THE HERMENEUTICS OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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ABSTRACT

Here we seek to develop a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, understood both as a theory of interdisciplinary experience and pedagogy for its cultivation and practice. This project, however, is neither simply a hermeneutic interpretation of interdisciplinarity nor an application of hermeneutics to the problem of interdisciplinary theory. It is rather a formulation of interdisciplinary theory that proceeds from a hermeneutic recognition of the problem interdisciplinary would overcome, namely, the alienation of modern consciousness, as well as the character of the experience interdisciplinary would cultivate. At least two aspects of interdisciplinary practice bring its hermeneutic character to light, namely, its emphasis upon application and dialogue, and practical orientation toward the problem, as well as its proximity to the non-disciplinary or liberal study of the humanities.¹ Understood in terms of a theory of hermeneutic experience, it is clear that these characteristic emphases are not simply techniques for making knowledge relevant or applicable, but are the embodiment of a distinctly hermeneutic ontology of understanding. Similarly, interdisciplinary’s emergence alongside the liberal study of

the humanities is not historical happenstance, but points to its intuitive appreciation for
the distinct experience such practice of the humanities cultivates.

Recognition of the distinctly hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience
is essential to developing a coherent interdisciplinary theory. Moreover, the radical
character of interdisciplinary practice only fully comes to light, and the liberal study of
the humanities’ potential as an interdisciplinary pedagogy is only fully realized, within a
hermeneutic theory of interdisciplinary experience. We suggest the neologism interity as
a means of capturing the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience, and will
thus speak of realizing the interity of interdisciplinarity in each of the three areas
mentioned above. Because the theory of hermeneutic experience Hans-Georg Gadamer
discloses in the second part of *Truth and Method* is the philosophical articulation of
precisely the kind of experience interdisciplinarity seeks to cultivate, his work will prove
central in each aspect of this threefold task. The creative appropriation of hermeneutics
in the work of Paul Ricoeur will also prove fruitful to this study both by identifying the
alienation of modern consciousness and illustrating the practical significance of a
hermeneutic pedagogy of interdisciplinarity.

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DEDICATION

For Taryn (and Aubrey, Caedmon, Naomi, and Eleanor)
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ABBREVIATIONS

SSRC  Social Science Research Center
SOE   The Symbolism of Evil
TM    Truth and Method
WM    Wahrheit und Methode
INTRODUCTION

At first glance, there is little to suggest a connection between hermeneutics and interdisciplinarity. Hermeneutic philosophy has recently begun to engage with educational discourse, though not yet with interdisciplinary theory. While interdisciplinary theory is thoroughly engaged in philosophical discourse—particularly with postmodern thought—it has yet to engage philosophical hermeneutics. The lack of critical interaction notwithstanding, there is at least a historical connection between the two concepts that bears reflection. Both interdisciplinarity and hermeneutics come to expression in the turbulent intellectual milieu between the world wars. The term interdisciplinary was coined in the meeting rooms of the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) in New York City sometime in the mid-1920s. While the term hermeneutics enjoys a much longer legacy, spanning some 2,500 years, it was first employed in its specific philosophical sense in Martin Heidegger’s Freiburg lectures during the summer of 1923. The co-origination within this revolutionary cultural and intellectual context seems, in fact, to suggest further lines of connection.

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2 There is, perhaps, one exception: Kenneth A. Reynhout’s “The Hermeneutics of Transdisciplinarity: A Gadamerian Model of Transversal Reasoning,” in *Metanexus* (September 1, 2011). The scope of the article, however, is more narrowly concerned with the fruitfulness of Gadamer’s hermeneutics for interdisciplinary research in science and religion. Reynhout’s insight concerning the foundational importance of Gadamer’s notion of fusion of horizons for interdisciplinarity is developed at length in this essay.

3 Roberta Frank, “‘Interdisciplinary’: The First Half Century” in *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* (1988 Vol.6 pp.139-151), 139ff. Frank writes: “Professor Robert Sessions Woodworth (1869-1962), the distinguished Columbia University psychologist and the first person I have caught using "interdisciplinary" in public, neither apologizes nor treats the word as a neologism. On Monday evening, August 30, 1926, in Hanover, New Hampshire, where members of SSRC had gathered to escape the heat of
Modern science and the positivism of the nineteenth century would remain prominent through mid-century and beyond, but following the first World War movement toward something beyond enlightened modernity picked up in earnest. Hermeneutics and interdisciplinarity are part of this larger movement. Admittedly, the respective projects of Heidegger and the SSRC are quite different in scope and orientation—whereas the SSRC sought dialogue and collaboration across intellectual boundaries and the application of knowledge to particular social problems,\(^5\) Heidegger sought to re-engage the task of thinking after the eclipse of philosophy (via metaphysics and science) by the technological. Nevertheless, they converge upon the goal of transcending certain limitations in modernity. As interdisciplinarity takes shape in the intellectual life of the university of the later twentieth century, and as Heidegger’s initial insights are fully developed in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, it becomes clear that each is seeking in different ways to overcome the alienation implicit in modern consciousness. Or, so this thesis shall argue.

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\(^4\) The lectures have recently been published under the title: *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

\(^5\) From “Who We Are,” Social Science Research Center, http://www.ssrc.org/about/who-we-are/ (accessed March 23, 2016): “The SSRC is an international, *interdisciplinary* network of networks dedicated to galvanizing knowledge and mobilizing it for the public good… The Council is unique in scope and structure. It convenes scholars, practitioners, and policymakers while standing alongside the academy and public affairs. By supporting individual scholars, enhancing the capacity of institutions, generating new research, and linking researchers with policymakers and citizens, the SSRC plays a vital role in efforts to build a more just and democratic world.

The SSRC was founded in 1923 by visionaries in the fledgling fields of anthropology, economics, history, political science, psychology, sociology, and statistics. The organization was *shaped by the need to cross the boundaries that separated these disciplines* from each other, university scholarship from public affairs, and the social sciences from the humanities and the natural sciences” (Italics mine).
Here we seek to develop a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, understood as a theory of interdisciplinary experience and pedagogy for its cultivation and practice. This project, however, is neither simply nor even essentially an application of hermeneutics to the problem of interdisciplinary theory. Rather, recognizing the fundamentally hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience, it seeks to develop a theory of interdisciplinarity accordingly. The hermeneutic character of interdisciplinarity comes most clearly into focus in two aspects of interdisciplinary practice: its characteristic emphases of application, dialogue, and the centrality of the problem, and the non-disciplinary or liberal study of the humanities. Understood hermeneutically, it is clear that these characteristic emphases are not simply techniques for disciplines to apply, but practices embodying a distinct ontology of understanding. Neither is interdisciplinarity’s flourishing among the liberal study of the humanities a matter of historical happenstance, much less evidence of naïve romanticism. It derives from an intuitive appreciation for the distinct experience of understanding such practice cultivates.

Recognition of the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience is essential for developing a coherent interdisciplinary theory and for understanding the significance of interdisciplinary practice. Indeed, the radical character of

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7 Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” in *Conflicts of Interpretation*, (ed. Don Ihde trans. Peter McCormick. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 19. Ricoeur employs this term to refer to the ontic dimensions of understanding, rather than the term epistemology, which refers specifically to a theoretical account of knowledge. The meaning of this substitution is subtle but important to the present thesis. While modernity seems to have subsumed the problem of knowledge wholly within epistemological frames, hermeneutics challenges the ontological presuppositions underlying epistemology, transcendental subjectivity in particular.
interdisciplinary practice only fully comes to light, and the liberal study of the humanities’ potential as an interdisciplinary pedagogy is only fully realized, when this interdisciplinary experience is interpreted via hermeneutics. Nevertheless, hermeneutics is uniquely equipped to identify the relevant issue at stake in the contemporary problem of interdisciplinary theory and to develop a strategy to address it appropriately. In fact, a careful consideration of the problem of interdisciplinary theory demonstrates the relevance of hermeneutics.

The Problem of Interdisciplinary Theory

Interdisciplinarity made its way from the margins to the middle of academic life in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Now seemingly ubiquitous, it is difficult to find an institute, think-tank, or scholarly journal that does not employ the modifier “interdisciplinary” when describing itself. “Interdisciplinarity is everywhere,” writes critic Jerry A. Jacobs, “neuroscience, nanotechnology, bioengineering, behavioral economics, and the digital humanities, not to mention various racial, ethnic, and gender studies programs…The cumulative power of these examples can easily lead an observer to the conclusion that the era of the interdisciplinary university is upon us.”

The problem, at least from the disciplinary perspective of the modern academy, is that interdisciplinarity is largely—perhaps fundamentally—without theoretical justification. For despite its privileged status in academic rhetoric, the term interdisciplinary theory

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9 Klein, Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity, 3. Klein makes this point ironically: “At a time when the phrase ‘increasingly interdisciplinary’ has become commonplace, studies of interdisciplinary formations take on heightened importance.”
denotes little more than a plurality of differing approaches and perspectives.  

Indeed, interdisciplinarity is most often conceived as a technique or method for addressing complex, multifaceted problems, while university interdisciplinary studies programs attempt to secure interdisciplinarity a place at the table, as it were, by formulating interdisciplinarity according to the familiar departmental structure of the disciplinary academy. There is, therefore, neither a generally accepted philosophy of interdisciplinarity nor a coherent interdisciplinary method.

Upon further examination, it appears that it is not a lack of a well-articulated philosophy and methodology per se that imperils interdisciplinary claims to academic legitimacy, much less the existence of various and competing attitudes towards its practice. The more basic difficulty facing interdisciplinary theory is that, given the terms of the discussion, there is no clear indication of how any such theory could be formulated in the first place. Disciplines are not so much a fact of academic life as they are the paradigm within which modern academic life operates. The modern academy is thoroughly disciplined. Disciplines produce knowledge and organize it into discrete fields of inquiry, and disciplines develop, refine, and propagate methods appropriate for determining what counts for knowledge within a given field. In this way, disciplines

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10 This is not to say that all find such a plurality to be problematic; some see it as interdisciplinarity’s greatest strength. See, for instance: Jan C. Schmidt, “Prospects for a Philosophy of Interdisciplinarity,” in The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity, edited by Robert Frodeman and Julie Klein Thompson (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 39-41.

11 See the editors’ introduction to The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity, edited by Robert Frodeman and Julie Thompson Klein (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010), 39-41.

12 Jacobs, Defense of Disciplines, 28ff. Jacobs captures both aspects of disciplinarity well: “A discipline is a form of social organization that generates new ideas and research findings, certifies knowledge, and in turn teaches this subject matter to interested students.”
constitute both “the key units of social organization in higher education” and “the basic structure of academic life.” Considered within the conceptual frames of the disciplinary paradigm, therefore, it is not clear how interdisciplinarity could be anything other than a technique for compiling disciplinary perspectives or applying them to address complex problems—unless it represents an intermediate stage in the emergence of a new field or sub-field of inquiry that would ultimately take the form of a new discipline. In either case, however, interdisciplinarity would be effectively relativized. The interdisciplinary phenomenon, therefore, must either be assimilated within the interpretive frames of the disciplinary model, or else interdisciplinary theory must engage the task of formulating its self-understanding in an entirely different way.

The present thesis seeks to set interdisciplinary theory upon this different way. To do so, it is necessary to address the problem at a more basic level, beginning with the recognition that interdisciplinarity has failed to consider either the nature of its own claims or the effect of the disciplinary model nearly radically enough. As such, the distinct grounds of its claims to legitimacy vis-à-vis the disciplinary paradigm remain unclear. It has left key questions unanswered. Does interdisciplinarity offer something other than a set of techniques, a novel perspective, or a method that subverts, transgresses, or somehow transcends disciplinarity? If so, does it afford an experience of understanding that is quite independent of the methodological considerations of disciplinary knowledge, such that defining itself in opposition to disciplinarity is already subtly misleading? Moreover, since interdisciplinarity seems to imply that knowledge is a

13 Ibid., 2.
dynamic event occurring in the midst of disciplines or along their margins, does it actually presuppose a different model of understanding than disciplinarity’s static concept of knowledge as object produced within a given field of inquiry?

Careful consideration of these questions could not be more critical for interdisciplinary theory; it would serve to clarify the difficulty of defining interdisciplinarity from within the frames of the disciplinary model and to suggest the way interdisciplinary theory will have to follow if it hopes to move beyond them. If interdisciplinarity truly implies a different model of understanding and is oriented towards a distinct mode of experience, then neither the character of interdisciplinary experience nor the significance of its practice can be adequately perceived or effectively addressed from within a disciplinary model. Thus, any hope of a coherent interdisciplinary theory hinges precisely upon raising the profile of interdisciplinary experience, understanding it, and interpreting interdisciplinary practice accordingly.

We are now in a position to see that the charge of insufficient theoretical justification is not so much an indictment of interdisciplinary theory as it is an indication of how effectively the disciplinary model has come to order academic discourse. As such, it is evident that the task for interdisciplinary theory is not a matter of working out a more or less adequate philosophy and methodology, as it appeared to be at first glance. It is actually something far more radical—effectively changing the disciplinary question itself. In terms whose meaning we explore in depth below, the interdisciplinary task is a problem of economy and strategy. It amounts to exchanging the metaphysical

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monologic of the modern disciplines for what we might call the hermeneutic dialogic of interdisciplinarity. Precisely in recognition of the radical nature of the task facing interdisciplinary theory, however, hermeneutics now has something to say.\textsuperscript{15}

As we mentioned above, Gadamer’s \textit{TM} is key in this regard. The reason is that in \textit{TM} Gadamer is explicitly concerned with understanding claims to knowledge and to truth that transcend or somehow bypass the methodological considerations of the modern scientific disciplines. He writes famously of this aim in the forward to the first edition of \textit{TM}: “The following investigations…are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{16} Gadamer will formulate his theory of hermeneutic experience precisely with reference to vindicating these non-methodical claims to knowledge and to truth. Importantly, this theory will disclose, not only the legitimacy of ways of knowing that are not the result of method, but also the different character of the truth and the knowledge they discover. In this way, hermeneutics discloses an alternative ontology of understanding to that presupposed by modern scientific method.\textsuperscript{17} As such,

\hspace{1cm} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 282ff. Derrida employs these terms when he discusses the epic perils of both the flight from and the direct fight with the metaphysical tradition of philosophy. The kind of writing he develops, which he dubs deconstruction, is something of a third way of engaging. He explains: “it is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself. A problem of economy and strategy.” This admittedly paradoxical approach—to depart from while operating within, and to undermine without opposing—serves as a model for the approach taken in this thesis.

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{15} See note 2 above.

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{16} Hans-Georg Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} rev. ed. (English), trans. and ed. Joel C. Weinsheimer and Donald C. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), xvi.

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{17} See note 9 above.
Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy is uniquely equipped with the conceptual resources necessary to address the problem of interdisciplinary theory in the terms elucidated in the paragraphs above. The theory of hermeneutic experience Gadamer develops in *TM* thus proves foundational to our theory of interdisciplinary experience.

Again, however, this thesis is not intended merely as the application of hermeneutic thought to the problem of interdisciplinary theory. Its goal, and a more profound test of its truth, is the effectiveness of a hermeneutic theory of interdisciplinarity thus articulated to bring the significance of interdisciplinary practices to light. The practices are twofold, referring respectively to what we might term the practical and the pedagogical aims of interdisciplinarity. When interdisciplinarity is invoked in the academy it is often attached to concepts like application (especially with respect to concrete problems) and dialogue. Gadamer’s reflections in *TM* are particularly relevant to these practical aims, since his theory of hermeneutic experience is developed specifically in reference to the rehabilitation of Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis*, practical wisdom or skill at living. Moreover, since its emergence last century, interdisciplinarity has found itself in close proximity to the liberal or non-disciplinary study of the humanities.  

While often regarded as happenstance, hermeneutics would suggest otherwise. Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience is articulated precisely as a reflection upon the kind of experience of understanding that occurs in the humanities.

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beyond the domain of methodology. Indeed, Gadamer is everywhere concerned with the experience of understanding in the humanities, as he develops his hermeneutic theory.\footnote{See especially: Jean Grondin, “Gadamer’s Experience and Theory of Education: Learning that the Other May be Right,” in \textit{Education, Dialogue, and Hermeneutics} edited by Paul Fairfield (New York: Continuum, 2011), 5-20.}

Formulating a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity is accordingly a threefold task. We seek first to transpose the problem of interdisciplinary theory from the statics of the modern disciplinary model to the dynamics of hermeneutic experience, and in so doing, to radicalize the characteristic interdisciplinary practices of application, orientation toward the problem, and dialogue, and to realize the liberal study of the humanities as a new interdisciplinary pedagogy. Taken together these three tasks represent a reinterpretation of interdisciplinarity as a hermeneutic phenomenon. Thus reinterpreted—and, we would argue, only thus reinterpreted—interdisciplinarity takes on its own compelling and coherent character vis-à-vis the totalizing claims of the modern disciplines.

Admittedly, Gadamer did not write with the problem of interdisciplinarity in mind, and he is clear in his insistence that \textit{TM} is entirely philosophical in its intentions.\footnote{He writes in the preface to the second edition of \textit{TM}: “I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences. Nor was it my aim to investigate the theoretical foundation of work in these fields in order to put my findings to practical ends” (xxv).}

Nevertheless, this project is Gadamerian in scope and ethos. Indeed, it instantiates in a way Gadamer had not foreseen a project he sketches all-too-briefly in the preface to the second edition of \textit{TM}. He writes there of his intention to limit the pretensions of modern consciousness by showing what is possible here and now and by confronting the modern...
will of man with something of the truth of remembrance.  

21  The horizon of what is possible, as we will see, is determined by our situation in language, while the truth of remembrance is part of what Gadamer describes elsewhere as “those fundamental orders of our being that are neither arbitrary nor manipulable by us, but rather simply demand our respect.”  

22  This project will also enlist, in different ways the efforts of Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida. Ricoeur’s work occupies a prominent place, serving both to elucidate the hermeneutic situation and to illustrate the radical significance of interdisciplinary practice when interpreted hermeneutically. Furthermore, his reconciliation in the art of reading of interpretive and explanatory orientations—a dichotomy he identifies as the basis of the alienation of modern thought—is a compelling example of the radical significance of interdisciplinary practice. It provides, as well, the model for how interdisciplinarity must operate within the modern disciplinary academy. 

23  It goes without saying that Derrida’s work is particularly effective at confronting and limiting the pretensions of modern consciousness. His work will play a more structural role, however; as we will employ it as a strategy of critique that prevents one from being implicated within the very system one would critique.  

