasies by which it is shaped, begets that by which it is begotten"; "The king who ruled by contradiction was also ruled by contradiction"; "if the traitor abuses words, he is also abused by them"). (For the above examples, see Montrose, "Eliza," 169, 172, 180; "Shaping Fantasies," 86; "Elizabethan Subject," 305; Greenblatt, ed. *Genre* 15, nos. 1-2 [1982] [titled *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*]; Goldberg, *James I*, xiii; Mullaney, 119.) At times, the result is a scholastic discourse as tightly self-knotted as Montrose at his best—e.g., in the opening sentence to his "Eliza," "Pastoral power might seem an oxymoronic notion, for pastoral literature is ostensibly a discourse of the powerless in dispraise of power" (153), or in such subsequent sentences in the essay as the following: "Pastorals that celebrate the ideal of content function to articulate—and thereby, perhaps, to assuage—discontent" (155); "The charisma of Queen Elizabeth was not compromised but rather was enhanced by royal pastoral's awesome intimacy, its sophisticated quaintness. Such pastorals were minor masterpieces of a poetics of power" (180).

⁶ Because of considerations of space, I have not been able to include the pictures that were meant to illustrate the following presentation of paradigms. It is to be hoped that a purely verbal summoning up of these pictures will adequately advert to the pictorial imagination so central to New Historical works. Following such precedents as Foucault's meditation upon *Las Meninas* at the opening of *The Order of Things*, the New Historicism characteristically looks to pictures for initiatory emblems of argument. Pictures function in the method as the quintessence of paradigmaticism. Their seeming concreteness and relative muteness (from the perspective of the verbal realm) emblemize the *otherness* of history that the obsessively textual imagination of the New Historicism seeks to interview. In pictures, the methodology of "discursive formations" glimpses its imago.

⁷ For illustrations of Inigo Jones's floorplan and scenery and for Orgel's discussion of *Florimène*, see his *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), 27-36; and "The Royal Theatre and the Role of King," in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, eds. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), 266-71.

⁸ *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 5.

⁹ Theater and the theatrical paradigm in the New Historicism is so pervasive that individual page references is not in most cases useful. My samples in the Renaissance field include: Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985); Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*," in *Political Shakespeare*, 72-87; Goldberg, *James I*; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; "Invisible Bullets"; "King Lear and Harsnett's 'Devil-Fiction'"; Introduction to *Genre 15* (1982): 3-6; Montrose, "'Eliza'"; "The Purpose of Playing"; Franco Moretti, "'A Huge Eclipse': Tragic Form and the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," *Genre 15* (1982): 7-40; Mullaney; Orgel, *Illusion of Power*; "Royal Theatre"; "Prospero's Wife," esp. 7; Tennenhouse, "Strategies of State and Political Plays." (See also other essays in *Political Shakespeare*; the essays in *Shakespeare Reproduced*; and Robert Weimann, "History and the Issue of Authority in Representation: The Elizabethan Theater and the Reformation," *New Literary History* 17 [1986]: 449-76.) Recent Romantic studies that draw upon the paradigm include: Julie Carlson, "An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform" *Modern Philology* 86 (1988): 22-33; Mary Jacobus, "That Great Stage Where Senators Perform": *Macbeth* and the Politics of Romantic Theater," *Studies in Romanticism* 22 (1983): 353-87; William Jewett, "'Action' in *The Borderers*," paper presented at the conference on "Wordsworth and the Borders of Romanticism," Yale University, November 14, 1987; Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989), esp. the chapters on "The Poetics of Violence" and "The Tragedy of the Family"; Reeve Parker, "Reading Wordsworth's Power: Narrative and Usurpation in *The Borderers*," *ELH* 54 (1987): 299-331; "In some sort seeing with my proper eyes': Wordsworth and the Spectacles of Paris," *Studies in Romanticism* 27 (1988): 369-90. Much of this body of work is influenced explicitly or implicitly by the new wave of French Revolution studies that "dramatize" history as part of their interpretation of the Revolution as symbolic display—most importantly: François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), esp. 46; Marie-Hélène Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution: The Staging of Marat's Death, 1793-1797*, trans. Robert Hurley (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), esp. 19-20, 34-38; George Armstrong Kelly, *Mortal Politics in Eighteenth-Century France* (Waterloo, Ontario: Univ. of Waterloo Press, 1986), esp. 304-7; Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), esp. 79-82. The recent alliance between literary study of the Romantics and historical study of the French Revolution may be usefully likened to the complicity of Renaissance New Historicism with such interpreters of Continental culture as Natalie Zemon Davis or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.

¹⁰ Orgel, *Illusion* and "Royal Theatre"; Huet (note 9), esp. 1-25, 47-69, on the symbolic relation between the theatrical justice that condemned the King and the judgmental theater that beatified the Friend of the People (Marat).