Plan for the Present Work

The threefold nature of this project is reflected in the threefold structure of the essay. The first part is dedicated to transposing interdisciplinary theory from the

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23 See note 16 above.
disciplinary model to the hermeneutic experience. The second part seeks to show how understood hermeneutically the characteristic interdisciplinary emphases of application, focus on the problem, and dialogue, take on radical significance. Similarly, the third part explores how hermeneutics realizes the potential of the liberal study of the humanities as an interdisciplinary pedagogy. Before briefly detailing how each of these parts will unfold, however, it is important to explain something of the character of the argument that is being offered. As mentioned above, our aim is not so much the application of hermeneutic theory to the problem of interdisciplinarity as it is a realization of the coherence, effectiveness, and radical significance of interdisciplinary practice once the fundamental hermeneutic character of interdisciplinarity is clearly perceived and articulated. The familiar theory-application model is inadequate in this regard for two reasons: first, as we explore in detail below, a theory-application schematic presupposes precisely the modern ontology of understanding this thesis would seek to overcome; second, and related to the first point, the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience only comes fully to light in practice—and only when this practice is not interpreted within the restricted economy of the disciplinary model. There is thus an inescapable circular dynamic to our argument: we wager, so to speak, on the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience in hopes that interdisciplinary practices thus interpreted take on radical and compelling significance, which will in turn confirm the initial insight of the wager.

But what is the impetus for entering the circle in the first place? How to ensure that it will not turn out to be but one more perspective or approach, a somewhat
idiosyncratic one at that? Why, that is to ask, is there any reason to think that the argument from hermeneutics addresses the point of stasis as it were, the salient point at issue in the problem of interdisciplinarity’s claim to legitimacy vis-à-vis the disciplinary model? The answer to these questions comes in the identification that it is the experience of alienation, and not disciplinary silos, that interdisciplinarity would actually seek to overcome. This identification marks our entry into the circle; for the alienation implicit in modern consciousness, which is exacerbated rather than overcome by the application of method, is precisely the animating problem for hermeneutic thought. The argument therefore unfolds as follows: supposing interdisciplinary experience is hermeneutic in character, and the identification of alienation gives us good reason to suppose that it is, interpreting interdisciplinarity along the lines of a theory of hermeneutic experience ought to render its self-understanding coherent and compelling; and indeed as we reflect upon its practice and pedagogy it does. In this way, therefore, the identification of alienation forms the hinge upon which the thesis turns.

The first part of the thesis must accomplish two basic tasks: the identification of the interdisciplinary critique as a response to alienation, and the justification of that identification via hermeneutics. To accomplish the first task, we begin with an examination of the devastating critique of interdisciplinarity, and subsequent compelling reassertion of disciplinarity, offered by Jerry A. Jacobs. His systematic refutation of the common interdisciplinary critique of disciplines (namely, that they form intellectual silos) sets a stark choice before interdisciplinary theory: it must either be assimilated within the

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24 Jacobs. *In Defense of Disciplines.*
disciplinary model or else engage the task of formulating its self-understanding in an entirely different way. His critique, in fact, proves to be too effective; it raises the question concerning the self-evident nature of the disciplinary critique and even its perdurance given the lack of evidence. Following this question allows us to explore whether the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity is basically existential or ontological rather than epistemological or methodological in nature. Arriving at an alternative account of interdisciplinarity—namely, that it is not the insularity of knowledge but the alienation implicit in subjectivity that motivates the interdisciplinary critique of disciplines—provides the crucial link to hermeneutics.

With alienation clearly in view, the first part of the thesis sets Ricoeur and Gadamer to work exploring the existential, methodological, and ontological the nature of this alienation. We begin with Paul Ricoeur’s discovery of the hermeneutic situation, and his subsequent analysis of its implications in the opening chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil* (*SOE*). Because consciousness is an event in language—this is the implication of his maxim “the symbol gives rise to thought”—inquiry is always already situated with respect to what it would seek to know. Moreover, even the practice of inquiry itself is the effect of a prior orientation toward the world which is itself effected by language. This multifaceted situation in language constitutes, for Ricoeur, our “principle methodological bondage;” it introduces a radical contingency in all of our inquiry that no method can

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guarantee against, and exposes once and for all the notion of a philosophy without presuppositions as the chimera of modern thought.\(^{26}\)

As insightful and important as Ricoeur’s treatment of the hermeneutic phenomenon \textit{SOE} is, it is a methodological preface to a work directed toward more practical interpretive ends. For a more focused elucidation of the insights Ricouer discovered, we turn to Gadamer’s 1966 article “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” where he identifies the historical, aesthetic, and hermeneutic alienation effected by modern academic scholarship.\(^{27}\) Importantly, his point is not simply to show that method is never able to transcend the experience of alienation implicit in subjectivity. He argues as well that since subjectivity is actually illusory, reliance on method alienates us from a more fundamental human experience, one that simply happens to us. Exposing the basic sterility of the modern academic model, Gadamer suggests in its place one that is attuned to those fundamental orders of our being that are neither manipulable by us but simply demand our respect.

The first part culminates with a summary of Ricoeur’s and Gadamer’s treatment of alienation, arguing that its identification as the basis of the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity is fully justified. In different ways, they lead us again and again to the conclusion that we are unable to circumscribe by language what is known \textit{in} language. It

\(^{26}\) Part two of this thesis explores in detail Ricoeur’s understanding of what it would mean to set aside the disciplinary guarantees of a philosophy and methodology and to proceed instead from what he calls “a full language.” Here we restrict ourselves to a consideration of how recognition of our situation in language undermines the methodological universalism of the disciplinary model.

identifies as well the alternative ontology of understanding that Gadamer and Ricoeur seem continually to allude in their critique of alienation. Developing this ontology is the immediate goal of the second part.

The second part of the thesis has three distinct, though intimately related, goals. It seeks to elucidate a theory of hermeneutic experience, to interpret interdisciplinary experience according to this theory in terms of the neologism *interity,* and then to show how realizing the interity of interdisciplinary experience transforms characteristic interdisciplinary practices. We begin with a study of Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience in *TM,* finding that here is both a critical and a constructive aspect to this study. From the prefaces of *TM* we discover Gadamer’s aim of providing an account of a kind of understanding that does not proceed from subjectivity and method. In the first part of *TM,* he demonstrates by reflection upon play, aesthetic experience, and historical understanding, that subjectivity is illusory and method unable to deliver its promised goods. It is in the second part of *TM,* however, that Gadamer develops the key elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience. Proceeding from the recognition of the fore-structure of consciousness, and thus the inescapability of prejudice, Gadamer develops his notions of historically-effected consciousness as an alternative to a modern consciousness predicated on subjectivity and the fusion of horizons as an alternative to critical methodology.

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28 In the process of writing the present thesis, I became aware that the neologism *interity* is not original to my work. It was coined by Jacques Demorgon in *L’histoire interculturelle des sociétés* 2nd rev. ed., (Paris: Éd. *Anthropos*, 2002), 304. However, it is important to note that, although stemming from reflection on related dynamics, we use the term in significantly different ways.
With the robust image clearly in view of the historically-effected consciousness that experiences understanding as a fusion of horizons, it is clear that this, and not a subjective modern consciousness that employs method to produce objective knowledge, is the goal of interdisciplinarity. Adopting this image explicitly is in part what we mean by realizing the *interity* of interdisciplinarity. The next goal of the second part of the thesis, therefore, is to render this image explicit in the interpretation of interdisciplinary experience. We propose *interity* as way of capturing both the dynamic and virtual space of interaction, relation, and difference in which interdisciplinarity thrives as well as the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience. As such, the notion of the interity of interdisciplinarity provides the theoretical horizon both for the reinterpretation of interdisciplinary practice and the realization of humanities as a new interdisciplinary pedagogy.

The final goal in the second part is to interpret the characteristic interdisciplinary practices of application, orientation toward the problem, and dialogue in light of historically-effected consciousness and the fusion of horizons. Each emphasis is radically transformed. Application, once relativized pragmatically within a theory-praxis model, is restored to its central position as the event of understanding. Dialogue is no longer merely a technique for collaboration or multiplying perspectives, but reflects the nature of understanding itself, which transcends subject-object and active-passive dichotomies. The most radical change, however, takes place in the transformation of the *problem* into the *question*. The interdisciplinary focus on the problem has always respected the motivated nature of inquiry and the importance of application.
Nevertheless, it is still beholden to the active-passive dichotomy of subjectivity.

Realizing the problem in terms of a question that elicits our response, however, captures both the event-character and dialogical nature of understanding.

The third part of the thesis looks to the practice of humanities associated with interdisciplinarity. Its goal is to realize the non-disciplinary or liberal study of the humanities as a new interdisciplinary pedagogy. Continuing the theme of allowing a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity radically to transform interdisciplinary practice, we see how, understood hermeneutically, the liberal study of the humanities serves to cultivate historically-effected consciousness. The first step in realizing their pedagogical potential is the recognition that a pedagogy of the humanities entailed by a hermeneutics of interdisciplinary is thoroughly Socratic in character. That is to say it is fundamentally ambivalent, consisting both of what we might call subversive and constructive elements. In the words of Gadamer’s preface to TM, an interdisciplinary pedagogy seeks to confront the modern consciousness with the truth of remembrance. Underscore both the confrontation and the remembrance. Thus, while interdisciplinary study of the humanities is concerned with knowledge, and indeed with truth, it is also subversive of the particularly modern pretension to guarantee knowledge and truth. The goal of an interdisciplinary pedagogy, therefore, is both the deconstruction of modern consciousness and the cultivation in its place of historically-effected consciousness.

29 The respective work of Julie Thompson Klein and Jean Grondin are key in this regard—especially, Julie Thompson Klein, Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), and Jean Grondin, Sources of Hermeneutics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), and Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
With this goal clearly in view, the third section turns to an examination of how various parts of the humanities syllabus contribute. We find, first of all, that play is the fundamental interdisciplinary pedagogy. It undermines any notion of subjectivity while providing the experiential context for appreciating the basic dialogic structure of human understanding. In fact, it is within this context that we are finally in the position of clarifying the term *experience* that has been operative throughout the essay, which we will understand in terms of the German *Erfahrung* rather than, or at least not simply, *Erlebnis*. Gadamer’s notions of being-in-play, self-presentation, and transformation-into-structure will inform this pedagogy of play. The basic insights into the significance of play open into further dimensions as we consider the pedagogical potential of the aesthetic, historical, and philological experience offered by the humanities. Again, Gadamer’s work proves decisive as we look to the total mediation and aesthetic non-differentiation of aesthetic experience and the transformation-into-communion effected by historical and philological understanding. Indeed, the aesthetic, historical, and philological pursuits of the humanities come together to confront the alienation present in modern consciousness. With the pedagogy of play in view we look to Paul Ricoeur’s

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30 We discuss Gadamer’s distinction between these terms at length in the third section. What he has in mind is basically the distinction between what in English we might term having experience and having an experience. The qualification of not simply aiming at *Erlebnis* is in reference to John Arthos’ insightful critique of Gadamer’s insistence upon *Erfahrung*. Drawing from the etymology of *Erlebnis*, to be alive when something happens, Arthos argues that Gadamer’s either-or is a bit too stark; surely living experience, so to speak, is desirable, even if attaining experience in the affairs of life is the ultimate goal. See: John Arthos, “‘To be Alive When Something Happens’: Retrieving Dilthey’s Erlebnis, *Janus Head* 3 (1):3-1.

31 The fact that the trio of being-in-play, self-presentation, and transformation into structure are followed by a further trio, namely, total mediation, aesthetic non-differentiation, and transformation into communion, is no accident. It represents a thematic identification of the analogical or elliptical shape of the pedagogy of humanities as it proceeds from play to the syllabus of the arts and beyond.
hermeneutics of the symbol as its embodiment. The concluding chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil* is key in this regard; for it is here that Ricoeur develops the basic contours of his own interdisciplinary philosophical project. If interity forms the philosophical horizon of a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, then the restoration of application to its central place, the recognition of the fundamental dynamic of dialogue, and the realization of the hermeneutical priority of the question form its methodological practice.

The third part concludes with a presentation of what we term a new hermeneutic *studia humanitatis*. The goal is to provide some preliminary sketches of a new interdisciplinary pedagogy that re-deploys the arts of the humanities for the cultivation of hermeneutic consciousness. This new syllabus consists of the original arts of grammar, rhetoric and poetics, history, and moral philosophy, reinterpreted accordingly, as well as a further area of study that has hitherto been absent—dialectic. Dialectic in fact, comes takes its place in the syllabus of the humanities, though not merely as one art among many, but as the art that informs the basic dynamic of the entire syllabus. We offer examples of the practice and pedagogical potential of just two of these arts, grammar and dialectic. First, we interpret Ricoeur’s reorientation of hermeneutics around the text as the realization of reading as a new pedagogy of grammar, understood not simply as the analysis of text, but as the art of creative appropriation of the being in the world of the text. Because Ricoeur’s grammar reconciles interpretive and explanatory attitudes in an act of creative appropriation, it is the headwaters of the other philological arts, such as rhetoric and poetics. We look next to Gadamer’s hermeneutic discipline of questioning as
the realization of dialogue as a new art of dialectic. The art here is not that of rational deduction but of attending to discourse. Gadamer’s reading of Plato’s *Lysis* in his hermeneutical studies of Plato is key in this regard.\(^{32}\)

The three parts of the argument complete, the thesis concludes with a consideration of the effect of a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity. While the goal of the project has never been to refute or displace disciplinarity, only to identify and to understand what exceeds its domain, it is important to acknowledge the critique this project necessarily entails. If disciplinarity pretends to comprehend academic learning as such, the affirmation of “yes, and,” that a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity voices to disciplinarity is subtly but profoundly subversive. Taking responsibility for this implicit critique, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity must consider how it will operate within the structures of the disciplinary academy. Recalling the earlier discussion of the term *interity*, we see that it will indeed operate within these structures. We discuss the academic aspects of the interity of interdisciplinarity in terms adopted from Gadamer and Derrida—respectively, being *in the middle* and *in the margins*. Interdisciplinary experience is cultivated in the middle of speech, dialogue, and thus interdisciplinary scholarship must set diligently to work where discourses meet, and perhaps especially

where they clash. At a broader level, interdisciplinary studies must realize the potential of working in the margins, understood not as sidelines, but as the locus of movement, interaction, collaboration, and again in the conflict of existing departmental and disciplinary structures. In this way, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinary is a theory and pedagogy as well as a program for developing interdisciplinary studies within the disciplinary academy.

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33 Ricoeur is especially attuned to the creative potential of the conflict of interpretations.
PART I.

RELOCATING INTERDISCIPLINARITY FROM THE STATICS OF THE DISCIPLINARY MODEL TO THE DYNAMICS OF HERMENEUTIC EXPERIENCE
The studies that constitute the first part of this thesis seek to re-direct reflection upon interdisciplinarity from the statics of the disciplinary model to the dynamics of hermeneutic experience. To be successful, it must accomplish two tasks in particular: the reinterpretation of the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity as a response to alienation, and a justification and elaboration of the meaning of that interpretation via the respective work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The first study employs the most insightful and incisive critique of interdisciplinarity available in order thoroughly to undermine the common interdisciplinary critique of disciplinary silos. From here we seek to raise to a crisis the problem of the perdurance of the appeal of interdisciplinary rhetoric in the face of evidence. Thus the critique of interdisciplinarity will ultimately drive the question to the more radical level at which this thesis seeks to engage—the alienation of modern consciousness. In this way, a proper understanding of the nature of the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity provides the crucial link with hermeneutics.

**Jacobs on the Dubious Notion of Disciplinary Silos**

The problem of interdisciplinarity’s basic lack of clarity and identity is perhaps most clearly perceived and articulated by University of Pennsylvania sociologist Jerry A. Jacobs in his 2013 *In Defense of Disciplines: Interdisciplinarity and Specialization in the Research University*. As the title suggests, the book is a reassertion of the disciplinary model in the face of ascendant interdisciplinarity. At the heart of his critique is an effective refutation of the most important interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity—namely, that they channel knowledge into “silos.” Since this critique is taken for granted—and, indeed, informs interdisciplinarity’s reason for existence—Jacobs’
refutation could not be more devastating. Yet, Jacobs’ distinct accomplishment is just how effectively he goes on to subsume the interdisciplinary phenomenon—its concerns, ideals, and claims to effectiveness—within a disciplinary framework.

Returning to the book’s well-chosen subtitle—Interdisciplinarity and Specialization in the Research University—we should not be surprised at his method. Jacobs will defend the disciplines by situating both academic specialization and interdisciplinarity as dynamics best managed within the disciplinary framework of the modern research university. Jacobs’ argument is thus the most cogent—and, indeed, potent—alternative to the position set forth in this thesis. The book is carefully researched and the scope of its inquiry far-reaching. For our purposes, therefore, we restrict our focus to a brief examination of the central argument against the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinary “silos.” The goal, however, is neither to take exception to his argument nor to defend against it. Rather, allowing Jacobs effectively to silence this default critique, we seek to expose a flaw in interdisciplinarity’s self-understanding. We argue that, while the critique of silos is a response to a real experience, it is one interdisciplinary theory has failed properly to identify.

The method Jacobs employs in his critique of interdisciplinary claims is straightforward and effective. He seeks to determine whether the substance of interdisciplinary claims actually support the effectiveness of its rhetoric. For Jacobs this means a consideration of the evidence. “In addition to asking hard questions,” he writes, “the book will present data that have played too small a role in earlier discussions. The research presented here draws on many data sources in order to shed light on the pivotal
questions underlying the case for a more interdisciplinary form of higher education.”¹ His analysis of the data actually works in two directions, serving to evaluate interdisciplinarity’s central critiques of disciplinarity and its own claims of effectiveness. Finding the evidence lacking in each respect, and discovering on the contrary that disciplinarity is actually not so ineffective as interdisciplinary would have it appear, Jacobs reasserts disciplinarity, arguing that the expressed aims of interdisciplinarity are actually best achieved within a traditional disciplinary model.²

Looking first to the merits of the interdisciplinary critique of the disciplinary model, Jacobs comes into contact with a wide-ranging and diffuse body of criticism. Nevertheless, he discerns a cluster of five recurring themes: “Disciplines, it is charged, inhibit communication, stifle innovation, thwart the search for integrated solutions to social problems, inhibit the economic contributions of universities, and provide a fragmented education for undergraduates.”³ That is to say, disciplines—and especially the departments that set their agenda and guard their entrance—necessarily obstruct effective interdisciplinary communication, and in so doing, prevent the kind of innovation and integrated solutions required to address complex contemporary problems.⁴

¹ Ibid., 5.

² The notion of the traditional liberal arts disciplines is, of course, somewhat misleading. Since the disciplines come into place only from the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th centuries, they are traditional only vis-à-vis contemporary inter-, trans- or multidisciplinary approaches. Jacobs acknowledges the relatively recent appearance of disciplinarity, but, as we explain below, interprets this as merely the late development of a logic inherent in the larger intellectual tradition that comes to fruition because of the proliferation of new knowledge.