¹¹ In the past few years, "power" has been reified by critics of the New Historicism to such an extent that it perhaps now needs no documentation. For a particularly concise generalization of the concept, however, see Montrose: "My argument is that the symbolic mediation of social relationships was a central function of Elizabethan pastoral forms; and that social relationships are, intrinsically, relationships of power" (" 'Eliza,' " 153). In a footnote to this sentence, Montrose then points to Abner Cohen's definition of "power" in the latter's *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Societies* (1974; rpt. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), xi: "'Power' is taken to be an aspect of nearly all social relationships, and 'politics' to be referring to the processes in-

volved in the distribution, maintenance, exercise and struggle for power. . . . Power does not exist in a 'pure form' but is always inherent in social relationships." For a recent collection of essays centered upon the anthropology and cultural history of power, see Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics Since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

¹² Jurij Tynjanov: "Since a system is not an equal interaction of all elements but places a group of elements in the foreground—the 'dominant'—and thus involves the deformation of the remaining elements, a work enters into literature and takes on its own literary function through this dominant. Thus we correlate poems with the verse category, not with the prose category, not on the basis of all their characteristics, but only of some of them" ("On Literary Evolution," trans. C. A. Luplow, in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971], 72-73). Roman Jakobson: "the concept of the *dominant* . . . was one of the most crucial, elaborated, and productive concepts in Russian Formalist theory. The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" ("The Dominant," trans. Herbert Eagle, in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, 82). Tynjanov's and Jakobson's essays originally appeared in 1927 and 1935, respectively. Cf., Montrose's Marxist-based usage of "dominance": "I construe ideology not as a monolith but rather as a shifting complex of components, including what Raymond Williams calls 'interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance'; these include the residual and emergent, oppositional and alternative values, meanings, and practices which are always creating potential spaces from which the dominant can be contested, and against which it must be continuously redefined and redefended" ("Renaissance Literary Studies," 10-11; for the reapplication of the quote from Williams and the reworking of the thought in "The Elizabethan Subject," see the latter, 331, 339 n. 48). Montrose's "shifting complex of components," we can see, is mappable over the early structuralism of Tynjanov's evolving system; with the consequence that New Historicism can be seen to incorporate elements not only of Marxism and structural Marxism (Montrose in "Renaissance Literary Studies" immediately goes on to instance "relative autonomy") but—as I go on to argue—of a Formalism as pure as that which momentarily coexisted with Marxist thought after 1917.

¹³ Orgel, *Illusion*, 27-29, "Royal Theatre," 266; Huet, 2-4.

¹⁴ I adapt here Orgel's comments about Elizabeth I and James I in *Illusion*, 9, 16.

¹⁵ Orgel, *Illusion*, 10-16.

¹⁶ *Richard II*, ed. Kenneth Muir, rev. ed. (New York: Signet, 1963), 4.1.200. Anamorphosis is a concept precisely suited to *Richard II*. At one point, Bushy paints for Richard's Queen a trick "perspective picture" of her fears (in the specialized sense of the day) analogous to Holbein's *Ambassadors*:

For Sorrow's eye, glazèd with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives which, rightly gazed upon,
Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
Distinguish form. (2.2.16–20)

¹⁷ *Annual Register* for 1793: 220. For another allusion in the press linking Louis to the scene of the English Revolution, see the *London Times*, Jan. 25, 1793: 2.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Fumerton for this glimpse from her book-in-progress, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament*, as well as for sustained conversation on the New Historicism.

¹⁹ *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 147-48.

²⁰ *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 81-115. For a floorplan of Penshurst as well as a photo of the succession of arches, see 50, 91.

²¹ See my discussion of the Fra Angelico *Annunciation* in the Diocesan Museum, Cortona, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 72-74. My allusion to the Fra Angelico is prompted in part by Wayne's discussion of Penshurst's own symbolic garden.

²² Goldberg, *James I*, 30-54; Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 2-4; Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts"; Mullaney, 60-87 *passim*. Goldberg's discussion makes an especially suitable companion piece to Wayne's, since it recognizes in James's triumphal arches (a motif also imitated on title-pages of books) an invocation of classical authority akin to Penshurst's invocation of the baronial past. In Mullaney's book, the paradigm of the wonder cabinet is minor compared to his preoccupation with theatricality. I include it here because it provides a convenient link between the several modes of interiority—theatrical and architectural/inventorial—occupying the imagination of Renaissance studies. It is thus clear in Mullaney's work that theatricality is a paradigm that can be expanded or collapsed, seen through a telescope or microscope, at will. Thus his chapter on "The Rehearsal of Cultures" collates the theater of Shakespeare's *Henriad* between the landscape-size "mise-en-scène" at Rouen re-enacting Brazilian tribal life for the French king (the central episode in the chapter) and the inscape of curios that was the wonder cabinet. Whether sized to fit landscape or chamber, the curiosity shop in which the Renaissance accommodated otherness was a oneness that rehearsed *within* itself the supplement of otherness—a thesis that finds equivalent expression in Wayne's study of the baronial manor house embedded within Penshurst Place or Fumerton's of the foreign ambassadors that Elizabeth entertained in her private chamber.

One other qualification of my present use of Mullaney is in order: the wonder cabinet belongs here under my rubric of the Governing Line only insofar as it is cognate with the mock-Brazilian scene at Rouen as viewed by the French king. Imagining that act of viewing with the aid of a contemporary picture of the mock-scene, Mullaney, 67-68, conceives the King to look out from a stationary vantage point (precisely, we might say, as if upon a masque in which all the scene unfolds to the royal eye); and what the King sees in particular is the vignette of a Brazilian king and queen in their hammock, which Mullaney makes the "dominating" center of the picture. Thus is a perfect line of governance drawn between the French king and the vanishing point of otherness. However, from a different perspective the wonder cabinet could just as well be catalogued within my later category of the Disturbed Array or carnivalesque, in which the governing line turns into the disturbed array. Poking among the wonder cabinets of the time, Mullaney observes, "These are things on holiday, randomly juxtaposed and displaced from any proper context. . . . Taken together, they compose a heteroclite order without hierarchy or degree, an order in which kings mingle with clowns. . ." (62). (In the same way, Belsey's view of Felbrigg Hall images what is essentially a heteroclite architecture, which I have labeled a "split representation" in allusion to Claude Lévi-Strauss's thesis ["Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America," in his *Structural Anthropology*].) What Mullaney's essay points out, in sum, is that the House-that-Jack-built in which I am presently locking all the paradigms of the New Historicism is also inevitably a wonder cabinet—a dissolve-structure from which beasts and curios are always escaping.

²³ "'Secret' Arts" (cited in note 2), 57-71.

²⁴ Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). Bender reproduces section- and elevation-plans for the Panopticon prison based on Bentham's

proposal on 25, 209; see 23 for a succinct sketch of Bender's application of the paradigm: "[Bentham] suspended inmates in a transparent medium dominated by a hidden omniscient authority. Bentham fused narratively structured reformative confinement with the principle of supervision. . . ." Also relevant to the paradigm of the Panopticon, of course, is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979); and Gertrude Himmelfarb's "The Haunted House of Jeremy Bentham," in Richard Herr and Harold T. Parker, eds., *Ideas in History: Essays Presented to Louis Gottschalk by His Former Students* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1965). See Himmelfarb, 212, on the visitor's gallery in the projected Panopticon prison, which Bentham added to his proposal in his postscript upon finding that the plan-drawings had inadvertently left a large space in the chapel unused (see also Bender, 202, on Bentham's intention to display prisoners theatrically before visitors in the chapel).

²⁵ *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (cited in note 9), esp. 61-65, 80-84, 88-90. Wordsworth's passage on the Falls occurs in *An Evening Walk*, 1793 version, 11. 53-84 (*An Evening Walk*, ed. James Averill, The Cornell Wordsworth [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984]).

²⁶ On royal progresses and entry pageants see Montrose, "'Eliza,'" 168-80; and Mark Breitenberg, "'... the hole matter opened': Iconic Representation and Interpretation in 'The Queen's Majesties Passage,'" *Criticism* 28 (1986): 1-25.

²⁷ For sources and fuller discussion relevant to this and the next paragraph, see my *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 61-137.

²⁸ Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1986), 17; Ozouf (cited in note 9), 46. Ozouf's work was originally published in French in 1976. For contemporary pictures of the Champ-de-Mars during the fete, see the citations in my *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 16, 517 n. 16.

²⁹ On pigs and authorship, see Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 27-79; on butchers and fishmongers, see Bristol (cited in note 9), 72-87. Stallybrass and White carry their study of carnivalesque, the grotesque body, and dirt from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century.

³⁰ Haynes, "Festivity and the Dramatic Economy of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," *ELH* 51 (1984): 645-68; Helgerson, "Inventing Noplace, or the Power of Negative Thinking," *Genre* 15 (1982): 112-16; Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986), esp. 17-71; Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986). For a theoretical discussion of the carnivalesque and current critical and philosophical developments, see Robert R. Wilson, "Play, Transgression and Carnival: Bakhtin and Derrida on *Scriptor Ludens*," *Mosaic* 19 (1986): 73-89.

³¹ Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 93-94. See also the discussions of Wordsworth and fete in Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, esp. 15-18, 163, 165-66; and David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 53.

³² Castle, esp. 1-109.

³³ An event sometimes called *la journée des brouettes*. See Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 16; Ozouf, 45-47.