⁴ Ibid., 9-22.
Moreover, so goes the critique, since funding for research is overwhelmingly directed toward integrated initiatives, this inhibition of communication restricts the economic growth of universities as well. Finally, since the modern university is organized around research, it goes without saying that the undergraduate education offered in such a context is fragmented.

As Jacobs considers these themes together, a more fundamental criticism begins to emerge in the midst of the five strands: the disciplines create insularity or isolation. Jacobs writes: “Amidst these varied lines of criticism, the central complaint is that disciplines have become isolated ‘silos.’” The image of “disciplinary silos” is ubiquitous in the literature. The charge of intellectual silos is intuitive and thus quite persuasive. However, is it warranted by the evidence? Jacobs argues that it is not, whether it is considered on its own or as it is applied in each of the five themes identified above. On the contrary, Jacobs shows how disciplinarity is faring far better in each of these areas than interdisciplinary would have one believe, and even that a misguided interdisciplinarity might itself be exacerbating the putative problems it attempts to resolve. Looking first to the concept of disciplinary silos, then to each of its supposed manifestations, Jacobs mounts an evidence-based argument against the very heart of interdisciplinarity’s claim to relevance.

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5 Ibid., 22-24.
6 Ibid., 24-26.
7 Ibid.
The argument against the critique of disciplinary silos is twofold. On the one hand, there is no evidence that anything like silos exist; on the other, there is abundant evidence of the kind of collaboration and cross-pollination among disciplines that such silos would necessarily inhibit. Research in the field of citation analysis is particularly helpful in dispelling the myth of silos. Citation analysis is “a technique for tracing the connections between researchers as indicated by their own references.” Ordinarily, citation analysis seeks to compile data concerning the other fields of research that are being accessed by a researcher as he or she works within any given field. Jacobs employs its findings as a powerful means of undermining interdisciplinary claims. For, according to the evidence collected from citation analysis, it appears there is not only some communication happening between disciplinary fields; “the majority of references in a given journal are drawn from journals in other disciplinary fields.” In fact, Jacobs cites one study in particular that suggests the percentage of cross-disciplinary references to be as high as 69%. It is rather difficult to account for such a figure if one maintains the disciplinary silos thesis. Jacobs goes on to consider the evidence from a number of citation analysis studies in the course of his argument. However, each paints a similar picture of disciplinary researchers crossing disciplinary boundaries in their research. Silos, at least from the perspective of citation analysis, do not appear to exist.

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8 Ibid., 80.
9 Ibid., 81.
10 Ibid.
Jacobs looks to another major body of evidence in his search for support of the silos thesis and finds a similar situation. Here he considers research concerning the diffusion of concepts and terminology across disciplines rather than cross-disciplinary references in disciplinary scholarship. It serves similarly to undermine the notion of silos, however, even adding a further dimension to the suggestion citation analysis makes to the contrary. Where the broad diffusion of references demonstrates the extent of communication, the dissemination of specific terminology and conceptual vocabulary indicates the depth of this communication. Jacobs looks first to the distribution of a term like “postmodern” to make his point. The staggering breadth of this term’s usage seems to support his notion that ideas actually flow freely across fuzzy disciplinary boundaries. Yet, this case actually proves very little for Jacobs. The term postmodern may have its origin in the rather specific discourse of post-structuralist philosophy, but it has since becomes so thoroughly popularized that one would be surprised for it not to be employed broadly across disciplinary boundaries. Jacobs looks, therefore, for evidence of the dissemination of specialized conceptual vocabulary across various disciplinary fields, since only this kind of evidence would truly constitute a proof of the depth of cross-disciplinary communication. Such distribution is precisely what the data indicates. For instance, Jacobs cites a study that found Bruno Latour’s sociological term “actor-network theory” in use in nearly 1,400 articles across scores of diverse fields ranging from economics, computer science, geography, and educational research.\textsuperscript{11} The breadth and depth of dissemination of such narrow terminology confirms for Jacobs both the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
communication of ideas among disciplines and the permeability of disciplinary boundaries. Again, evidence abounds for precisely the kind of communication that silos would inhibit. The net result of both studies is a complete loss of credibility with respect to the charge of silos. Indeed, taken together, an entirely different image begins to emerge from the evidence. Rather than isolated disciplinary silos, the evidence indicates a web of interrelated disciplinary fields.

This is not to say, however, that there is no evidence that would indicate something like silos. In the midst of the very analysis of academic journals that undermined the charge of silos, Jacobs discovers evidence indicating that the traditional disciplines of the liberal arts academy do seem to be micro-fracturing into ever more disciplines and sub-disciplines. Devastatingly for interdisciplinarity, however, the evidence suggests for Jacobs that this dynamic is due to the influence of interdisciplinarity rather than disciplines. He points both to the proliferation of interdisciplinary doctoral degrees and interdisciplinary journals as indicators of this trend. His note about journals is sufficient to make the point:

Over the next ten to fifteen years we can expect the establishment of perhaps another ten thousand journals. If interdisciplinary journals maintain their current share, this will result in 2,500 new journals, added to our current 1,500. If these were all interdisciplinary in the broadest sense, then the research findings would be scattered over some four thousand interdisciplinary journals. The regular publication of thousands of interdisciplinary journals would make the task of following the journals themselves exceedingly difficult.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 71.
Put simply, the net result of the proliferation of interdisciplinary journals is the effective irrelevance of such journals, and as such the inhibition of the communication they would seek to bring about. The effect of interdisciplinary doctoral degrees is somewhat different, though analogous. When an interdisciplinary program begins, they are often populated by scholars from a variety of fields. Jacobs proffers communications as a notable example.\textsuperscript{13} As they begin to grant doctoral degrees, however, the variety of disciplines represented is diminished as “in-field” scholars begin to populate the programs. In this way, interdisciplinary doctoral programs ensure that interdisciplinarity will ultimately come to resemble precisely the departmental structure of the other disciplines. Again, communications is a poignant example for Jacobs. In each case, both the proliferation of interdisciplinary journals and the departmentalization of interdisciplinary degrees, the net effect is insularity and disintegration.

The central charge of silos refuted, and the evidence indicating widespread and profound communication among the disciplines, how are we to account for the charge of silos of disciplinary insularity? Jacobs locates the impetus for the charge in the real proliferation of knowledge. He acknowledges that “the unending tide of new information” makes it nearly impossible for anyone to have specialized knowledge in more than one field, let alone all of them.\textsuperscript{14} Thus what is often characterized as an inhibition of communication, or worse disciplinary esotericism, is simply the necessary effect of the need to manage large bodies of specialized knowledge. As he has shown,\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 49-52.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 19.
however, interdisciplinarity serves only to exacerbate this problem, not solve it. He argues, therefore, that the best means of stemming the tide of new knowledge is the traditional disciplinary structure of the liberal arts academy. That is to say, the best kind of integration of knowledge and techniques, dialogue across departmental boundaries, innovation, and concrete application, is already taking place within the disciplinary academy. As we mentioned above, a full examination of Jacobs’ argument is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important, however, to conclude by noting just how effectively he situates interdisciplinary concerns and insights within a disciplinary framework. For Jacobs, the “dynamic disciplines” represent the via media among the competing ideals of specialization and interdisciplinarity, allowing the kind of breadth, flexibility, and permeability that interdisciplinarity values, while acknowledging the necessity and legitimacy of specialization.

With such a comprehensive refutation of interdisciplinarity’s central claim, and such a compelling argument in favor of the traditional disciplines, it seems that there is little recourse for interdisciplinarity than to acquiesce to its relativization within the disciplinary model. There is a compelling reason to do so. It would grant academic legitimacy to interdisciplinarity and provide a clear place for it to practice. However, it would seem also to betray a central insight. It is, after all, at least somewhat curious that a critique as intuitive and self-evident as that directed at the insularity of disciplinary learning should perdure without an evidential basis—indeed, in the face of the evidence. The question arises, therefore: why is the interdisciplinary critique so immediately plausible? Why in the midst of the dynamic disciplines Jacobs describes—disciplines that
support innovation, enjoy productive cross-disciplinary innovation, and inform the work of research centers and institutes—does the critique of disciplinary isolation, impracticality, and irrelevance to real-world problems still ring so compellingly true to so many people?

Granting that the evidence Jacobs presents is sound and the argument he builds from it valid, then we must look elsewhere if we are to arrive at satisfying answers to these questions. It is a central claim of the present thesis that the problem lies rather in an unfortunate interpretation of the experience lying behind the charge of silos. Moreover, neither Jacobs nor the interdisciplinary critics he so roundly refutes have identified this experience. That is to say, the interdisciplinary critique is mistaken, not because there is nothing to the charge of silos, but because the problem it intuits with respect to disciplinarity has nothing primarily to do with the organization or presentation of knowledge. To speak more technically, the problem interdisciplinarity perceives in disciplinarity is not primarily epistemological or methodological in character. It issues rather from an experience at the existential or ontological level—the experience hermeneutic philosophy identifies as alienation. This identification will have profound and important consequences. For, as we will explore in more detail below as we turn to the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur, disciplinarity presupposes the subject-object and active-passive dichotomies of a modern metaphysics. Each dichotomy serves to alienate the putative subject in the experience of understanding.

Failing to identify the radical character of the problem it would seek to overcome, interdisciplinarity has addressed its critique of disciplinarity basically as a
methodological problem. If disciplinary learning leaves one with the experience of a fragmented education, where knowledge from one field seems irrelevant to another field, let alone the real world, then this must lie in the fact that disciplines are structurally isolated from one another. Thus a method or technique for overcoming alienation is proposed. Hence the focus upon dialogue, application, and real-world problems that characterize interdisciplinarity. The hope is that breaking down categories, introducing more dialogue, making education hands-on and experiential, and letting problems determine the relevance of knowledge, will overcome the isolation implicit in disciplinary learning. Ironically, not only has interdisciplinarity not overcome alienation, if Jacobs is correct, the very interdisciplinary initiatives themselves have served only further to fracture and subdivide learning.

Everything changes, however, if we begin from an alternative interpretation of interdisciplinary experience. Following the lead of hermeneutic thought, we understand that the problem of the perceived irrelevance, isolation, and impracticality of disciplinarity is not a matter of the proliferation of specialized knowledge or the academic division of labor at all. It is the result of an existential alienation effected by the modern ontology of understanding\(^\text{15}\) disciplinarity presupposes—and interdisciplinarity has yet to challenge. The elaboration and justification of this claim is the second task we must accomplish in this part of our thesis. We turn, therefore, to a consideration of the existential, methodological, and ontological nature of this alienation in the respective work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

\(^{15}\) See note 3.
Ricoeur’s “Hermeneutic Turn”

Contingency is not an embarrassing feature for philosophy to overcome, notes Paul Ricoeur, “it inhabits the history of philosophy itself.”¹ Neither is it an unfortunate limitation that philosophy must simply live with. On the contrary, he claims, “it is always in the midst of contingency that rational sequences must be detected.”² Coming at the conclusion to the opening chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil (SOE)*, these words on contingency express Ricoeur’s discovery concerning the effect of language in human thought. As we shall see, this discovery brings about both a methodological detour in *SOE* and a hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur’s career. While *SOE* is not itself specifically concerned with either hermeneutics or interdisciplinarity, its opening and closing chapters are devoted explicitly to identifying the character and extent of the hermeneutic situation, and to developing a method that would transcend the alienation Ricoeur perceives in modern thought.³ “Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again,”⁴ writes Ricoeur, showing us that our exodus consists in renunciation of the sterile criticism that characterizes modern thought and taking up in its stead a productive hermeneutics that proceeds not from method but a full language. In this way, Ricoeur’s *SOE* serves as a model of his claim above, since it is in the contingency of his study of


² Ibid.

³ In this section we employ the terms *modern-critical thought* and *modern-critical method* somewhat interchangeably. This is not so much a loose use of terminology our part as it is the attempt to reflect Ricoeur’s thought. He identifies critique as the chief characteristic of modern thought and the implementation of method as its chief mode of operation. This said, however, we do not simply use the term method, but critical or modern method, in order to reflect the fact that Ricoeur is not opposed to method *per se*, only one that operates in a supposed objectivity.

⁴ Ibid., 349.
human fallibility and fault that Ricoeur first comes to appreciate the profound implications of the hermeneutic situation and to organize his investigations accordingly.

*SOE* is the second installment of what Ricoeur had intended to be a three-part philosophical anthropology guided by the image of human finitude. While he devotes the first and third parts to an examination, specifically, of the liabilities and creative potential implicit in human finitude, the second part is concerned with understanding the fact that human beings are not only potentially fallible but actually commit errors. Specifically, Ricoeur is concerned to account for the actual transition from fallibility to fault, and it is in his search for this transition that he comes face to face with the radical implications of the human situation in language. Following the implications as they unfold, Ricoeur reflects first on how our situation in language places limits on critical method and then moves eventually to formulate an interdisciplinary approach that respects these limits. Most immediately relevant to the specific aims of this section, however, is Ricoeur’s identification of the alienation implicit in a modern consciousness that, failing to perceive and to orient itself to the effect of language, pretends instead to secure knowledge by means of critical method.

Following Ricoeur’s investigations in *SOE*, therefore, we seek to re-trace his methodological detour toward hermeneutics. We will consider his formulation of the hermeneutic situation and the unique approach to the task of thinking it requires. We discover that the hermeneutic situation implies the priority of a relationship or situation with respect to what we would understand, as well as the necessity of interest and commitment in the act of understanding. By way of contrast to Ricoeur’s approach,

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Ricoeur dubbed the third part of this study *the poetics of the will*. Owing precisely to the hermeneutic trajectory his work takes coming out of symbolism, he would never complete it.
however, we will perceive the character of the alienation he understands to attend a modern critical methodology. Importantly, Ricoeur expresses this alienation in terms of the dichotomy between knowledge and understanding.\textsuperscript{6} Though beyond the scope of this part of our study, we return at the conclusion of the second part to explore the contours of the more general hermeneutical and interdisciplinary project Ricoeur proposes for reconciling critical knowledge and hermeneutic understanding. In each respect, from his formulation of the hermeneutic situation, to his own approach, and the critique of modern alienation, Ricoeur’s work gives credence to the claim that alienation effected by a modern ontology of understanding is the impetus for interdisciplinarity.

We begin our study at the moment of the detour in *SOE*. Ricoeur is perplexed by the problem of human sin as he encountered it in his earlier study of the poetics of the human will. For Ricoeur, this problem is not primarily theological in nature; it is a matter of philosophical anthropology. What is the being, he asks, of the being that sins? The experience of being at fault is confused and paradoxical. It is, as Ricoeur explains, the self-willed and yet blind “experience of being oneself but alienated from oneself.”\textsuperscript{7} Expressing the paradoxical nature of this experience more personally he writes: “[it] makes me incomprehensible to myself.”\textsuperscript{8} So, while it might be clear how fallibility is

\textsuperscript{6} Of course, Ricoeur sees the hermeneutic situation as a unique opportunity afforded both by and at the expense of modernity. Criticism, he argues, has delivered to us the very tools of transcending mere criticism. The hermeneutic opportunity, therefore, is the possibility of understanding—whereas pre-modernity experienced the naïve immediacy of belief, and modernity the exile of critique, we have the opportunity of understanding from within the dynamic between participatory belonging and critical distanciation.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
logically entailed in the concept of finitude, the actual commission of fault is perplexing and problematic.

What accounts for the transition from fallibility to fault? In what does it consist? In hopes of answering these questions, Ricoeur looks to a resource that is closest to the moment of the transition—the religious consciousness’s confession of fault. It is important to see that Ricoeur’s move here is philosophical in nature, not sociological or psychological. That is to say, by looking to confession he does not mean observing confessions in order to obtain data or evidence. Rather, he will take confession as a starting point for phenomenological reflection. “We will try to surprise the transition in the act,” he explains, “by ‘re-enacting’ in ourselves the confession that the religious consciousness makes of it.”9 The goal is to tease out the experience at the moment of the transition by reflecting upon the utterance of error or fault that attends the transition. The hope is that once identified an analysis of the intentional content of this experience will lead to an account of the experience and an explanation of the transition.

Why does Ricoeur opt for a phenomenological analysis of confession rather than the traditional philosophical approach of attending to the rationalized confessions of writers like St. Augustine? Confessions like these come ready-made, after all, in the kind of discourse philosophy already understands. Ricoeur explains that the problem with the confessions of the philosopher or theologian is that they are not actually confessions at all—if by confession we mean the spontaneous utterance of the experience of fault. For, despite their life-like appearance, philosophical or theological confessions come “not at

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9 Ibid.
the beginning but at the end of a cycle of living experience.”¹⁰ They are the result of speculation, not spontaneous expression, and are thus removed from the experience of the transition to fault Ricoeur would seek to discover. Importantly, it is not temporal distance that separates them from the experience of sin; it is the fact that speculation represents but a final layer of interpretive sedimentation over this experience. Theological or philosophical speculation operates within a larger and more complex network of rationalized images and metaphors derived from stories and symbols. (St. Augustine’s Confessions are a case in point in this regard, since for Ricoeur they are the careful interpretation of the meaning of Augustine’s life seen through the lens of speculative theological categories like Fall, Original Sin, and Divine Providence.) It is impossible, therefore, to discern in these kinds of confessions the kernel of basic experience, as it were, from the multi-layered husk of symbol, myth, and interpretation. The philosopher who looked to such confessions for the living experience of fault would see only his own face. Hence Ricoeur adopts a phenomenology of confession in order to isolate the authentic human experience beneath the interpretation. Thus by bracketing the philosophical concepts of rationalized confessions and looking instead to authentic utterances of confession he will seek to recreate the experience of fault in sympathetic imagination.

Again, this decision to employ a phenomenological method is thoroughly philosophical in nature. Now it ought to be clear what this designation entails. The attempt to isolate living experience from interpretation presupposes the priority of experience or consciousness over language and discourse. However perspicuous the

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.
validity of this presupposition appears to modern consciousness, it is simply assumed nonetheless. The problematic nature of presupposing a priority of experience to interpretation—indeed, of dichotomizing them—occurs to Ricoeur as he actually begins to analyze the confession of fault.

Ricoeur finds in his investigations that the relationship of confession to the living experience of fault is not at all what he expected it would be. It is not just that “the preferred language of fault appears to be indirect and based on imagery;” it appears that except in parables confession utters not a word. Thus it is not only the rationalized speculative discourse of the philosophers that operates within a network of symbols. Even the putatively spontaneous expressions of the religious consciousness take part in this symbolic network. This discovery will have profound consequences. “There is something quite astonishing in this,” Ricoeur reflects, “the consciousness of self seems to constitute itself at its lowest level by means of a symbolism and to work out an abstract language only subsequently, by means of a spontaneous hermeneutics of its primary symbols.”  