³⁴ Montrose, "Gifts and Reasons: The Contexts of Peele's *Araygnement of Paris*," *ELH* 47 (1980): 433-61; Fumerton, "Exchanging Gifts: The Elizabethan Currency of Children and Poetry," *ELH* 53 (1986): 241-78; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 180-94; "Invisible Bullets"; (see also his "Murdering Peasants" [cited in note 5], which addresses the analogous suppression of peasants); Helgerson,

"The Land Speaks" (cited in note 5); Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Levinson, esp. the chapter on "Spiritual Economics: A Reading of 'Michael'"; Simpson; Eilenberg, "'Michael,' 'Christabel,' and the Poetry of Possession," *Criticism* 30 (1988): 205-24 and "Wordsworth's 'Michael': The Poetry of Property," *Essays in Literature* 15 (1988): 13-25. My own chapter on "The Economy of Lyric: *The Ruined Cottage*" in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* and the two sessions of the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association on "The Value of Romanticism" at the Modern Language Association Convention, Dec. 28, 1987, may also be cited as part of the recent turn of Romantic studies to issues of property, money, credit, and other species of Romantic speculation (together with its inverse, the discourse of poverty). Recent dissertations concerned with economic issues promise to continue the trend. See, for example, Gary Harrison, "Wordsworth and the Itinerant Poor: The Discourse on Poverty," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1987; and Mark Schoenfield's chapter on "An IncurSION into a Theory of Property: Wordsworth's *Excursion*" from his thesis in progress.

³⁵ For the consistent dependence of the New Historicism on an often ideal, abstract, or merely shorthand concept of "dialectic" and its elements (e.g., "antithesis," "reversal or cancellation," "affirmation"/"effacement," "submission"/"negation") see for example: Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 9, 36, 77, 110, 156; "Invisible Bullets," in his *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 41; "Murdering Peasants," 12; Montrose, "'Eliza,'" 168, 171; "The Purpose of Playing," 53, 68, 70; "Gifts and Reasons," 448, 453; "'Shaping Fantasies,'" 61-62, 65-66, 86 (see also Goldberg on Montrose's work in "Politics," 525-26); Orgel, "Prospero's Wife," 1; Mullaney, 69, 79, 123, 125-26; Helgerson, "The Land Speaks," 64, 75, 77; Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love Is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49 (1982): 422; Bristol, 124-39. Cf., such full-scale inquiries into dialectic and Renaissance literature as Michael McCauley, *Dialectical Criticism and Renaissance Literature* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975) and Susan Wells, *The Dialectics of Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985).

³⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1970), xv. For an uncanny analogue of this laugh (and its Bakhtinian version) in the New Historicism, see Greenblatt's meditation on "strange laughter—not belly laughter, not even the laughter that accompanies a sudden release from menace, but a taut, cruel laughter that is at once perfectly calculated and, as in a nightmare, out of control" ("Murdering Peasants," 15; see also 17-18).

³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984); *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), esp. "Discourse in the Novel," 259-422. For Bakhtin on laughter, see esp. *Rabelais*, Introduction and Chapter 1.

³⁸ I conflate here the harem or bathhouse scene in which the descent of the valkyries turns into a circus (as so often in Fellini) and the final scene in which the hero joins the ring of characters from his life. Fellini's emphasis on carnival coupled with theatricality, together with his concern with autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical subjectivity, makes his work an excellent analogue to the New Historicism's vision of exaggerated play.

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 270-72.

⁴⁰ E. H. Gombrich: "It was Wölfflin who gave art history the fateful tool of systematic comparison; it was he who introduced into our lecture rooms a need for two lanterns and two screens, for the purpose of sharpening the eye to the stylistic differences between two comparable works of art. . . . It is a pedagogical device that has helped many teachers to explain to their students certain elementary differences, but unless it is used with care it subtly but decisively falsifies the relationship between the two works" (*Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* [London: Phaidon, 1966], 90).

⁴¹ On the link between Wölfflin and Russian Formalism, see Boris Eichenbaum, "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), 104; Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine*, 3d ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 59-60, 274.

⁴² I refer to Wölfflin's concept of "die typischen Motive" or "Hauptmotive" (*Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, 5th ed. [Munich: Hugo Bruckmann, 1921]). For the Russian Formalist usage of "motive" and "motif," see Eichenbaum, 119-22; Victor Shklovsky, "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style," referred to in Eichenbaum, 118-19; "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, 25-57, esp. 40; and Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, 61-95, esp. 78-87. See also Vladimir Propp's related usage of "move" in chap. 9 of *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. by Louis A. Wagner (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968), 92-117. Tomashevsky's explanation of "motive" is especially useful: "The system of motifs comprising the theme of a given work must show some kind of artistic unity. If the individual motifs, or a complex of motifs, are not sufficiently suited to the work, if the reader feels that the relationship between certain complexes of motifs and the work itself is obscure, then that complex is said to be superfluous. If all the parts of the work are badly suited to one another, the work is *incoherent*. That is why the introduction of each separate motif or complex of motifs must be *motivated*. The network of devices justifying the introduction of individual motifs or of groups of motifs is called *motivation*" ("Thematics," 78). In the light of my following discussion of motive, subject, and hero, Tomashevsky's comments on the narrative hero are also suggestive: "The usual device for grouping and stringing together motifs is the creation of a character who is the living embodiment of a given collection of motifs" ("Thematics," 87-88). (There is an intriguing resonance between my discussion here and Litvak's essay. He titles one of his sections on the New Historicism in its relation to deconstruction, "Motivating the Arbitrary.")

⁴³ Renaissance studies not previously cited: Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, 210-24; Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983). See also Timothy J. Reiss, "Montaigne and the Subject of Polity," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, 115-49; and Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts." Related inquiries include Helgerson's study of the "identity" of the British "land" in "The Land Speaks" and the current widespread interest in Renaissance "authorship" and "authority" (e.g., Stallybrass and White; Bristol, 111-24; Montrose, "Elizabethan Subject," 318-32; Goldberg, *James I*, 17-27; Haynes, 662-63). Helgerson in "The Land Speaks" relates authorship and authority in his formulation of "the twin emergence" of "the author and the land, of the self and the nation" (67; see also 64-65). As regards Romantic studies, subjectivity is the *donnée* of the field. The whole domain may be said to pivot around the imaginative "self," which faces in one way toward the transcendental but in the other—as historicizing Romanticists increasingly point out—toward the material. Thus, for example, Simpson's *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination* (cited in note 31) places the poet's unstable subjectivity within the field of contemporary historical instabilities.

⁴⁴ I allude particularly to Foucault's inquisition of "man" in the chapters on "Man and His Doubles" and "The Human Sciences" at the end of *The Order of Things*. The modern anthropological and psychoanalytic inquisitions of the subject, of course, are very relevant as well.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*, ed. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 89.

⁴⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946; rpt. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 282-302. On historical understanding as costume drama, cf., Belsey, 2.

⁴⁷ See the following Renaissance scholars for discussion or application of the subversion/containment dilemma (with such associated ambivalences as “oblique resistance,” “ironic dissent,” “domination/submission,” “domination/subordination,” “domination/dependency,” “opposition/submission,” “content/dissent,” “consolidation/resistance,” “containment/expression,” “adoration/contestation,” “legitimacy/challenge,” “enablement/constraint”): Cartelli (cited in note 3), esp. 1-4, 21-22; Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, 109-19 and *passim*; “Introduction,” 7-15; “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*”; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 61, 63, 71, 120, 203, 214, 254; “Invisible Bullets”; “Murdering Peasants,” 9, 11, 13; Helgerson, “The Land Speaks”; Marcus, 6-9; Montrose, “‘Eliza,’” 155, 177; “‘Shaping Fantasies,’” 64-65, 74; “Elizabethan Subject,” 309-10, 322-23, 330-31; Tennenhouse, “Strategies of State and Political Plays,” esp. 111-12, 125. See also the discussion of the subversion/containment problem in Goldberg, “Politics,” 528-29; and Howard, “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” 29-30, 34-37, 39-40. For a discussion of the older debate on whether the Romantics were actors of “romantic revolt” or arch-conservatism, see Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), 24-48. A recent extension of the Renaissance subversion/containment debate into the Romantics field may be found in my “Wordsworth and Subversion, 1793-1804: Trying Cultural Criticism,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 (Spring 1989): 55-100. (A slightly fuller bibliography of subversion may be found in the latter, 89-90 n. 2.)

⁴⁸ I discuss Greenblatt’s essay further at the close of this essay. Particularly relevant to my discussion here is the way the essay implicates the undecidability of the subversion/containment problem in the general undecidability of hermeneutics, of modern interpreters reading the past.

⁴⁹ Marcus, 6, defines the “escape valve” theory of festival as “the view that holiday inversions of hierarchy are essentially normative and help to perpetuate a preexisting system by easing, at regular, predictable intervals, tensions that might otherwise build to a full-scale challenge of the system” (see also her note to this sentence). For other references to the “escape-” or “safety-valve” theory of containment/subversion, see Bristol, 27; Stallybrass and White, 13-14. On the “material bodily lower stratum,” see Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 368-436.

⁵⁰ I think here especially of Lévi-Strauss’s speculations on the static quality or reversibility of mythic thought and its relation to time and history in *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), 230-44, 263-69; *Structural Anthropology*, 209-212; and *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), 137-38.

⁵¹ Nigel Smith, “Critical Opinion: The Rest is Silence,” *Essays in Criticism* 37 (1987): 275.