This discovery is astonishing indeed; it means that consciousness is not primarily a self-consciousness that freely chooses symbolic language as a means of expressing itself, as if symbolic expression were simply one possibility among others for the self. If anything, the traffic seems to move in the other direction: symbolism constitutes the consciousness of self. Better yet, the relationship between fault and confession cannot adequately be expressed in terms of cause and effect or antecedent and consequent. The utterance of confession is better understood as the event where fault emerges into human consciousness as fault. Utterance and conscious experience,

11 Ibid., 9.
therefore, are intimately bound together, perhaps structurally inseparable. This recognition not only redefines the relationship Ricoeur expected to find between confession and living experience, it thoroughly undermines a central presupposition of Ricoeur’s phenomenological method. It inspires, as well, an entirely different understanding of confession, language, and ultimately experience itself.

Rightly wary of the effect of philosophical concepts embedded in discourse, phenomenology would look instead to the things themselves, which in Ricoeur’s case is the experience of fault expressed in spontaneous utterance of confession. Since his analysis of confession led him to conclude that he can no longer oppose language and experience, however, a new understanding of confession and its relationship to the experience of fault begins to emerge. Ricoeur discovers that confession is not so much an expression of fault as it is the linguistically mediated event of the experience of fault. Put another way, confession is the coming-into-language of the self-consciousness of fault. This is an astonishing discovery because it is a discovery about the effect of language itself. It serves to undermine the very notion of critical method at its putative foundation in self-consciousness, not merely to express an interesting insight concerning the function of a certain species of religious utterance and its implications for the phenomenological method. We will see, in fact, that, as a model of consciousness, subjectivity is called radically into question because the consciousness of self at its most basic level is mediated by language. Hence Ricoeur’s expressed astonishment, and hence the radical implications that will follow for his own philosophical career.

Ricoeur’s initial attentiveness to confession is transformed by the revolutionary discovery that confession constitutes an event where the experience of fault comes to
consciousness precisely by coming into language. At base, the reconciliation in language of utterance and consciousness constitutes Ricoeur’s hermeneutic turn. The change this turn effects in Ricoeur’s project is subtle as it profound. While he will continue to direct his investigations to the utterance of confession, his understanding of the nature of language itself has been radically transformed. Language is no longer something one must look beneath or behind in order to discover a more fundamental experience. Language is rather something more like the trajectory one must look along in order to see the world opening before it.\textsuperscript{12} In short, language constitutes the very way our thinking must follow. The first chapter of SOE is devoted to tracing out the philosophical implications of his hermeneutic insight into the effect of language.

It is not simply Ricoeur’s understanding of utterance this is transformed, however; just as the character and significance of language is transformed in light of his hermeneutic discovery, so too is the character of experience and consciousness. Ricoeur looks first to the concept of living experience with which he initially intended to begin his phenomenology of confession. “[I]f, then, we begin with the interpretation of living experience we must not lose sight of the fact that that experience is abstract, in spite of its lifelike appearance.”\textsuperscript{13} “That experience” that we call “living experience” is an abstract concept, not a brute or simple fact. Thus, no bracketing is sufficient to isolate what is

\textsuperscript{12} This notion of language as the trajectory one must look along represents my attempt to combine two images that have influenced me greatly. The first is Ricoeur’s notion of the non-ostensive reference of the text from “What is a Text?” in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, edited and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, 1981). For Ricoeur, the text projects a possible world before itself and readings is the creative appropriation of this possible world. The other I found in C. S. Lewis’s “Meditation in a Toolshed,” which was originally published in The Coventry Evening Telegraph (July 17, 1945) and reprinted in God in the Dock (Eerdmans, 1970). Lewis considers the difference between look at the shaft of light coming in through a gap in the wall of a toolshed and looking along the shaft of light onto the world beyond the shed. In a fascinating resonance with Ricoeur, Lewis thinks the tragedy of modern thought is that it has perfected methods for looking at things at the expense of looking along them.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 10.
putatively living experience from the experience mediated by interpretation. Ricoeur explains: “we must never forget, either, that this experience is never immediate; it can be expressed only by means of the primary symbolisms that prepare the way for its treatment in myths and speculation.”\textsuperscript{14} There is no such thing as \textit{immediate} experience. It is always already interpreted—according to the very character of experience as such. Moreover, the very consciousness of self is itself “worked out in a spontaneous hermeneutics” of the symbolism inherent in language. This means that self-consciousness does not occupy the place of priority with respect to the world of possible experience and knowledge subjectivity imagines it to occupy. Rather, self-consciousness is the effect of our prior situation within linguistically mediated experience. This identification of the effect of language in experience and even consciousness is precisely what Ricoeur understands by the designation \textit{hermeneutic situation}.

It goes without saying that the basically hermeneutic character of experience and consciousness has implications that extend more generally to the philosophical project as such—indeed to the human project of understanding. If the consciousness of the self—the \textit{Cogito}—is the effect of a spontaneous hermeneutics of a primary symbolism and not somehow standing behind it, then it follows that the symbols and thus language are prior to reflection. Ricoeur expresses this inference in the form of a maxim: “\textit{symbols give rise to thought}.”\textsuperscript{15} The philosophical hermeneutics Ricoeur would come to practice throughout his career in various ways simply develops and elaborates upon the implications of this central insight.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 19, italics original.
The symbolic impetus of human thought constitutes what Ricoeur calls “our principal methodological bondage.”\textsuperscript{16} If the symbols operative in language are what give us something to think about in the first place, then, acknowledged or not, all philosophical reflection is a matter of following the symbols. Whatever methods we will practice will operate within their limits. As we have seen already, Ricoeur does not see the symbolic basis of thought as a restriction upon philosophical reflection, but as a gift—the “symbol gives” after all. For Ricoeur, following the symbols does not stifle thought, but gives rise to it. Therefore, when he speaks in terms of their being our principal methodological bondage, he is using irony to make an important point. The terms for receiving from symbols the gift of having something to think about is the renunciation of the claims to methodologically ensured objectivity. While our thought is not inhibited but set free by symbols, our methodological pretensions are chastened—and this can only be seen as bondage to modern consciousness. As soon as we admit that our thinking follows the symbols, Ricoeur writes, “we introduce a radical contingency into our discourse.”\textsuperscript{17} The word radical is key here. Admitting the priority of the symbol is not a matter of acknowledging bias or identifying presuppositions in the hopes that simply by acknowledging or identifying we have somehow transcended the contingency of our discourse. Rather, to follow the symbol is to acknowledge that the contingency of our discourse is incircumscribable. To see why this is the case, it is necessary to consider the various degrees of contingency introduced by this notion of the priority of the symbol.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
A discourse that follows the symbol is marked by contingency, first of all, because we enter a world in which a particular set of symbols is already present to us. Ricoeur calls this cultural contingency, referring to the fact that one always finds oneself within a given cultural-linguistic context. It is important to see, however, that our cultural-linguistic particularity actually implies a twofold limitation. The first limitation it implies is obvious and perhaps non-controversial: our discourse is limited because it oriented within a particular set of symbols. Ricoeur explains, “I do not know them all [i.e., all the symbols]; my field of investigation is oriented, and because it is oriented it is limited.”18 The second limitation is not so obvious, however: our particular situation means we are oriented toward our symbols, so to speak, and toward the other symbols we would encounter, in a particular way. Thus our orientation implies that our knowledge is inescapably limited. It implies as well that what is known is always already known from a particular angle, whether it is the foreign symbol we encounter or the familiar symbol we feel we know already.

Ricoeur reveals a further degree of contingency when inquires into the character of our inquiry itself. “By what is it [i.e., my field of investigation] oriented? Not only by my own situation in the universe of symbols, but, paradoxically, by the historical, geographical, cultural origin of the philosophical question itself.”19 Not just our knowledge, but our inquiry is contingent. “The philosopher,” writes Ricoeur, “does not speak from nowhere, but from the depths of his Greek memory.”20 There exists a

18 Ibid., 19-20.
19 Ibid., 20.
20 Ibid.
particular set of symbols that we know, but we have always known them as the Greeks know them—as the response to a particular, contingent set of questions that form the origin of our discourse. Moreover, the radical nature of the contingency of our discourse is due in part to the fact that inquiry itself is a particular means of orientation. “The fact that the Greek question is situated at the beginning,” Ricoeur explains, “orients the human space of religions which is open to philosophical investigation.”21 In addition to the questions that we have inherited, the very fact that we orient toward the world via inquiry, determines the horizon for what is possible for us.

Because of the effect of language and the priority of the symbol, all discourse and all inquiry is motivated, always already situated with respect to what it would inquire into. Indeed, even inquiry itself marks out a distinct orientation toward the world. Hence Ricoeur’s notion of the incircumscribable contingency of the discourse that would follow the symbol. For Ricoeur, however, admitting the contingency of our discourse is not a dead-end for philosophical reflection, though it does indicate a detour. He writes: “it is necessary to renounce the chimera of a philosophy without presuppositions and begin from a full language.”22 Barred from the outset is any notion that we can somehow transcend that which we would seek to understand, or the notion that it is the passive object of our subjectivity. Instead we must begin from a full a language, where symbols like philosophical first principles are always already there for us to begin from. Unlike first principles, however, a full language is not simply ready to hand for philosophical speculation; our thought is always a response to what has already addressed us in

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., italics original.
language. Renouncing the modern chimera of non-situated objectivity, therefore, Ricoeur will begin within an interpreted language. He will seek neither critically nor naively to look at or beneath language, but to look along its trajectory or within its horizon. In this way, Ricoeur’s philosophical investigations are less a matter of inquiry and more like learning to follow the question.²³

While a full discussion of this new hermeneutical discipline of following the question must wait until the conclusion of the second part of this thesis, it is clear that that discipline will follow a full language and for the sacrifices of objectivity promises great return in terms of understanding and self-knowledge. With this in view, we are now in a position to consider Ricoeur’s notion of the alienation implicit in modern thought. Returning to the quotation we excerpted at the beginning of this chapter, we find that the scandal of contingency is what is at issue for Ricoeur.

Shall we be astonished, shall we be scandalized by the contingent constitution of our memory? But contingency is not only the inescapable infirmity of the dialogue between philosophy and its ‘other’; it inhabits the history of philosophy itself; it breaks the sequence which that history forms with itself; the springing up of thinkers and their works is unforeseeable; it is always in the midst of contingency that rational sequences must be detected. Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated ‘objectivity’ would at the most know everything, but would understand nothing. In truth, he would seek nothing, not being motivated by concern about any question.²⁴

There are several layers to the alienation Ricoeur identifies, but the most basic appears to be the dichotomy of knowledge and understanding. Elsewhere he speaks of the opposition of explanation and understanding as being the fundamental tension in modern

²³ In the third part of this thesis below, we develop dialectic in terms of the art of following the question. It is, we argue, fundamental to a hermeneutic pedagogy of interdisciplinarity.

²⁴ Ibid., 24.
thought. Opting for explanation at the expense of understanding is an alienation because it amounts to non-personal knowing—standing apart from the game, not being at play, not engaged, not committed, and unable to position itself with respect to what it would know. Ultimately, the *I think* is reduced simply to *thinking*. A further layer of alienation is related to that entailed in the ideal of impersonal knowledge, which we might characterize in terms of alienation from interest or concern. Without a prior disposition or orientation—not to mention a pressing issue or practical concern—it is difficult to account for the motivation that would lead to inquiry in the first place. For Ricoeur this applies even to the motivation to pursue a non-situated objectivity. Beneath each of these layers, however, is a more basic existential alienation, though Ricoeur only hints at it here. Gadamer writes in the preface to *Truth and Method* that modern consciousness is quickly becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness. Perhaps in these words we hear only a vague critique of idealism or other-worldliness, and fail to discern the radical critique of modern consciousness Gadamer intends. The terms utopian and eschatological, however, are carefully chosen to express the ideal implicit in modern consciousness of a knowledge that is completely removed from both space and time. When Ricoeur writes of the desire to escape the “contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in a non-situated ‘objectivity’ he is expressing a similar critique of modern consciousness.

In the previous section, we suggested that the impetus for interdisciplinarity is not a matter of disciplinary silos but an underlying experience of alienation implicit in a

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25 Paul Ricoeur, “What is a Text?,” 161. For Ricoeur, the task of hermeneutics is to reconcile the two, not simply to affirm understanding over and against explanation.

modern ontology of understanding. We identified as well the subject-object and active-passive dichotomies as key features of this ontology. As we have shown in the brief examination of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic turn in *SOE*, these dichotomies were initially impediments to his own study as well. So long as he approached the phenomenon of confession as an object to his subjective consciousness, and as being passive with respect to the implementation of his phenomenological method, the experience he sought behind the confession remained elusive. When, however, he admits a prior relationship to the experience he would understand—particularly his situation with respect to the symbolic character of the utterance under examination—not only does the subject-object dichotomy evaporate, but the more fundamental notion of a subjective consciousness standing apart and behind all experiences vanishes as well. Similarly, when Ricoeur admits of both the necessity and the gratuitousness of the priority of the symbol, the notion of trying to avoid the effect of conceptual sedimentation in language seems as fruitless as it is futile. Renouncing the chimera of a philosophy without presuppositions, therefore, critical method gives way to a discipline of following the symbols of a full language. Again, Ricoeur will develop this insight into a hermeneutic and interdisciplinary method, which we discuss at length in the third part of this thesis.

Ricoeur’s analysis of the hermeneutic situation as he encountered it in his philosophical investigations supports the notion that the experience of alienation is the impetus for interdisciplinarity in at least two ways. The first has to do with his concept of the role of method; the second is suggested by the resonance of how he sees contingency playing out with certain key interdisciplinary emphases. As the objective means of ensuring the validity of knowledge, method is a centerpiece of the modern project and
basic to disciplinarity. As Ricoeur has demonstrated, however, the ideal of standing apart from the game in this kind of non-situated objectivity is illusory, not simply ineffective. At best mere method would deliver knowledge without understanding; in the final analysis, it would not have the resources to motivate inquiry at all. In either case, the effect is alienation. In contrast to modern method’s pretensions to objectivity is the hermeneutic way suggested by Ricoeur. Returning to the passage quoted at length above, it is the way that seeks for rational sequences within the contingencies of historical encounters. It is situated with respect to what it would know, it seeks to join the game of understanding, and it allows its inquiry to be motivated and directed by contingent concerns and questions. In the introduction to this thesis we identified application, dialogue, and problem-focus as key interdisciplinary emphases, and their resonance with the alternative way Ricoeur suggests is clear.

Our study of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic turn in SOE has served to disclose items that are essential to the full development of a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity. The second part of this thesis is directed toward a detailed treatment of how a hermeneutic theory of experience is fully expressed and embodied in the interdisciplinary emphases of application, dialogue, and focus on the problem. Presently, however, we turn our attention to Gadamer’s discussion of the experience of alienation that is basic to modern consciousness. As we will see, Gadamer expands upon Ricoeur’s insights, and further confirms the notion that the experience of alienation is indeed the animating cause of interdisciplinarity.
Gadamer on the Alienation of the Modern Consciousness

Gadamer’s 1966 article, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” picks up very much where Ricoeur’s discussion of language in The Symbolism of Evil leaves off. Gadamer’s article seeks to give an account of what was at the time a preoccupation with reflection on language on the part of philosophy. “Why has the problem of language,” he asks, “come to occupy the same central position in current philosophical discussions that the concept of thought, or ‘thought thinking itself,’ held in philosophy a century and a half ago?” For Gadamer the answer lies in the growing recognition of what we might call the priority of language in human experience. “Language,” Gadamer writes, “is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world.”¹ This notion of linguistic priority is profoundly at odds with a dominant modern conception of human being, predicated upon the priority of self-consciousness with respect both to language and to experience of the world. Though Gadamer does not employ the term subjectivity in this article, this is precisely what he has in mind when he speaks of modern consciousness or modern experience. Stated more fully, therefore, Gadamer’s question is really asking why reflection on language—particularly in hermeneutic thought following Heidegger—has come to problematize modern consciousness and its privileged notion of subjectivity. Posed in this fashion, it is clear that this is not simply a question about language, but about the dynamics of the cultural milieu of late modernity that make us aware again of the problem of language.

Gadamer identifies alienation as a basic feature of modern experience. This alienation is most palpable in the radical disjunction we experience between “our natural

view of the world—the experience of the world we have as we simply live out our lives” and that “unassailable and anonymous authority that confronts us in the pronouncements of science.” It is important to note that modern science confronts our natural view of the world particularly in its pronouncements. For Gadamer, as we shall see, our everyday experience of the world is an event in language—indeed, language constitutes both our world and our being-in-the-world. The pronouncements of science, however, come “fixed in non-verbal signs”—hence, the experience of alienation. For Gadamer, how our experience of the world is related to modern science is “the central question of the modern age.” Thus the ultimate task of hermeneutics “is to reconnect the objective world of technology, which the sciences place at our disposal and discretion, with those fundamental orders of our being that are neither arbitrary nor manipulable by us, but rather simply demand our respect.”

Modern science, however, is a manifestation of a more basic modern project that seeks to place the objective world at our disposal through technology and lay it open to our knowledge via method. As Gadamer narrates at length in *Truth and Method*, the modern disciplines of the humanities have modeled themselves precisely according to the paradigm of the modern sciences. Admittedly, the technical jargon of disciplinary discourse only approximates the ideal of the fixed non-verbal signs of the modern sciences, but when coupled with critical methodology it admits something of the same anonymous and unassailable authority. Whereas hermeneutics is ultimately tasked with reconnecting the objective world of technology with those fundamental orders of our

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being that simply demand our respect, there is a more immediate task to which Gadamer directs his efforts in this article. It is the task of reconnecting the *objective world of human experience*, which the *modern disciplines* put at our discretion and disposal, with these fundamental orders of our being.

The first part of this task is to make us aware of the experience of alienation and to inquire into its character. To do this, Gadamer considers the alienation of modern consciousness as it encounters a work of art, a witness to past life, or a literary text. His selection of these three areas is not arbitrary; the aesthetic, historical, and philological disciplines form the core of the traditional humanities. In each, he shows that, while the modern subjective consciousness would seek to regulate the effect of art, human tradition, and language, their effect nevertheless precedes consciousness and everywhere undermines its attempt to maintain a non-situated objectivity. This recognition opens us to the possibility of a different consciousness. This point is especially important to note; for the alienation of modern consciousness is not so much an alienation from the work of art, human tradition, or text *per se*, as it is an alienation from our own experience of the relationship we always already have with what we would seek to know through our critical method or judgment. The second part of the hermeneutic task, therefore, is to rehabilitate the consciousness that is effected by history, not to develop a method that would somehow overcome the alienation of modern consciousness. As the phrase suggests, this rehabilitation will mean making ourselves at home again in world constituted by language. The foregrounded prejudice, in fact, will come to displace critical judgment as the basic condition for experiencing and understanding.