⁵² I summarize and adapt here part of my argument in “Wordsworth and Subversion” (cited in note 47), esp. 62.

⁵³ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” in his *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971).

⁵⁴ Cf., Montrose’s excellent “Elizabethan Subject,” which explores the flexibility of this core sentence of subjection by showing that it may also be read in reverse.

⁵⁵ I draw here upon Hayden White’s distinction between historical annals and higher-order narratives of history (“The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987], 1-25). In the date- and event-lists of annals, White observes, there is no “notion of a social center” allowing the annalist to organize events along a narrative line (11). White then meditates upon a passage from Hegel to formulate the distinguishing feature of annals: lack of a

“rule of law” and therefore of a legitimized “subject” capable of having a narrative line of events (12-13). In essence, we may say, the New Historicism to date has been a method preoccupied almost exclusively with the status not of annals imagination but of its narrative legitimation: variously legitimate or illegitimate subjects who may only be recognized/discovered in story form. One way to approach the problem of New Historicist “paradigms” might thus be to recognize that they are first and foremost highly sophisticated exercises in storytelling. Indeed, it often seems that the most successful new Historicist works are those that form a sustained sequence of tales akin to an updated hagiography. Whatever else it is, for example, Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* is a moving tale of the passion and blindness of intellect in its fatal dance with authority. Each chapter is a critical biography that could be titled “More,” “Tyndale,” and so on. By corollary (though I can here attest only my own experience), the most difficult and rigorously worked sections of a New Historicist study are those that may seem most naive and transparent: the narratives of “events” or “facts.” The difficulty lies not in practicing the art of narrative in itself, for which our available schema are many, but in contouring the narrative so that it contains as an entelechy the development of the proper thematic “subject”: an interpretive line of argument formed as a second-order or meta-narrative. The implication of this corollary is that any radical recovery of an annals-imagination innocent of the processes of narrative legitimation must contest the dictates of our critical form itself. Criticism is that which converts annals (or any mere chronology of life- or textual-events) into what might be called mediated annals (collections or structurations of “themes,” “motifs,” “images,” “figures” already big with argument) before using the mediation to create its thesis-narratives of beginning-middle-end (e.g., the end of Neoclassicism and the growth of Romanticism). For a discussion of narrative versus non-narrative critical forms, see Jerome McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 132-51.

⁵⁶ Rimbaud: *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. and ed. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), 251.

⁵⁷ Enroute to his definition of art as defamiliarization, Shklovsky begins by setting aside Alexander Potebnya’s influential thesis that art is “thinking in images” designed to economize “mental effort” (“Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, 5-13). Particularly apropos in our current context is Shklovsky’s placement of Potebnyaism in literary history: “Potebnya’s conclusion, which can be formulated ‘poetry equals imagery,’ gave rise to the whole theory that ‘imagery equals symbolism’ . . .” (“Art as Technique,” 8). On Potebnyaism, Russian Symbolism, and the origins of Russian Formalism, see also Eichenbaum, 105-106, 111-15; Erlich, 23-26, 33-69.

⁵⁸ A useful line of inquiry would be to compare what Shklovsky (“Art as Technique,” 12) calls the “difficult” “feeling” of art at the moment of defamiliarization (especially when “we can define poetry as *attenuated, tortuous* speech,” 23) with the agony of Aristotelian discovery and reversal. In Russian Formalist poetics, defamiliarization is also a discovery and reversal in the order of the known, but the attendant pain of agon seems somehow anaesthetized or shunted aside (e.g., into the erotics and suppressed violence of the dirty folk story that then preoccupies Shklovsky in “Art as Technique”).

⁵⁹ As I clarify below, I use the period-term “Romantic” here semi-elastically to designate both the age of the French Revolution and the immediately subsequent revolutionary period that saw the advent of high historicism on the Continent—especially in French and German historiography, legal theory, and philology. By broadening the chronology of Romanticism in this way, we can include not only the two generations of literary Romantics but also an analogous span of generations in historiography (thus not only Herder, for example, but also Ranke).

⁶⁰ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1947), 153-54.

⁶¹ For a fuller discussion of the relation between the abyss of deconstructive vision and cultural history, see my "Wordsworth and Subversion," 63-66. The concept of deep play, of course, alludes to Clifford Geertz.

⁶² There is an intriguing resonance between my characterization of the New Historicism as "embarrassed" of historicist spirit and Litvak's sustained description of it as "anxious" over deconstructive undecidability. The razor-edge on which the New Historicism balances between embarrassment at too-determinative Spirit (and/or the People) and anxiety over too-indeterminate textuality is the space of an acute fastidiousness. Fearing total commitment to either contextual or textual understanding, it pauses nervously in between. Seen in this light, the relative shallowness of New Historicist theorizations to date (which I advert to below) is a sign perhaps of too much self-consciousness on the part of practitioners who fear that theorization will expose nakedly the method's affiliations to established methods of contextual or textual study that have not been so squeamish in promulgating doctrine. As I go on to argue, however, anxious/embarrassed self-consciousness is also a potential resource of strength in the New Historicism.