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The aim of the present section of our study is threefold: to see that the experience of alienation is indeed implicit in the modern disciplines, to show how this alienation is necessarily entailed precisely by the modern consciousness the disciplines take for granted, and to understand Gadamer’s claim that problem of alienation is not a problem of method at all, but of our relationship to those fundamental orders of our being that simply demand our respect. Given the larger goals of the first part of this thesis, namely, the identification of the experience of alienation as the basic impetus for interdisciplinarity, we are here most concerned with the first two aims. The third anticipates the interpretation of interdisciplinarity in terms of a theory of hermeneutic experience that will occupy the second part of this thesis.

Gadamer begins his reflections on the hermeneutical problem with the experience of alienation of the aesthetic consciousness. While the point might be obvious, it is important to bear in mind that the aesthetic consciousness is the modern consciousness considered particularly as it experiences a work of art. The dynamics disclosed in the encounter of modern consciousness with art are also at work in its historical and literary experience as well. As such, Gadamer’s discussion of aesthetic consciousness provides frames of reference for his treatment of both historical consciousness and hermeneutical consciousness.

The aesthetic consciousness seeks to regulate its relationship to the artistic form via aesthetic judgment, or, better yet, it understands its relationship to a work of art to consist in aesthetic judgment. Gadamer explains: “we are related [to a work of art] in such a way that the judgment we make decides in the end regarding the expressive power and validity of what we judge. What we reject has nothing to say to us—or we reject it
because it has nothing to say to us.”⁵ This is not to say that aesthetic consciousness fails to appreciate the fact that most people’s experience of art is naïve or uncritical. Quite the contrary, this common experience is precisely what the aesthetic judgment must ensure against. For aesthetic consciousness, it is only a critical evaluation of a work’s aesthetic quality that guarantees the validity of its judgment concerning a given work.

Note the ontology of understanding implied in aesthetic consciousness. The consciousness is a subjectivity, for whom the work of art is a passive object of judgment. Aesthetic consciousness does not encounter the work of art in a world it shares together with the work and with others, but as a potential object of aesthetic experience. Indeed, for aesthetic consciousness, the work of art must be rigorously abstracted from such original contexts if it is to be judged properly.⁶ Moreover, beyond the opposition of subject-object there is an active-passive dichotomy as well. While the work of art or the artistic form certainly exhibits expressive power, the aesthetic consciousness is always and everywhere prior to this expression and regulates its relationship to it by an analysis of the work’s aesthetic quality. The “aesthetic consciousness,” writes Gadamer, “is the experiencing (erlebende) center from which everything called art is measured.”⁷ In this way, the work of art’s effect is due not to the work itself but to the rational volition of

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⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Gadamer terms this process of abstraction aesthetic differentiation. He writes: “What we call a work of art and experience (erleben) aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the ‘pure work of art.’ In performing this abstraction, aesthetic consciousness performs a task that is positive in itself. It shows what a pure work of art is, and allows it to exist in its own right. I call this ‘aesthetic differentiation’” (Truth and Method, 74).

⁷ Idem, Truth and Method, 74.
aesthetic consciousness. Gadamer employs the term *aesthetic sovereignty* to describe this priority of consciousness, and of conscious judgment, over the effect of the work of art.

The aesthetic consciousness pays a price to maintain its sovereignty, however; as Gadamer explains: “The aesthetic sovereignty that claims its rights in the experience of art represents an alienation when compared to the authentic experience that confronts us in the form of art itself.”

This alienation is manifold and multifaceted, beginning in alienation of the consciousness from the work of art and resulting ultimately in closing of an entire world of experience. As Gadamer notes, the alienation comes most clearly into view in comparison with the authentic experience that confronts us in the artistic form. To pose the question in terms adopted from our discussion above, we might ask: what orders of our being confront us in the artistic form that are neither arbitrary nor manipulable by us, but rather simply demand our respect? A full answer to this question touches on the cosmological, historical, existential, and communal aspects of human experience. In each way, however, the answer turns on the fact that the experience is indeed a confrontation—art addresses us in a world we already share. The authentic experience of a work of art thus radically undermines aesthetic sovereignty as well as the aesthetic differentiation aesthetic consciousness presupposes.

To discover the authentic experience of a work of art, Gadamer turns first to the experience of what he identifies as “the religiously vital cultures of the past.” What he finds, particularly in the tradition coming from the Greeks, is that the work of art speaks with “original and unquestioned authority” within a diaphanous world, rather than the

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9 See note 6.
objective world mediated by aesthetic judgment. This experience of the authority of the work of art accounts for the historical connection between the religious and the aesthetic in that tradition. Gadamer makes two further observations about this authority that will have radical implications:

Is it not true that when a work of art has seized us it no longer leaves us the freedom to push it away from us once again and to accept or reject it on our own terms? And is it not also true that these artistic creations, which come down through the millennia, were not created for such aesthetic acceptance or rejection?¹⁰

Authentic experience reveals that the work of art is not the passive object of the sovereign aesthetic judgment, nor was it ever intended to be encountered as such. The implications Gadamer draws from these two observations are profound. Because the work of art seizes us, our relationship to the work is always prior to the consciousness of self over and against the work as an object of aesthetic judgment. The question, therefore, is not whether a given object will have anything to say to us, but what we will say in response to what has already addressed us in the work. Moreover, because the work of art was never created to be the object of aesthetic judgment in the first place, it does not submit to our terms but rather demands that we respond to it on its own terms. Gadamer’s point here is subtle, but essential to his argument: art has its own teleology.¹¹ Failure on the part of aesthetic consciousness to perceive this teleology does not stifle its effect, however; it simply makes aesthetic consciousness insensitive to it. As a model, therefore,

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¹¹ There is resonance here with Heidegger’s notion of the teleology of technology. It is not technology per se that imperils human freedom; it is our tendency to think of it simply as a tool that is ready-to-hand. Likewise, our alienation from the work of art consists in the aesthetic consciousness’ inability to perceive the work, so to speak, of the work of art.
subjectivity does not have the resources to account for aesthetic experience at its most basic level.

If not for aesthetic judgment, for what then was a work of art created? The answer to this question discloses a further dimension of authentic experience. Gadamer responds that, throughout human tradition, it is clear that “[the artistic] creation should be received in terms of what it says and presents and that it should have its place in the world where men live together.”\(^\text{12}\) Note that this purpose extends to how the work of art exercises its authority, and to how it does so within a world and in the midst of human community. The work of art seizes upon us and we find ourselves with others in a world constituted around the work. Importantly, this experience of human community transcends not only the subject-object dichotomy of subjectivity but temporal distance as well. Gadamer speaks of “the splendid contemporaneousness that we gain through art with so many human worlds.”\(^\text{13}\) For Gadamer, this is not only a matter of encountering the human quality of an object from the past; the experience of a work of art is a transformation into communion.\(^\text{14}\) Of course, the aesthetic consciousness finds itself as part of a community as well. Gadamer remarks wryly, however, that the community constituted by an

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^\text{14}\) See especially Truth and Method, Part One, 2.1.a-2.1.b. Gadamer seeks to capture the ontological character of the dynamics of the experience of a work of art with the phrases transformation into structure or transformation into communion. His point is that, as in the creation of a painting or poem, where materials are gathered and organized into a work of art, so too in aesthetic experience, the artist, the creation, and the audience, are transformed into an ontologically distinct structure. Neither the poem, the painting, nor the event, is properly understood simply as a composite of the elements gathered together.
authentic experience of art is “always distinguishable from the cultured society that is informed and terrorized by art criticism.”  

Beyond the cosmological, the human, and the historical, there is a perhaps more basic dimension of authentic aesthetic experience. It illustrates the existential aspect of the alienation of aesthetic consciousness. At the most basic level what we are confronted with in aesthetic experience, for Gadamer, is “the immediate truth-claim that proceeds from the work of art itself.” Aesthetic sovereignty would suppress the claim of the work of art; for we can only maintain the priority of judgment, as Gadamer explains, “when we have withdrawn ourselves and are no longer open to the immediate claim of that which grasps us.” Yet, this fails to perceive both the effect of the “work of art [which] has seized us” as well as character of that which seizes us. While aesthetic consciousness would judge the aesthetic qualities it discerns, authentic experience responds to a claim the work of art makes.

We mentioned that the alienation of the aesthetic consciousness is manifold and multifaceted, beginning in alienation from the work of art itself and resulting in the loss of an entire world of experience. In this experience we are confronted with the immediate truth-claim of the work of art. It seizes upon us, leaving us no longer free to accept or reject the experience, only to respond. Responding, we find ourselves in a world where human community is constituted around the work. Nor is this experience of belonging to human community bound to the specific collection of people who happen to be located around the work at a given time; the work of art cultivates an experience of  

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15 Ibid., 5.

16 Ibid.
contemporaneity with a number of human worlds, past and present. Seeking to regulate its relationship to the work of art via critical judgment, however, the aesthetic consciousness would suppress these more fundamental orders of our being that operate in aesthetic experience. A coherent picture of the character of the alienation of aesthetic consciousness is now beginning to emerge. Even so, it is important to bear in mind that Gadamer is not simply opposing authentic aesthetic experience to the experience of aesthetic consciousness, as if the choice is between non-situated objective judgment and initial openness to the effect of the artistic form. The work of art will have its effect, the question is whether we are open to it or alienated from it. Indeed, it is precisely in this respect that our alienation consists: the aesthetic consciousness would make us insensitive to that which is always already present to us, and is spite of which we claim our rights in aesthetic experience.

As we turn from the experience of a work of art to the encounter with historical tradition, we find that the withdrawal of oneself, implicit in the sovereign operation of aesthetic consciousness, is more explicitly foregrounded in the historical consciousness. The ideal here is practicing “the noble and slowly perfected art of holding ourselves at a critical distance in dealing with witness to past life.”\(^\text{17}\) To be understood properly, witnesses to past life must be considered according to the standards of their own time and on their own terms. At first glance this ideal seems to be in opposition to the aesthetic consciousness that seeks to submit a work to aesthetic judgment. In reality, however, it is precisely the same dynamic. Once it has abstracted the work of art from all of its contexts, aesthetic consciousness determines its relationship to the work on the basis of

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.
an analysis of its qualities. Similarly, historical consciousness seeks to determine its relationship to historical tradition on the basis of the evidence itself. Thus while their concerns seem to differ on the surface—the problem for art is subjective taste, and for history it is the influence of contemporary interests or biases—in each case, the modern consciousness seeks to claim its rights and maintain it priority with respect to experience by guarding against prejudice and authority. “[T]he historical consciousness,” Gadamer explains, “has the task of understanding all the witnesses of a past time out of the spirit of that time, of extricating them from the preoccupations of our own present life, and of knowing, without moral smugness, the past as a human phenomenon.” Present concerns, motivations, and prejudices, therefore, are precisely what must be excluded if historical knowledge is to be valid. Indeed, historical consciousness must abstract the witnesses to the past from all temporal associations, past, present, or future. The witnesses must speak for themselves; historical consciousness will not tolerate any leading by the interrogator. Nowhere is this ideal of historical understanding expressed more clearly than in Ranke’s celebrated notion of “extinguishing of the individual” before the historical evidence.

Gadamer agrees that the aim of “controlling the prejudices of our own present to such an extent that we do not misunderstand the witnesses of the past” is venerable so far as it goes. Historical consciousness is nevertheless fundamentally flawed, he argues, for two reasons. First, however laudable, maintaining one’s critical distance remains an elusive goal. Gadamer notes:

Even in those masterworks of historical scholarship that seem to be the very consummation of the extinguishing of the individual demanded by Ranke, it is still an unquestioned principle of our scientific experience that
we can classify these works with unfailing accuracy in terms of the political tendencies of the time in which they were written.\textsuperscript{18}

Try as we may, what appears to be critical distance in our own present will appear woefully uncritical to another age. In this way, what we take for granted as a basic principle of self-knowledge—namely, that we are often unaware of our own motivations—historical consciousness excludes systematically when it comes to scholarship. Even the most rigorous critics are often secretly in league with one another because of their share in the spirit of the age. Furthermore, even if possible the extrication of historical understanding from present concerns or values is undesirable; it amounts to an abdication of the distinctly human office of exercising judgment. Again, Gadamer explains:

\begin{quote}
[T]he modern mind has become so accustomed to considering things in ever different and changing lights that it is blinded and incapable of arriving at an opinion of its own regarding the objects it studies. It is unable to determine its own position vis-à-vis what confronts it.
\end{quote}

The distinctly human character of historical understanding is what is at stake in historical consciousness; for implicit in historical consciousness is the elimination of human opinion and evaluation. Taken together, the undesirability and impossibility of regulating our relationship to historical tradition from a critical distance point to the fact, for Gadamer, that “the whole reality of historical experience does not find expression in the mastery of the historical method.”\textsuperscript{19}

As with aesthetic consciousness above, the alienation of the historical consciousness is perceived most clearly in the authentic experience that confronts one in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
the actual encounter with historical tradition. Gadamer writes how “the great and productive achievements of scholarship always preserve something of the splendid magic of immediately mirroring the present in the past and the past in the present.” Historical experience is thus most authentic when our present concerns—and even our prejudices—take the form of productive questions to ask of historical tradition. In this way, far from stifling historical understanding, our very situatedness constitutes our openness to the world. Historical tradition’s relevance becomes fully visible in the light of present concerns. As Gadamer has observed already, this splendid magic is often performed in spite of the conscious intentions of the scholar. This observation indicates as well the character of the alienation of the historical consciousness: whether acknowledged or not, the effect of historical tradition not only everywhere precedes historical understanding; it is its condition of possibility. Gadamer explains:

[T]he great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future. History is only present to us in light of our futurity. Here we have all learned from Heidegger, for he exhibited precisely the primacy of futurity for our possible recollection and retention, and for the whole of our history.

Seeking to escape the effect of history entirely, which is impossible, would mean pursuing “only insignificant things in historical scholarship”20 or abdicating entirely the human office of having positioning ourselves and having an opinion with respect to what confronts us.

Turning finally to the alienation of the modern consciousness in the experience of interpretation, Gadamer discovers in hermeneutical consciousness both similarities with and subtle differences from what he encountered in historical consciousness and aesthetic

20 Ibid., italics original.
consciousness. It is clear from our discussion so far that the alienation of the modern consciousness in both aesthetic and historical experience consists in a basic denial that consciousness already stands in relationship to what it imagines to be an object of its acceptance or rejection. For aesthetic consciousness, this is to deny that our aesthetic judgment is always a response to what has already seized us. Similarly, the historical consciousness denies that historical understanding is always motivated by present concerns and situated with respect to what it would seek to understand. Moreover, both aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness understand the relationship to the putative object of their experience to be a problem, respectively, of judgment or method.

While failing to break decisively with the dichotomies of aesthetic consciousness or historical consciousness, hermeneutical consciousness nevertheless modifies the character of these dichotomies significantly. In fact, Gadamer does not see hermeneutical consciousness as something basically to be transcended. He writes rather that it is “a more comprehensive possibility that we must develop.”

He identifies a genuine insight that distinguishes hermeneutic consciousness. Where both the aesthetic and the historical consciousness seek to limit the effect of their relative objects of inquiry, hermeneutic consciousness seeks rather to arrive at an understanding. There are actually two insights bound up here. The first is that hermeneutics imagines itself as encountering subjects rather than objects of inquiry. Substituting I and Thou for subject and object, hermeneutical consciousness engages the task of interpretation as inter-subjectivity. It has every reason to expect, therefore, that it will be addressed by the texts or literary materials it encounters. Thus, and this is the...
second insight, hermeneutical consciousness understands that interpretation is precisely a matter of situating oneself with respect to what confronts one. This marks a significant departure from the ideals either of aesthetic differentiation or extinguishing of the individual. It follows that the method hermeneutical consciousness employs will differ significantly as well, for the goal cannot be to guarantee knowledge of an object, but to avoid misunderstanding one with whom one is speaking. This accounts for Schleiermacher’s famous description of the task of hermeneutics as “the art of avoiding misunderstanding.”

The genuine insight notwithstanding, hermeneutical consciousness also suffers from what Gadamer describes as the epistemological truncation implicit in modern science. In terms of our argument so far, this is to say that hermeneutical consciousness reduces the hermeneutical problem to a problem of epistemology. To understand Gadamer’s critique it is necessary, first of all, to see that intersubjectivity is still a subjectivity. Even though what hermeneutical consciousness encounters is not a passive object, but a subject that would address it, both of the subjects in question are still, as Gadamer explains, “isolated, substantial realities.” As a consciousness, the hermeneutical consciousness understands itself to be prior to its encounter with the subject that it would not misunderstand. Moreover, while the hermeneutical I expects to be addressed by its Thou, it understands this relationship to be fundamentally epistemological in character. The I-Thou relationship consists in understanding, and understanding is dependent upon method. That this method is not understood as a

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
guarantee of knowledge, as in modern science, but as a means of ensuring against misunderstanding, makes no difference in the final analysis. The truncation of hermeneutical consciousness lies in this reduction of the hermeneutical problem to a problem of epistemology and method. For hermeneutical consciousness, like each manifestation of modern consciousness we have considered, our being in the world is essentially epistemological—a problem of knowledge that must be addressed by method. As such, hermeneutical consciousness, at least as it is has been developed hitherto, leaves us alienated with respect to those fundamental orders of our being that we cannot manipulate but must simply respect. It is important now to place this insight in the larger context of this section of the thesis.

A coherent picture of the alienation of modern consciousness is beginning to come into focus from our studies of Ricoeur and Gadamer. While manifold in its effects, the alienation of modern consciousness originates in subjectivity. Ricoeur shows how the modern consciousness imagines itself to be prior with respect to both language and experience, while Gadamer considers how this subjective consciousness operates specifically in aesthetic, historical, and hermeneutical experience. A similar dynamic is discernable in each area. Whether it is the subject-object dichotomy of aesthetic consciousness or historical consciousness, or the intersubjectivity of the hermeneutical consciousness, modern consciousness always and everywhere begins from the concept of isolated, substantial realities to which all relatedness is secondary. Aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness, for example, attend to the work of art or the historical witness as an essentially distinct object, while hermeneutical consciousness considers a text as a distinct other—a thou—whom it is always possible to misunderstand.
Even the phenomenological method Ricoeur initially employed presupposes a subjective consciousness existing behind or beneath the language of confession. Subjectivity, therefore, characterizes modern consciousness at its most basic level. Ironically, subjectivity is also the basic structural element in its alienation.

The distinctly modern character of modern consciousness, in fact, derives from its conception of the character of its subjectivity and the applications it makes accordingly. That is to say, there is both an ontological and methodological dimension to the subjectivity of modern consciousness. As we have noted already, modern consciousness considers itself and all other subjects and objects of its experience to be isolated, substantial realities. Any relationship among subjects or objects is secondary and accidental to this basic ontological isolation. Modern consciousness, however, does not conceive of this isolation to have the character of alienation. In fact, a key function of methodology is to maintain this isolation in the form of a critical distance that ensures against the effects of prejudice, bias, or misunderstanding.

We have already witnessed the methodological and ontological dimensions of subjectivity at various points in our study. With aesthetic consciousness, this means not only approaching the work as an object of experience but abstracting it from its context in order to encounter it purely as work of art. Aesthetic consciousness hopes thereby to guarantee that its relationship to the work of art is regulated by a critical evaluation of the work’s aesthetic qualities. Similarly, the historical consciousness seeks to maintain a non-situated objectivity with respect to a given witness of historical tradition in order to encounter it simply as past and not as something that has contributed to the consciousness of the historian. As we have just considered, hermeneutical consciousness makes
significant advances over aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness in each of these respects. Nevertheless, it fails decisively to break with subjectivity in either its ontological or methodological dimensions.

As important as the ontological dimension of subjectivity is—especially in terms of the priority of consciousness—the methodological implications of subjectivity indicate what is most characteristically modern in modern consciousness. Modernity understands establishing and regulating the relationship of the subjective consciousness to all other subjects or objects of thought to be a problem of method. We can observe this characteristic in Ricoeur’s initial attempt to overcome the sedimentation of concepts in the language of confession by a phenomenological method. Where, by bracketing the theological and philosophical content and attending to the spontaneous language of confession, he hoped to discover the uninterpreted, and thus putatively authentic, experience of fault. Similarly, we can observe it in the method of aesthetic differentiation and exercise of judgment employed by the aesthetic consciousness, and the historical method employed by historical consciousness. Hermeneutical consciousness exemplifies the same characteristic as it considers avoiding misunderstanding to be a problem of method, though the method is somewhat more complex. As Gadamer explains, the hermeneutical consciousness must proceed “by a controlled procedure of historical training, by historical criticism, and by a controllable method in connection with the powers of psychological empathy.”

24 Albeit different in subject matter and intention, each serves to illustrate the priority of method that is characteristic of modern consciousness.

24 Ibid., 8.
It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the problem of method is not simply a feature of modern consciousness; it is its mode of operation. Method, therefore, together with subjectivity and the priority of the consciousness, constitute the basic structure of modern consciousness as we have developed it in this thesis. Thus, to admit of a relationship to a work of art that precedes aesthetic consciousness, and that “has already performed our possibility for aesthetic judgment,” to admit that “the great horizon of the past…influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future,” even in our encounter with a witness to human history, and to admit an understanding of a text or religious experience that is not regulated by method but which nevertheless makes a valid claim to knowledge and to truth, is to suppose a different consciousness. Indeed, it is to suppose an alternative ontology of understanding, which will displace the modern notions of subjectivity, priority of consciousness, and centrality of method that we have identified as the root causes of the experience of alienation. This is precisely what Ricouer claims when he speaks about thought following the symbol or of philosophical reflection proceeding from a full language. It is also what Gadamer repeatedly opposed to modern consciousness in the authentic experience of a work of art, in genuine historical understanding, and even in the experience of misunderstanding an interlocutor. Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience, as we discuss it at length in the next section of the thesis, is devoted explicitly to developing the contours of this alternative ontology.

Before turning to Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience, however, there are still two points that we must solidify. First of all, in anticipation of the critique of romanticism, it is necessary to clarify the intention of Gadamer’s notion of authentic
experience. When we described the authentic experience of the work of art in terms of being led by its original and unquestioned authority and not by analysis of the work’s aesthetic quality, this was not to relegate aesthetic judgment to the realm of subjective taste. This is owing to no other reason than that being seized by a work is not at all a matter of subjective taste. It is rather the initial response to the truth-claim or authority of the work of art. The fact that one is drawn to or captivated by a work cannot, of course, be the final word—but it must be the first word if authentic experience is indeed to take place. Again, this opposition of authentic experience to aesthetic judgment is not binary, as if the choice were between maintaining a non-situated posture of objective judgment and experiencing the effect of the artistic form. The work of art will have its effect. The question is whether we are open to it or alienated from it. Though we must develop this point in some detail, it is nevertheless important to note here that hermeneutics would not seek to cultivate unrefined or uncritical aesthetic judgment. Being seized by the immediate truth-claim of the work of art and seeking to respond to it rather than suppress it is not a matter of judgment at all. It is, as we have seen, simply a matter of respect. Rather, hermeneutics would seek to undermine the notion that aesthetic judgment is what secures our relationship to the work of art in the first place.

The same is true for historical understanding. Allowing one’s historical inquiry to be directed by present concerns—indeed, by prejudice, properly understood—rather than by the putatively controlled methods of historical inquiry, is not to do violence to the historical witness. Again, this is for no other reason than that present concerns and prejudices constitute our very conditions of openness to historical understanding. Like our response to the claim addressed to us in the work of art, hermeneutics would not
claim that prejudice should operate as a kind of quasi-critical judgment. Being oriented toward a witness to past life and seeking to situate oneself with respect to it rather than suppress one’s orientation is not a matter of judgment at all. Prejudices, we will see, are places to begin or points of contact—whether we acknowledge their effect or not. 25

The other point to solidify concerns what we might call the economic dimensions of the critique of modern consciousness. 26 To this point we have only discussed the problem of modern consciousness in terms of the ontology of understanding. Yet, as both Ricoeur and Gadamer have indicated in different ways, modern consciousness suffers not only from the alienation of subjectivity but from its exile from language as “the real mode of operation of our whole human experience of the world.” 27 Our turn from modern consciousness to a rehabilitation of the consciousness effected by history will be both the recovery of a distinct mode of consciousness as well as a rehabilitation—a return home—of that consciousness in language. Following Gadamer and Ricoeur, we hope to have shown that this is not even a choice at the ontological level; for we all dwell in language. The basic shape of the alienation of modern consciousness is its failure to respect that economy—the house rules, as it were, of language. The notion that hermeneutic and thus interdisciplinary experience operates within an economy of language is foundational for the remainder of this thesis.

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25 We explore this claim in further detail below in our discussion of Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience.


PART II.

RADICALIZING CHARACTERISTIC INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICES IN LIGHT OF A THEORY OF HERMENEUTIC EXPERIENCE
The first part of this thesis sought to relocate interdisciplinary theory from the modern conceptual frames of a disciplinary model to the dynamics of hermeneutic experience. We argued that the alienation of modern consciousness rather than the existence of disciplinary “silos” animates the interdisciplinary critique of disciplinarity. The specifically modern character of the modern consciousness owes, as the term suggests, to the privileging of subjective consciousness over experience, and the reduction of knowledge to a problem of method. We increasingly used the term modern ontology of understanding in order to capture all of these facets of the experience of modern consciousness. The alienation implicit in a modern ontology of understanding is twofold: as subjectivity, modern consciousness presupposes isolation; because it reduces the problem of knowledge to method, it is unable to be receptive to all the ways its subjectivity is ruptured. As the basic structures of academic life and social organization in the modern academy, disciplines embody this modern ontology of understanding both in terms of subjective consciousness and the imposition of method as the means of guaranteeing knowledge—hence the experience of alienation.

Since interdisciplinarity arises within the same basic conceptual frames as disciplinarity, however, it has understood neither the basis of its own critique of disciplinarity, let alone the significance of its own insights and practices. We addressed the hermeneutic nature of the interdisciplinary critique in the first part of this thesis in order to remove interdisciplinary theory from these conceptual frames. In the second part, we seek to relocate the interdisciplinary phenomenon within the dynamics of hermeneutic experience. What follows, therefore, is an elucidation of a hermeneutic theory of interdisciplinarity and an interpretation of interdisciplinary practice in light of it. A
hermeneutic theory of interdisciplinarity seeks to give expression to the alternative ontology of understanding disclosed in our investigations into the alienation of modern consciousness. We propose the neologism *integrity*\(^1\) to express the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience. The interpretation of interdisciplinary practice has two distinct though intimately related parts. The first, which we take up in this second part of the thesis, is the radicalization of the characteristic interdisciplinary practices of orientation toward the problem, application, and dialogue. The second, which we address in the third part, is the realization of the liberal study of the humanities as a pedagogy for cultivating interdisciplinary experience.

**Gadamer’s Theory of Aesthetic Experience**

A study of Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience in *Truth and Method* (*TM*) is central to this section. From the prefaces of *TM*\(^2\) we discover Gadamer’s aim of providing an account of a kind of understanding that undermines subjectivity and transcends method by a confrontation of the truth of remembrance. In Part One of *TM*, Gadamer brings to light basic features of hermeneutic experience in his reflections upon play, aesthetic experience, and historical understanding. His notions of the self-presentation of play, participation and total mediation, as well as transformation into structure are especially important in this regard. Gadamer elucidates the elements of a theory of hermeneutic experience in Part Two of *TM*. Following Heidegger’s insight concerning the fore-structure of consciousness, Gadamer develops his notion of the

\(^1\) In the process of writing the present thesis, I became aware that the neologism integrity is not original to my work. It was coined by Jacques Demorgon in *L’histoire interculturelle des sociétés.* (Paris, Éd. Anthropos, coll. Exploration interculturelle et science sociale, 2e éd. rev. et augm., 2002), 304. However, it is important to note that, although stemming from reflection on related dynamics, we use the term in significantly different ways.

\(^2\) Specifically, the prefaces to the first and second German editions.
productive use of prejudice. His disclosure of the *historically-effected consciousness* (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein) as an alternative to the modern consciousness predicated on subjectivity and the *fusion of horizons* (Horizontverschmelzung) as an alternative to critical methodology are key in this regard. Cultivating a historically-effected consciousness that experiences understanding as the fusion of horizons is precisely what we mean by realizing the interity of interdisciplinarity. Intery, as we will see, provides the context for developing the radical significance of application and dialogue and realizing the priority, not of the problem, but of the question.

The initial insight that led to the project of a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity comes from Gadamer’s forward to the second German edition of *TM*. Like many authors whose work has come into later edition, Gadamer seeks both to clarify his original aims in writing and to reply to his critics. With the proponents of technocratic modernity to the right and the prophets of the cosmic night of the forgetfulness of being to the left, there appears to be little room for the kind of hermeneutics Gadamer would practice in this great work. Reflecting on his unique, and perhaps uniquely precarious position, however, Gadamer makes a claim for hermeneutics’ existence that effectively opens this space, addressing those to right and left. He also announces a project that is not directly carried out in *TM* when he writes:

> What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now. The philosopher, of all people, must, I think, be aware of the tension between what he claims to achieve and the reality in which he finds himself. *The hermeneutic consciousness, which must be awakened and kept awake,* recognizes that in the age of science philosophy’s claim of superiority has something chimerical and unreal about it. But though the will of man is more than ever intensifying its criticism of what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness, the
hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront [entgegensetzen] that will with something of the truth of remembrance [der Wahrheit des Erinnerns]: with what is still and ever again real.3

Note first Gadamer’s characterization of modern consciousness as a critical consciousness. It seeks to establish its subjectivity—to ground itself—epistemologically through rational method. Thus the scope of its critique extends to include anything that cannot be methodically guaranteed, not only tradition, but all witness to past human life—art, literature, even language itself. The effect of the scope and intensity of this critique is no less than that modern consciousness is at the point of ceasing to be human consciousness at all. An apocalyptic claim, no doubt, but this is precisely what is entailed by its utopian or eschatological character, literally, its becoming a consciousness no longer bound either to space or time. As the living being that exists in language,4 human being is situated in space and time from the ground up. Modern consciousness does not arrive here by rational necessity, however, as perhaps a modern narrative of ascent would lead us to believe, but by human will. Thus modernity’s rigorous critique of human tradition follows from a series of decisions. The response to it must likewise be a decision. Herein lies Gadamer’s criticism of Heidegger’s fundamental questioning. It is the human will that needs be addressed, not simply its epistemology or ontology. Awakening the hermeneutic consciousness and keeping it vigilant, is for Gadamer a matter of will.

Gadamer readily agrees that the prospects for human being in the world are rather bleak given the logic of technocratic modernity. The full realization of the nihilism of

3 TM, xxxiv.

enlightenment prophesied by Nietzsche, or of Heidegger’s cosmic night of the forgetfulness of being, seem truly to be imminent. Gadamer, however, doubts that the philosopher ought to play the role of prophet or preacher in such a context. At first glance his reasoning seems to be simply pragmatic. Given that modern science has so dominated thought that the erstwhile human task of thinking has been all but outsourced to technology, Gadamer would argue that the philosopher who discloses this state of affairs, of all people, ought to have an appreciation for how radically circumscribed his or her role truly is. Again, of all people, such a philosopher ought to have a keen appreciation for what is actually possible given this situation. Gadamer’s point here is practical indeed, but it is thoroughly according to principle and not merely pragmatic. If the characteristic problem with modern consciousness is that it attempts to remove itself from time and space, the philosophical response cannot afford to make the same error. Rather, the philosopher must be aware of what is possible, feasible, correct, here and now (in this place and at this time), and must seek to confront modern consciousness, not merely transcend it.

A few important items follow from this recognition. Above all it means the radical project of seeking to begin afresh from an entirely different ontology is not an option for Gadamer. Neither is the project of submitting modernity to fundamental questioning. In either case one involves oneself in the same utopian or eschatological project as the very modernity one would seek to subvert. For Gadamer, the only option is to engage modernity in dialogue, even if it takes the form of a confrontation; for sharing something in common is necessary even for confrontation. As we will see, Gadamer undertakes the project of confronting that will that would dismiss human tradition with
something of the truth of remembrance self-consciously from the position of what is shared. The truth of remembrance is something of a technical term, however; it is necessary to understand how Gadamer intends it in order fully to appreciate how it represents the way forward.

Gadamer explains that his investigations in *TM* “are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method,” and this, in part, is key to understanding what he means when he speaks of the truth of remembrance (*der Wahrheit des Erinnerns*). As he explores in *TM*, the distinct claim of the modern conscious is the universality of the domain of science, and thus the guarantee of truth on the basis of scientific method. The overwhelming effectiveness of scientific method for knowledge production, both in the sciences and the modern disciplines that have modeled themselves according to the sciences, is what has given rise to the modern consciousness. It is not surprising then that the modern consciousness is all but unconscious of any mode of experiencing truth lying outside the domain of scientific method. Indeed, any non-methodical claim to truth is held either in contempt or with suspicion by the modern consciousness. Thus Gadamer’s strategy, so to speak, is not to make any such claims, but to confront modern consciousness with an experience of understanding that it simply cannot account for by method—namely, the truth of remembrance. As he expresses the same notion elsewhere, Gadamer seeks to place modern consciousness face to face with an experience of truth that it can “neither reject nor transcend” but must simply respect.5

In *TM*, Gadamer chooses art, historical understanding, and language in order to confront modern consciousness with the truth of remembrance. His selection here is

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significant, as we explore in more detail below. Here we can point out that the aesthetic, historical, and philological disciplines have traditionally formed the center of the humanist syllabus, and have only come to adopt the methods of modern science in the nineteenth century. Presently, we will discuss the devastating effects of this newly adopted means of scientific method. Here it is important to note that by reflecting upon the phenomenon of understanding in art, history, and language, in particular, Gadamer shows how the experience of understanding they offer transcends the domain of the method that putatively secures it. In each of these areas he shows how something is always and everywhere happening to us beyond the application of method, effectively subverting the claims of method. While seemingly less radical than fundamental questioning, at least at first glance, Gadamer’s project of confronting modern consciousness is far more effective in undermining that consciousness because it brings it face to face with the limits of its own self-understanding.

It is important to note as well the end to which the hermeneutic philosopher confronts modern consciousness. Gadamer expresses this *telos* as awakening the hermeneutic consciousness. We will see that the hermeneutic consciousness appreciates the historical, relational, and participatory character of human understanding and seeks to make productive use of the very limitations implied in that character in its attempts to experience understanding. To return to the terminology employed above, we might say that the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to realize understanding as an event thoroughly and inextricably situated within space and time. Rather than seeking to escape situatedness, the hermeneutic consciousness understands it to be the very condition of understanding. Finally, Gadamer’s confrontation of the modern will with the truth of
remembrance is, as the language of remembrance strongly suggests, a Socratic project carried out time and again with the goal of awakening the hermeneutic consciousness and keeping it vigilant.

As we turn from the prefaces to the first part of TM, we find that Gadamer’s reflections begin from his immediate context, or rather the tradition of inquiry from which his own work developed, the geisteswissenschaften or human sciences coming out of the nineteenth century. Gadamer provides a two-part narrative of the geisteswissenschaften, where an older humanist account of truth and understanding is displaced by the newly adopted means of scientific method. As humanities come to accept a modern scientific account of knowledge, they attempt to situate themselves and their claims to truth with respect to it. At first, the humanities begin to understand themselves as the subjective-intuitive counterpart to the objective-empirical sciences. Ultimately, however, this separate-but-equal self-understanding is no longer tenable, and the humanities seek to ground their own discourses with the same kind of objectivity guaranteed by the empirical sciences. The central problem for the human sciences, therefore, becomes a matter of how to reconcile the philological and historical inheritance of the humanist tradition with the demands of a universalizing scientific empirical methodology, while at the same time maintaining its distinctiveness. In their zeal to set the human sciences on par with the natural sciences thinkers from Helmholz to Dilthey and beyond accepted unquestioningly the subject-object dichotomy modern science presupposes as well as its inductive method. To defend the distinct claims of the human sciences, therefore, they distinguished, not the experience of truth, but the psychological conditions of induction in each of these two kinds of sciences. The natural sciences, so
their thinking goes, employ a logical and the human sciences an intuitive-artistic form of induction. The result, according to Gadamer, is the emergence of the very aesthetic, historical, and hermeneutical consciousness we discussed at length in the first part of our thesis.

Nevertheless, even within the human sciences coming out of the nineteenth century, the guiding humanistic concepts of education/cultural formation (Bildung), common sense (sensus communis), taste, and judgment, as well as the community of tradition and authority they imply, remain in effect. According to Gadamer, in fact, it is from this older humanist tradition that “the human sciences of the nineteenth century draw, without admitting it, their own life.” The problem is that these concepts had undergone a subtle but radical transformation following upon Kant’s devastating limitation of knowledge to the theoretical and practical reason and his subsequent placing of aesthetic judgment outside the bounds of knowledge and under the subjective aesthetic taste. This transformation is especially notable with the concept of taste and the ideal of Bildung. Taste is no longer “a mode of knowing,” not even subjective experience inhering within a tradition and community of values, but becomes a knowledge-free feeling of pleasure in the subjective consciousness. Bildung, especially in the tradition stemming from Hegel, is no longer the enculturation, say, of the Greek paideia. It develops rather into the self-conscious cultivation of subjective aesthetic sensibilities through life experience (Erlebnis). Both the romantic concept of taste and Bildung’s ideal

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6 Gadamer cites Helmholtz as the locus classicus for this psychological distinction.