⁶³ I draw here upon Louis O. Mink, "Changes and Causality in the History of Ideas," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 2 (1968): 7-25.

⁶⁴ See John L. Stewart, *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians—The Nashville Groups of the 1920s and 1930s, and the Writing of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), 107-71 and *passim*. In general, Stewart is highly informative about the early milieu of New Criticism.

⁶⁵ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), 8-9, 228-53. The statement on unit-ideas I cite was first published in 1938; "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" first appeared in 1924.

⁶⁶ George Boas, *The History of Ideas: An Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1969), 22-23.

⁶⁷ Relevant here is Gerald Graff's history of the "field-coverage" principle in the academy in his *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁶⁸ On the formative but now invisible influence of Hirsch, see Stewart, esp. 3-35.

⁶⁹ The constatory origins of the New Criticism may also be confirmed by attending to the history of its institution as a pedagogy. In a local-history version of Graff's *Professing Literature*, I recently had occasion to compile a history of introductory English courses at Yale University ("Toward a Theory of the Prerequisite: Curing the Canon at Yale," paper presented at California Institute of Technology, May 12, 1988). What came to light in interviewing emeritus Yale faculty and reading back through the century in the University's course descriptions was the intense controversy surrounding the introduction of the "too analytical, theoretical, intellectual" approach of the New Criticism (Chauncey Brewster Tinker, as paraphrased by Richard Sewall). It was only after heated debate in the department that a group of junior faculty at Yale, fascinated by Brooks and Warren's new anthology *Understanding Poetry*, won the sanction in academic year 1940-41 to reorient Yale's Freshman English course wholly around the "poem itself" and such leading concepts as "irony" and "ambiguity." Eventually, the premises of this very early precedent of the New Critical seminar determined what became (and continues to be) the archetypal New Critical course at Yale: Major English Poets.

⁷⁰ Robert Penn Warren, "A Conversation with Cleanth Brooks," in *The Possibilities of Order: Cleanth Brooks and His Work*, ed. Lewis P. Simpson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976), 1-124.

⁷¹ The one term in my series that may not seem to belong is *longue durée*. However, see the attempts Ferdinand Braudel makes to link his concept with “structure” in *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), 31.

⁷² See note 5 above.

⁷³ In his *The Order of Things*, 17-45.

⁷⁴ See note 5.

⁷⁵ Foucault, 23.

⁷⁶ See, for example, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 130.

⁷⁷ Relevant here is the reaction to a suggestion I made in the discussion period after the conference on “Romanticism, Politics, and the New Historicism” at the University of California, Los Angeles, November 1986. Thinking of the locale of some of the major practitioners of the New Historicism and of the journal *Representations*, I remarked what had seemed to me a commonplace (at least on the East coast): that campus events of the early 70s especially in California had much to do with the advent of the New Historicism. The collective resistance of the audience to any such attempt to “localize” the New Historicism was memorable.

⁷⁸ “Elizabethan Subject,” 332.

⁷⁹ “Renaissance Literary Studies,” 11.

⁸⁰ “Elizabethan Subject,” 332-33.

⁸¹ *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 36.

⁸² *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 39. This important passage has been slightly revised since earlier appearances of “Invisible Bullets.”

⁸³ Cf., Meaghan Morris: “In the end, the aim of analysis [in cultural and popular studies] becomes to generate [‘negotiated,’ ‘resistant,’ and ‘oppositional’ readings], thus repeatedly proving it possible to do so. Since there is little point in regenerating a ‘dominant’ reading of a text (the features of which are usually presupposed by the social theory which frames the reading in the first place), the figure of a misguided but on-side Other is necessary to justify the exercise and guarantee the ‘difference’ of the reading” (“Banality in Cultural Studies,” *Discourse* 10.2 [Spring-Summer 1988]), 21. My thanks to Lindsay Waters for bringing Morris’s essay to my attention.

⁸⁴ “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” 15, 17

⁸⁵ *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁸⁶ Howard, “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” 43.

⁸⁷ See Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), esp. Hunt’s “Introduction: History, Culture, and Text.”

⁸⁸ Wesley Morris, *Toward a New Historicism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). Montrose in “Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History,” 6n, notes that Greenblatt introduced the term “New Historicism” in his Introduction to *Genre* 15 (1982).

⁸⁹ Donald R. Kelley presents a particularly intriguing history of the interdisciplinary development of historicism in his *Historians and the Law in Postrevolutionary France* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984). See 3, 13, 18, 20-21 on the old “new history.”

⁹⁰ Cited in note 46.

⁹¹ “The Elizabethan Subject,” 305.

⁹² Cf., Porter on “colonialist formalism,” 779-80: “To be sure, from the vantage point of a traditional formalist criticism, to appeal to extraliterary discourses . . . is by definition to attend to the ‘marginal’ realm of the nonliterary in a new and important way. . . . But the anecdotalization of the discursive fields now opened for interpretation works only to expand the range of the very formalism from which new historicists manifestly wish to escape.”

I owe the word “imperialism” here to Montrose, who after presenting a version of his “The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text” at Yale Univ. in 1986 began answering a question I put (quoting from memory: “does the New Historicism diminish formalism, or does it amplify it—to the scale of the world?”) by remarking that he detected a preoccupation with disciplinary imperialism in the question. Antithetical to my point about the implicit formalism of the New Historicism is Edward Pechter’s thesis in “The New Historicism and Its Discontents: Politicizing Renaissance Drama” (*PMLA* 102 [1987]: 292-303) that the method is primarily a Marxist mode of historical determinism. As he puts it at one point, “An absolute parity of literary and social texts is a will-o’-the-wisp. More important, even if parity were possible, it is not what the New Historicists really want. Their whole endeavor is to situate the literary text in social history and thus to see it in a determined or secondary position” (295). Any such attempt to label the New Historicism primarily determinist or materialist, it seems to me, is wholly wrong. So, too, the claim that the method is essentially or primarily Marxist is far from secure. (Cf., Porter on Pechter.) Many associated with the New Historicism do draw extensively from Marxist criticism whether or not their own stance is recognizably “Marxist.” Not to do so would be to ignore the most sustained body of work on the link between history and form in this century. However, there is no settled consensus between historicist critics who are more or less deconstruction-oriented, those who locate “materialism” primarily in acts of language, and those committed to a more classically firm materialist base (see Levinson, cited in note 31, 1-13, for a provocative effort to discern a “deconstructive materialism”)—a lack of consensus that will need future exploration if the current, curious alliance between American-style New Historicism and British-style “cultural materialism” is to be understood. In any case, the massive investment of Marxist criticism in formal and/or structural study (both in its traditional inquiries into the genre of the “novel” and in newer approaches to genre, style, and language) cuts the ground out from under any too-simple effort to single out “Marxism” as the absolute mark of difference between mainstream literary formalisms and historicism.

To extend the context of debate: it now appears that the Resistance to History (to vary upon de Man) has initiated its counterattack against the New Historicism on the basis of a massive misreading. I cite here M. H. Abrams’s recent “On Reading Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*” (paper presented at the conference on “Wordsworth and the Borders of Romanticism,” Yale Univ., Nov. 14, 1987), which mounts a full-scale attack on the New Historicism in the Romantics field on the assumption that the method is necessarily determinist in the “necessary” link it makes between history and literature. Or again, there is J. Hillis Miller’s attempt to negate historicism and materialism through *aufhebung* by assimilating both within deconstruction in fantastically sequestered form, almost as if within a confessional box of the reading self void of any other. In a statement contributing to his sustained undertone throughout the essay—a haunting tone of embattled isolation solaced by meditative loneliness—Miller argues that true devotion to materiality is observance of “the words on the page in the unique, unrepeatable time of an actual act of reading,” in the “one time only” that is the “here and now of the man or woman with the book in hand” (“Presidential Address 1986: The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of the Material Base,” *PMLA* 102 [1987]: 281-91, esp. 288). What such attacks show is too little reading in the New Historicism. Perhaps my own voice grows counter-polemical here in engaging with more dedicated acts of polemic, but it can nevertheless be stated that such early missives in the Resistance to History are fighting old spectres. By and large, they target a fictional Determinism and Materialism and so miss the point that the New Historicism was nurtured precisely by both the old historicism (*pace* Abrams) and the new formalism (*pace* Miller).

⁹³ Litvak's essay provides the best reading to date of New Historicism in the light of de Man. Particularly apropos here is his speculation, based on a passage in de Man, that "critics who widen their scope to include the fictiveness of all discourse are merely engaged in a mystified allegorizing of linguistic structures: 'history' would be nothing but an immense catachresis, an illusion produced by the unwitting projection of narrative figures onto the absent ground of reality" (124).

⁹⁴ In alluding to Sidney together with classical rhetoric in this essay, I am influenced by Margaret W. Ferguson's study of the rhetorical structure of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (*Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983], 137-62). In essence, my essay is an Apology or apologetics for the New Historicism complete with incorporated criticisms.

⁹⁵ Orgel, *Illusion of Power*, pp. 5, 17 ff; Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), esp. 234-35. See my "Wordsworth and Subversion (cited in note 47), 66 for a short bibliography and discussion of what might be called a "new rhetorical historicism" now making its advent.