7 TM, 6.

8 Ibid., 32-38.
of aesthetic cultivation, therefore, presuppose the existence of an experiencing (*erlebende*) subject who is naturally alienated from the putative object of aesthetic experience. Confronting aesthetic consciousness is Gadamer’s first task in *TM*. Following the insight expressed above in his preface to the work’s second edition, he will approach the problem at a more basic level than either the guiding humanistic concepts or the application of scientific method to the humanities. He attends rather to the character of experience as such as it is encountered in the concrete phenomenon of play.

**From Play to Aesthetic Experience**

Gadamer first introduces the image of play in his criticism of the modern aesthetic consciousness in order to contrast two critically different conceptions of experience. Following the indication of the German language, which has a distinct word for each of these concepts, he contrasts *Erlebnis* with *Erfahrung*. *Erlebnis*, as we have already begun to see, is best understood as lived experience, especially the privileged experiences of the subjective consciousness. Note the strong romantic overtones *Erlebnis* entails. Not insignificantly, the term is capable of being pluralized in the form *Erlebnisse*, which in English we would render *life experience or life experiences*. *Erfahrung*, by contrast, is best translated by the word *experience* as in the phrase he or she “has experience.” Again, it is not insignificant that *Erfahrung*, like its English counterpart, is not pluralized. *Erfahrung* is experience considered as effect rather than privileged possession. It is connected particularly with an event and, as we will see, it is revealed in play.⁹

The distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* is crucial for Gadamer. In the tradition stemming from Kant and Hegel, the concept of *Erlebnis* refers to the subjective

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⁹ This distinction is central to Gadamer’s concept of understanding as event (*Ereignis*), which we will discuss in more detail below.
experience of the knowing individual. It is the kind of experience fundamental to cultivating the aesthetic consciousness, which Gadamer describes as the subjective “erlebende center from which everything is experienced.”\textsuperscript{10} As we have seen already, the subjective aesthetic consciousness gives rise to \textit{aesthetic differentiation}, the process whereby the work of art, alienated from the knowing subject, is abstracted both from its historical context and from the artist who formed it.\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Erlebnis} is thus the experience presupposed in the methods aesthetic consciousness employs in making aesthetic judgments. Experience considered as \textit{Erfahrung}, however, could not differ more radically from the \textit{Erlebnis}; Gadamer turns to the phenomenon of play in order to illustrate this difference.

Gadamer begins his phenomenology of the experience of play at the most basic level, attending to the way the word operates in ordinary language. Following the direction indicated by the language of play, he discovers that \textit{Erfahrung} rather than \textit{Erlebnis} best captures the experience of play. He considers first how the word “play” is used in the following phrases: the play of light, the play of colors in a landscape, or the play of parts in a machine. Is it meaningful, he asks, to conceive of the word play in any of these contexts in either the active or passive voice? He considers as well phrases like \textit{the factors at play} in a decision, or the \textit{variables at play} in a given situation. Again, he finds that the language of \textit{play} simply resists being fit simply into the category either of playing or of being played. Rather, it bears a curious medial sense or middle voice.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 75
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 104.
This recognition is borne out as Gadamer follows the language of play to its embodiment in the actual phenomenon of playing a game. He observes how at the most basic level play in a game is dependent upon the players. While this would seem to make play simply the action of the players and a game the object of their play, the language of play has taught Gadamer to suspect such an easy division into active subject and passive object. Indeed, as he reflects he finds that such a dichotomy would obscure a more basic fact about the dynamics of the game. For while there must be players to play the game, the players are themselves only constituted as players by reference to play of the game itself. The game is not an object of play, it is an event in which players are brought into play. “The game masters the players,” writes Gadamer, and “all playing is a being-played.”¹³ In fact, if one insists upon the active-passive schematic, it appears that one does not play the game so much as one is played by the game.

At this point, it is necessary to anticipate two possible misunderstandings. First, one might conclude that Gadamer has simply discovered the dynamics of play within a game, and that what he says does not apply generally to play as such. Yet, for Gadamer, it is essential to play that it play something.¹⁴ Play is always a contextualized experience; to be at play is to be playing at something. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it is easy to hear that the game masters the players and to conclude that play is the action, not of the player, but of the game. But this is to miss the point of Gadamer’s phrase. The game constitutes the players and the conditions for play, but play is not specifically the action of either game or player; it is a dynamic that operates in the context of the game.

¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., 107.
and comes to expression in the players. For Gadamer, play is itself intentional, purposive: though it animates the game and constitutes the players, play nevertheless only plays itself.

Gadamer chooses a familiar example of play in order to illustrate this last point—a child bouncing a ball. She begins by releasing the ball to the ground, and as it returns to her, rather than catching it, she slaps it with the palm of her hand. At first she is able to bounce the ball ten times without losing control of its movement. Now twenty; now thirty. Next, she tries for forty. Though playing and laughing, she is determined and serious. The parents watch as the child tries again and again to master the movement of the bouncing ball. Consider the child’s state of consciousness: she is oblivious both to herself and to the world around her because she is completely in the game. The game has indeed mastered its player. Consider also that the child’s act of play has no other purpose than play itself. This fact is clear to anyone who is watching. The number of times she bounces the ball is purely arbitrary; keeping the ball in play (and herself in play along with it) is the sole end of the child’s activity. Consider finally how it is in play that the child, the ball, and the game of bouncing are constituted as a distinct ontological unity.

For Gadamer, another facet of the self-purpose of play is that its purpose is self-presentation. That is to say, what comes to presence in this distinct ontological unity is the play of the game itself. Presentation is thus play’s mode of being. It is dynamic rather than static. It follows, then, that it is only in playing that the being of play is made present. Moreover, for Gadamer, the being of play is made present only to the player—the consciousness caught up in the dynamic event of play. The game of bouncing the ball, for example, presents itself as play only to the child engaged in play. For the game qua game
is not concerned with spectators. As both players and spectators know from experience, a player’s concern for the spectators only serves to disengage the player from play in the game.

We mentioned above that the experience of play is best understood in terms of the German *Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis*, and now it is becoming clear why this is the case. Play is an event of self-presentation that forms the dynamics of the game. The player’s experience of the game is not so much that of having played as it is of having been in play. This is an important distinction; it is the difference between having an experience and having experience. When it comes to the game, say, of tennis, the relevant question is not whether one has played a particular match but whether one plays tennis. The first question is one of life experiences (*Erlebnisse*), the other of integrative and formative experience (*Erfahrung*). For Gadamer, the concept of experience as *Erlebnis* is simply inadequate to account for the fullness of the phenomenon of play. In this way, his reflections on play provide both the basic concepts for understanding aesthetic and historical experience and the initial insight for developing his theory of hermeneutic experience—all of which partake of the same dynamic of play.

The artistic presentation of drama provides the transition from play to aesthetic experience. Despite the similarity of the terms *play* and *a play*, the artistic performance differs significantly from play. Nevertheless, Gadamer shows how the dynamic at work is identical in each. The most important difference between *play* and *a play* concerns the relative roles of player and spectator. In a play, the spectators come to occupy the position formerly held by the players in a game, and the play’s players are wholly
transposed into the work itself.\textsuperscript{15} In this way, the self-presentation of play is no longer merely for the players, as in the game, but for the spectator as well. Actually, in a profound sense, the play constitutes the audience as a kind of player in the game of the artistic performance. This is precisely what seems to follow if we observe how the players are drawn up into the self-presentation of the play, while the spectators are drawn into play and constituted as the audience.

Note the twofold significance of the transposition effected by the event of the artistic presentation. First, it transforms the being-for-itself of playwright, players, script, into a distinct unity of the being of the play. Gadamer coins the phrase transformation into structure to capture the nature of the event of transformation, in which “something is suddenly and as a whole something else.”\textsuperscript{16} Each of these elements is constituted as part of an entirely different structure. It is a real transformation, since the being of the play is different from anything that was present before as being-for-itself. This transformation, moreover, implicates the audience as well; for if the audience stands in relation to the work of art where the player stood with respect to the game, then, as play performs its presentation only through the players, so too the work of dramatic art only performs its presentation through the audience. The play, therefore, is an event of transformation, not only of the being-for-itself of the playwright, the players, and script, but also of the being-for-itself of the audience. In this event, the audience and the play experience a unity of participation and presentation, which Gadamer terms aesthetic non-differentiation. The experience of aesthetic non-differentiation differs radically from the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 110-11.
experience of the aesthetic consciousness, and, again, it is the difference reflected in the language of Erfahrung and Erlebnis. Taken in conjunction, the concepts of aesthetic non-differentiation and transformation-into-structure begin to fill out the model of Erfahrung. It is the experience of truth that one enters into as being comes to presence in the event.

With the character of this experience more clearly in view, we are prepared to address the question raised in the introduction concerning the truth of hermeneutic experience. For Gadamer, the truth of hermeneutic experience is matter of ontology rather than epistemology. “[I]n being presented in play,” he writes, “what-is emerges.” The what-is of play, however, is not its subject matter—for example, the particular game. It is the being of play itself. When we consider this notion in light of the fact that the audience’s participation in the “what-is” of the play forms the unity of aesthetic non-differentiation, we discover what for Gadamer constitutes the experience of the truth of art. Risking clarity for the sake of placing all of the parts of this experience into relation, we may say that as the audience is drawn into the play of the aesthetically non-differentiated event of artistic presentation, which effects a transformation into structure, the audience experiences truth as the presentation of being. Following Gadamer, we might say more simply that the truth of art is an event of participation in being.

The invocation of participation in regard to the mode of the experience of truth, suggests strongly Gadamer’s debt to the Platonic-Aristotelian concepts of mimesis and anamnesis. In fact, it is precisely to these concepts that Gadamer leads his discussion in TM. The play of mimesis and anamnesis reveals a dialectical structure to the experience of truth that clarifies the sheds light on the mode of truth’s presence as well as the mode of the experience of truth. Each is a participation: the play mediates being through
mimesis, imitation, while the audience participates in being, as the term anamnesis indicates, by recognition or remembrance. The significance of this latter term is clear given Gadamer’s statement about remembrance in the preface to the second edition of TM.

Gadamer recalls Aristotle’s example of the child playing dress-up in order to disclose this twofold character of participation. Just as the well-trained actor in a dramatic performance, or the child bouncing the ball, a child playing make-believe is entirely serious and seeks to be taken as such. To be seen as a-child-playing-make-believe would spoil the game, so the child will go to any length possible to avoid being discovered as one who is “only pretending.” Staying in character, and being perceived as if he really were the character, are the most basic rules of the game for playing make-believe. Indeed, the child only plays dress-up in order that what he represents should be recognized for what it is. Aristotle expresses this insight when he notes how the child acts as if “what he represents should exist.”\(^\text{17}\) In terms of our discussion so far, we might say that the make-believe game of the child at play is a transformation into structure. New being is made present in the play of imitation. As such, the child no longer exists as being-for-himself, but mediates the being of the thing imitated. The more serious the play, the more perfect the mediation; the more perfect the mediation, the more enjoyable the play.

Though they are as common as the experience of play we are describing, the words imitation, participation, and mediation, are technical terms in the Platonic-Aristotelian lexicon. Gadamer has chosen them advisedly. For Aristotle, imitation (mimesis) is the representation of being, in the strictest meaning of the term. Mimesis

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 113.
makes being present through an act of mediation. Aristotle would use the term *mimesis* to express the play of the child or actor. The being that their imitation mediates, moreover, is the being of the thing that is being imitated. Thus, the imitation itself is *not* what is presented in the act of imitation, much less the person performing the imitation. Again, this would violate the play of the game. (The critic attends to the acting of the actor, and as such alienates himself or herself from the play of the play.) Aristotle would have us understand rather that imitation mediates or represents the being of that which is being imitated. In the case of the child playing make-believe, it is the being of the mother whose clothes she wears and whose mannerisms she caricatures that is mediated. As a mode of participation, therefore, *mimesis* brings being to presence. The central insight of the tradition that conceives of art as imitation lies here in the notion that *what one recognizes in imitation is not merely the particular thing, but the being of the thing itself.*

The rules of the game also extend in the other direction as well, disclosing a further dimension of participation. The enjoyment experienced by an audience is directly proportionate to how fully they participate in the play—how fully *they play along.* Consider again the child playing make-believe: her audience begins to laugh precisely at the point of recognition, not of the act of imitation, but as the imitation of that which is being imitated. Aristotle employs the term *anamnesis* to express the audience’s recognition of the being that is made present in *mimesis.* The being of the thing is made present in the *mimesis* of the actor while the audience participates in *anamnesis.* The more fully they all play along, the more fully the *mimesis* represents the being it imitates and thus the more full the recognition of that being.
Following Aristotle, Gadamer understands the pleasure of the aesthetic experience to lie precisely in recognition of being as it is imitated in art. As the term *anamnesis* suggests (in fact, as the term recognition—re-cognition—suggests as well), the experience of participation here is a kind of remembering. Just like remembering a forgotten name, or recalling the right word, the joy that attends artistic imitation “is the joy of knowing more than is already familiar.”¹⁸ This is the truth of aesthetic experience—it is the joy of recognizing the being made present in play. Importantly, for Gadamer “the cognitive import of imitation lies in recognition”¹⁹ as well, hence his concept of the truth of remembrance.

Whereas Gadamer’s discussion of play and aesthetic experience features Aristotle’s notion of *mimesis* and *anamnesis*, Plato’s distinct treatment of these concepts more directly informs Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience. Gadamer’s debt to Plato is particularly evident in his treatment of the hermeneutic significance of dialectic and dialogue.²⁰ For Plato, truth comes to presentation in the imitative play (*mimesis*) of the dialectic, and the cognitive import of the dialogue is the recognition (*anamnesis*) of the being of the matter under consideration (what Gadamer calls *die Sache*) on the part of the interlocutors. But this is to anticipate Gadamer’s discussion of the hermeneutic significance of dialogue. It is necessary here only to note how this discussion of *mimesis* and *anamnesis* sheds light on Gadamer’s notion of confronting modern consciousness with the *truth of remembrance*. Following the indication of the phrase *of remembrance*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See especially: “The model of Platonic dialectic,” in Part Two of *TM*.
(des Erinnerns), it is clear that the truth he refers to here is the disclosure of being in mimesis. It is the experience of truth where one is brought into the play of the event. It is, moreover, the truth of play and the truth of aesthetic experience; to refuse this truth is to be left out and to experience the alienation of the modern aesthetic consciousness. Confronting (entgegensetzen) modern consciousness with the truth of remembrance, therefore, is not essentially a matter of argument or refutation, but of opposing it with the kind of experience that is neither arbitrary nor manipulable by that consciousness, but rather simply demands its respect. If successful, in fact, it will be a movement from within. Like a Socratic dialogue, opposing the modern will with the truth of remembrance is a matter of leading an interlocutor continually against the limits of his logos in order to induce the aporia from which all understanding begins.

A coherent picture of the basic features of hermeneutic experience is beginning to emerge from our reflection on play. The discussion of imitation and recognition, however, adds a final dimension to this picture that we must address before turning to historical experience—mediation. Both in Aristotle’s example of the child playing make-believe and in the play of an artistic production, writes Gadamer, “the mediation that communicates the work is, in principle, total.” When speaking of the transformation into structure, we noted how the more fully one plays along the more fully one enjoys the play. This dynamic works in both directions. On the one hand, the being-for-itself of the player is transformed into the structure of the play. On the other, the being-for-itself of the audience is transformed into the experience of aesthetic non-differentiation.


22 TM, 118.
Importantly, the language of transformation is ontological, though habit is such that one hears it epistemologically. Yet, the ontological meaning is clear: “total mediation means that the medium as such is superseded.”\textsuperscript{23} In the presentation of play, for Gadamer, what is truly emerges.

Although he does not explicitly recall the concept of play again until the closing paragraphs of \textit{TM}, it is necessary to see that the presentation-participation model of aesthetic experience disclosed in play is the model for Gadamer’s concept of truth in hermeneutic experience. It is the truth of art just as it is the truth of historical understanding. More fundamentally it is the truth of language. As such, the presentation-participation model of aesthetic experience is clearly a mode “of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodical means proper to science.”\textsuperscript{24} The subjectivity and method of modern consciousness, however, are essentially the denial of total mediation. In the absence of the total mediation this model effects arise all the dichotomies of modern consciousness—subject-object, active-passive, theory-praxis, \textit{et al.}\textsuperscript{25} Having disclosed this model in the aesthetic experience, therefore, Gadamer’s task is to develop it in terms of a theory of hermeneutic experience.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, xxi.

\textsuperscript{25} For example, the realization of application as the event of understanding rather that the practical application of understanding depends upon this notion of total mediation.
From Historical Consciousness to Hermeneutic Consciousness

The modern experience of historical tradition operates under the same subject-object dichotomy that we encountered initially and had to dispel in the model of player and game. For historical consciousness, traditionary materials present themselves as objects of knowledge before the scrutiny of historical method. Tradition is not something to which the historical consciousness belongs, but a problem for which it develops a methodology to overcome. Method, in fact, is fundamental in this regard; for it assures the historian of the objectivity of his or her consideration of a historical witness. Insulated by historical method from the distorting effects of ideology, prejudice, and personal interest, the historian is able to let the witnesses speak on their own terms, as it were. Indeed, the more completely the historical consciousness distances itself from the objects of its historical investigation the more its confidence in the reliability of its judgments. Again, Ranke’s ideal of extinguishing the individual before the historical evidence is the best expression of this notion. The historical consciousness experiences its consequent alienation—the alienation, that is, of the subjective historical consciousness both from the putative object of its inquiry as well as from the effect of historical tradition in its own experience of that object—not as a loss but, again, as a problem to be overcome by method.

Gadamer’s investigations into the truth of artistic presentation, however, disclosed the integrative, dialectical, and event-oriented character of the kind of experience captured by the German term *Erfahrung*. It brought to light a presentation-participatory ontology, as well as the dialectical structure of truth it implies. Gadamer opposes the experience he terms aesthetic non-differentiation in the encounter with the work of art, to the alienation of the subjective aesthetic consciousness. As he turns to the truth of
historical tradition, Gadamer looks to discover, not what we seek or desire in our
historical investigations, but what actually happens to us in the encounter with historical
tradition. Perhaps not surprisingly, he discovers a similar dynamic at work here as he
does in aesthetic experience. His goal, therefore, is to formulate an image of the
consciousness that experiences art in the dialectical play of presentation and participation
and that experiences history in the dialectical play of foregrounded prejudice and the
fusion of horizons. This image is the historically-effected consciousness that experiences
understanding as the fusion of horizons as a non-binary alternative to the modern
consciousness and its methodological preoccupations. In this way, seminal concepts
disclosed in Gadamer’s reflection upon play and aesthetic experience come to full flower
in his theory of hermeneutic experience.

Heidegger’s concept of the forestructure of understanding constitutes the point of
departure for Gadamer’s investigations into the truth of historical experience in the
second part of *TM*. For Heidegger, understanding is not simply one activity among any
number of possible activities; it is Dasein’s mode of being in the world. The import of
Heidegger’s claim is radical: however basic they might seem, perception and judgment
are actually abstractions of a more basic and holistic experience of the world. Dasein is
being-in-the-world, and thus there can be no more fundamental experience of other being
for Dasein than *being-as*. Dasein’s experience is always already pre-contextualized, and
this as the condition of experience *qua* experience. With the concept of fore-structure,
however, Heidegger expresses a further dimension of the contextualization of Dasein’s
experience. Like the spatial and temporal ambivalence at play in his concept of human
being (*Dasein*, literally, “*there-be-ing*”), the concept of fore-structure intends both a prior
structuring of experience as well as the future-orientation of that structuring. It is both a 
fore-structuring and a fore-structuring. Heidegger expresses this future-orientation in 
terms of Dasein’s project. In the act of understanding, Dasein is always projecting,
always casting forth or sketching a structure in advance. It is beyond the scope the 
present study to explicate fully Heidegger’s richly dense notion of the forestructure of 
understanding. It is necessary, however, only to see how the forestructure of 
understanding follows from the temporal character of Dasein in order to appreciate 
Gadamer’s appropriation of the concept.

To this point, we have considered the alienation of subjectivity along spatial or 
geometrical lines; that is, we have expressed subjectivity in terms of a separation 
between subject and object. With the concept of forestructure, Heidegger seeks to 
transcend not only the a-topicality, but also the curious a-temporality, of subjectivity as 
well. The eternal perspective modern consciousness presupposes in its reduction of the 
problem of understanding to method, is not just a view from nowhere, for Heidegger, but 
from no-when. Dasein, on the contrary, is continually borne into a future by the 
movement of history. Understanding in the present is thus a synchronicity of past and 
future, with history particularly effective in orienting Dasein’s gaze. Dasein enters upon 
an opening formed by the horizon of history and future; everything Dasein understands is

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1 Heidegger’s penchant for the exploration of etymology is well-known, and his use of “project” and “projection” is illustrative. Though he will also use the Latin cognate Projektion to capture the sense of “throw-forth” (from the Latin, proiecere, literally “to cast or throw”), he uses the German word entwerfen, it seems, because of its ambivalence. While entwerfen is literally equivalent with proicere, its functional meaning in German is “to design or sketch.” To say that Dasein is projecting (entwerfe), therefore, captures both the temporal aspect of throwing forward as well as the intentional activity of designing.

2 Gadamer’s notion from the preface to TM concerning the utopian and eschatological character of modern consciousness is best understood in this light as well (TM, xxxiv).
understood within this temporal clearing. Importantly, history both determines Dasein’s 
*situation* within this clearing and *orients* Dasein with respect to the future. Gadamer 
captures these dynamics of history and futurity when he writes:

> the great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, 
influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the 
future. History is only present to us in light of our futurity. Here we have 
all learned from Heidegger, for he exhibited precisely the primacy of 
futurity for our possible recollection and retention, and for the whole of 
our history.

Forestructure is not merely the mode of Dasein’s initial approach to 
understanding, therefore; understanding is a *continual process* of forestructuring. As 
Dasein’s fore-conceptions are challenged and changed in the course of understanding the 
world, Dasein’s experience of the world changes accordingly. Recognizing this continual 
triangulation of forestructure and experience in the act of understanding, Heidegger 
makes a crucial appropriation of the concept of interpretation from the tradition of 
hermeneutics. If understanding is always forestructure, and understanding is Dasein’s 
mode of being in the world, then it follows that everything Dasein understands it 
fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones.”

Thus Heidegger’s notion of 
forestructure indicates the ineluctably dialectical character of understanding, in which the 
act of knowing is a continual situation of oneself with respect to what confronts one. 
Heidegger expresses the dialectical character of understanding famously in terms of the

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4 *TM*, 269.
hermeneutic circle, where a “constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation.”

Gadamer proffers the ordinary experience of reading a book as a concrete example of the forestructure of thought and the hermeneutical circle it effects.⁶ We always come to the text with a fore-conception of what we are going to read. We approach, say, a folk tale, and expect that we will find a unified narrative. We expect that it will make sense to us, and that it will even be enjoyable to read. Although we might not have read the particular story in question, we already have something of a sense of the storyline and anticipate what the story is going to be about. This sense of anticipation is especially acute with the folk tale, because the storyline and themes are widely disseminated in cultural symbols. The same holds for certain classical texts or authors.⁷ One needs not to have read a single line of Shakespeare or Dante, for example, to have some sense of what to expect in Hamlet or the Inferno. With great authors and well-crafted stories, these anticipations are challenged more often than not and undergo significant change as we actually begin to read. Our sense of what the story is about adjusts accordingly. As we read on, we continue to project our continually evolving sense of what the text is about.

Note the dynamics of forestructuring at work in the act of reading. Without our initial preconceptions, the text would not speak to us at all. The experience of encountering a truly foreign text, like taking in a truly foreign landscape, is disorienting

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 269-272.

⁷ See: Part Two of TM, Part II, 2.B.ii for Gadamer’s discussion of the “classical.”
to the point of unintelligibility. In this way, our preconceptions provide the reference points of familiarity that make an encounter with the unfamiliar possible in the first place. Without the continual transformation of these initial preconceptions, however, the text would cease to engage us. If all of our preconceptions are simply verified in the experience we find the text dull and uninteresting. The rule of narrative seems to be a dance of difference in familiarity and familiarity in difference. The experience of reading a story, therefore, illustrates well the dialectical character of understanding.

The significance of the forestructuring of thought extends beyond the experience of reading to the larger context of our argument. The fact that a prior having, seeing, and conceiving of things always provides the context for understanding, is equivalent, at least in the terms we have employed so far, to saying that human understanding is always already in play. The experience of understanding, therefore, is akin to the experience of the player and game. Consider again the example of the text. We make an initial move toward the text—say, a historical document—in anticipation of what we hope to find. Interestingly, it makes no difference whether our anticipations are surprised or confirmed in the actual encounter with the text, we adjust accordingly in anticipation of the next move. All the while, however—and this is key—neither our move nor the text actually initiates play—they presuppose it. As in the game, where being in play presupposes that the game has had its constituting effect on the player, the very encounter with a traditionary material indicates the play or effect history. To be addressed by a text is already to be in play. There is never a moment where one has identified, but has not yet decided to engage, the putative object of historical consciousness. On the contrary, the

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8 The threefold schematic of Vorhabe, Vorsicht, and Vorgriff is Heidegger’s development of the forestructure (Vorstruktur) of understanding. See: TM part II.2.1.b
initial approach toward human tradition—even by the historical consciousness that would identify itself with the ideal of extinguishing the individual before the evidence—already betrays itself as a response to the prior claim of tradition. The recognition on the part of historical consciousness that a given thing is an object before which it should extinguish its individuality is already an indication of the effect of historical tradition. The fore-structure of thought implies that one is always already oriented toward whatever one would seek to understand. The kind of objectivity historical consciousness seeks to achieve, therefore, is a chimera of modern consciousness.9

For Gadamer, acknowledging the forestructure of thought amounts to a “recognition that all understanding involves some prejudice” that no method can guarantee against.10 This is not to admit an unfortunate limitation of human knowledge, however; on the contrary, the inescapability of prejudice “gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust.”11 Fore-conceptions, in the form of prejudices, are not simply part of human understanding, they constitute the very conditions for its possibility and give historical tradition its interpretive power. Prejudices, as we will see, are the means whereby tradition addresses us. Of course, the concept of prejudice has been so thoroughly discredited that the word carries nothing but negative connotations—indeed, opprobrium—in the contemporary context. Yet, as unlikely as it may seem, the rehabilitation of prejudice is a chief task of hermeneutics. It is a task, moreover, that Gadamer begins, fittingly, with reflection upon the history of the word prejudice itself.

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9 Ricoeur, *SOE*, 19. He writes: “[I]t is necessary to renounce the chimera of a philosophy without presuppositions and begin from a *full* language.”

10 *TM*, 272.

11 Ibid.
“We should never underestimate what a word can tell us,” writes Gadamer, “for language represents the previous accomplishment of thought.” As he looks to the history of the word prejudice he finds an abrupt and sudden change in the history of its meaning. As its etymology suggests, the term prejudice originally indicates a provisional judgment concerning a matter before all of the relevant factors have been taken into consideration. Gadamer looks specifically to the use of the term in German (Vorurteil), French (préjudice), and Latin (praetecidium) jurisprudence, and finds in each that it indicates an initial judgment against one party in a legal suite. (This is the corollary of the provisional judgment in favor of the accused in a criminal case in American jurisprudence.) While the term is ambivalent with respect to the relative advantage it secures legally, there is no indication that the presence of a pre-judgment affects the validity of the final decision—on the contrary, jurisprudence rather presupposes it will ensure its validity. It is not until the Enlightenment that the term prejudice acquires the univocally negative connotation as a groundless and irrational disposition toward something it bears today. For Gadamer, this change in language indicates a profound change in thought—namely, the privileging of rational demonstration over and against tradition and authority. According to the logic of the Enlightenment, “the only thing that gives a judgment dignity is its having a basis, a methodological justification.” Given its explicitly pre-methodological character, the pre-judgment is thus especially suspect to modern consciousness.


13 TM, 273.
What may have seemed a curious irrelevance at first glance—the decision to rehabilitate prejudice—upon further reflection comes to light as a principal hermeneutic task. The critical significance of the Enlightenment’s rejection of prejudice (and thereby tradition and authority), for Gadamer, is that it exposes “the fundamental presupposition of the Enlightenment, namely that methodologically disciplined use of reason can safeguard us from all error.”¹⁴ Note the twofold significance of the Enlightenment critique of prejudice. First, it betrays precisely the modern will Gadamer seeks to oppose with his investigations into the experience of truth. What the Enlightenment dismisses as prejudice Gadamer identifies precisely as the means of transcending the alienation implicit in the modern historical consciousness. Second, the critique of prejudice itself arises from a prejudice. Ironically, writes Gadamer, “There is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power.”¹⁵ The decision to secure human being in the world on the basis of methodologically disciplined reason is not even questionable to Enlightenment; it is self-evident. Contrary to the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice, Gadamer will seek to restore it to its proper place in the historical reality of human being. He indicates both the inescapability of tradition and the direction its rehabilitation will take in an important passage from his discussion of the problem of prejudice in $TM$, which we quote at length. He writes,

In fact, history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-

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¹⁴ Ibid., 279.

¹⁵ Ibid., 273.
awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.\textsuperscript{16}

Prejudice is the self-evident self-knowledge we possess by virtue of belonging to history—in families, communities, and so on. It is thus admittedly ambivalent, allowing for both the kind of irrationalism feared by the Enlightenment as well as the kind of openness to understanding hermeneutics seeks to realize. Whether one is open or closed to understanding does not depend on the presence or absence of prejudice, but on whether prejudices are properly put to use. For Gadamer, the key to putting prejudice to work in a productive way is the critical insight he terms foregrounding.\textsuperscript{17}

“Foregrounding (abheben) a prejudice,” Gadamer explains, “clearly requires suspending its validity for us…it is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation. For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity.”

Foregrounding is the act of allowing our prejudices to be provoked, as it were, by the encounter with traditionary materials, in hopes of raising them to the level of self-conscious awareness. Recognized as such, we begin to put them to work, first by suspending them as judgments in our engagement with tradition, and then by realizing that what provoked our prejudices is tradition addressing us—indeed, asserting itself in our experience. Only when foregrounded, prejudices are free to become the conditions for the engagement with tradition, because foregrounding changes their logical structure.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 278. Italics original. Gadamer restates the section emphasized by italics in his 1966 article “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” which we discuss at length above.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 298.
The foregrounded prejudice no longer has the structure of a judgment, and thus the end of a conversation, but a question, and thus its beginning.

Return again to the experience of reading a story. Suppose now, however, that the story is unfamiliar because of genre or theme, or perhaps both. We find ourselves, for example, after a thorough education in Greco-Roman classics, reading Norse myth for the first time. Doubtless we find many aspects of Norse myth familiar (e.g., polytheism and the immanence of the divine in the world of human affairs), though some aspects are puzzling or even distasteful to us (e.g., the looming horizon of Ragnarök and its connection to a moral flaw in Odin). Although each is legitimate, the negative experience is far more significant precisely because it indicates most acutely the presence of prejudice. On the one hand, because what we experience as familiar in the story already comports with our prejudices, it remains all but invisible to us. On the other hand, we simply fail to recognize what is thoroughly unfamiliar to us because it is likewise invisible—there is no point of reference at all. Gadamer would have us understand, however, that the experience of the unfamiliar as being unfamiliar or even offensive is actually the most hermeneutically significant because it brings our prejudices into play with the differences of the text. These differences that provoke our prejudices are, as we have seen, the places where the text addresses us and asserts itself. In this way, the negative experiences are precisely the points of contact with the text.

Herein lies the significance of Gadamer’s notion that our prejudices constitute the historical character of our being. Understood hermeneutically, prejudices are not judgments—the significance of this claim cannot be overstated. They are rather the effect

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18 For Gadamer’s discussion of the hermeneutic significance particularly of negative experience, see especially: 7M, 349-51.
of history as it has come to us in any number of ways, most notably in language. Gadamer’s notion of the “classical” in art serves well to illustrate this point. “Whenever we say with an instinctive, even if perhaps erroneous, certainty,” writes Gadamer, “‘this is classical; it will endure,’ what we are speaking of has already performed our possibility for aesthetic judgment.” The initially negative experience of the unfamiliar or offensive is superior in one respect to the recognition of the classical in art: the provocation of the unfamiliar or offensive raises the effect of history to the level of consciousness. Conversely, our dogmatic aesthetic assertions often fail to rise to the level of conscious awareness as judgments. Foregrounded, these exposed prejudices form the beginning of our dialogue with the text rather than its end, thus serving as our initial openness to the alterity of the text.

The experience of our prejudices being drawn out in the encounter with tradition is thus precisely the experience of being drawn into the play of the hermeneutic circle we elucidated above. This discovery has important consequences for our argument. The particular form the play of the circle takes in historical understanding is a dialogue with tradition in the encounter with traditionary materials. Our prejudices are points of departure for entering dialogue because, as we have seen, the materials address us precisely by provoking our prejudices. As we foreground our prejudices, we open ourselves to be addressed further by historical tradition, because foregrounded prejudices take the logical form of questions, to which our thinking, speaking, and writing are

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20 Etienne Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, Press, 2000), 40. Gilson writes: “[E]sthetic judgments are both dogmatic and unjustifiable. Every one of us may check the accuracy of this fact by observing himself.”
responses. (We will return to this notion that the logic of question and answer is operative in the hermeneutic circle.) The dialogue that opens up is like the dialogue with the book we noted above: as the fore-conceptions of historical tradition undoubtedly change in the dialogue, so does the way historical tradition addresses us. Significantly for our discussion, the dialogue also has something of the character of aesthetic experience as well. Just as the audience participates in the presentation of the play, forming a unity of experience in an event of aesthetic non-differentiation, so the dialogue of foregrounded prejudices and historical tradition at play in the hermeneutical circle of understanding brings about its own unity. Gadamer terms this unity of effect the fusion of horizons (die Horizontverschmelzung), and it is the analogue in historical understanding to aesthetic non-differentiation.

Before exploring Gadamer’s concept of the fusion of horizons in more detail (and the historically-effected consciousness that serves to bring it about in a regulated way), it is important to note a further dimension of the dynamic of foregrounded prejudice and the dialogue it effects with historical tradition. We noted in our reflection upon reading Norse myth how what we imagine to be an experience of the unfamiliar is actually the experience of difference-in-familiarity. Again, since the truly unfamiliar would simply pass by us unrecognized, what we experience as being unfamiliar is actually a difference with respect to what is familiar to us. Of note here is the tension, as Gadamer writes, “in the play between the traditionary text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition.”21 The hermeneutic

21 *TM*, 295.
situation, in fact, consists precisely in this play between the familiar and unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{22} Above, we introduced the concept of \textit{interity} in order to denote the dynamic and virtual space of interaction, relation, and difference in which interdisciplinarity thrives. We mentioned as well that interdisciplinarity’s \textit{interity} could only be addressed once the interdisciplinary phenomenon had been relocated to the dynamics of hermeneutic experience—that is, once we had realized the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinarity. With the realization that, as Gadamer expresses it, “\textit{the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between},”\textsuperscript{23} the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinarity is becoming clear. We will return to this point presently.

We saw above how aesthetic non-differentiation provides the crucial structure for the experience of truth in art because, in the event of the play or the sacred drama, the audience constitutes part of this transformation into structure. The fusion of horizons in the experience of historical tradition operates in a similar fashion to aesthetic non-differentiation. Indeed, the transformation into structure of the artistic presentation is clearly mirrored in the fusion of horizons. Traditionary materials are akin to the players, script, etc., while the consciousness that foregrounds its prejudices stands as the participating audience. As such, the traditionary materials are no longer the being-for-themselves of so many witnesses and artifacts, but the being-for-something else that addresses us in the narrative of tradition. Likewise, the consciousness that is brought into dialectical play with tradition is neither any longer the being-for-itself of historical


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{TM}, 295. Italics original. The original German text reads: “\textit{In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik}” (\textit{WM}, 300).
consciousness. Rather, the transformation into communion effected by the experience of historical tradition discloses the operation of what Gadamer terms the historically effected consciousness (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein). The historically effected consciousness brings about the fusion of horizons in a regulated way by foregrounding its prejudices as the occasion for letting tradition speak. Therefore, like playing along with the child playing dress-up, or allowing oneself to be drawn into the event of the sacred drama, the historically effected consciousness participates in the encounter with tradition in the fusion of horizons.

When considering the historically-effected consciousness it is important to bear in mind what Gadamer does and does not intend. For Gadamer our consciousness is the effect of history, regardless of whether we are conscious of it or whether our epistemology is self-consciously opposed to the very notion of the effect of history. Thus, while the historically-effected consciousness is truly distinct from modern consciousness, the effect of history itself is not. Historically-effected consciousness is defined rather by its consciousness of the effective history of its own consciousness, and the practice of putting that history of effect to work in the act of understanding. This is precisely what Gadamer indicates when he notes that historically-effected consciousness brings about the fusion of horizons in a regulated way. The historically-effected consciousness, therefore, is both the consciousness that is the effect of history as well as the consciousness of the effect of history. Gadamer will often speak in terms of hermeneutic consciousness as a shorthand way of referring to historically-effected consciousness. We follow his lead in the remainder of this section.
There is a similar ambivalence or bi-directionality at work in the fusion of horizons as well. To appreciate it fully, it is necessary to consider again the hermeneutic rehabilitation of prejudice. The chief way that hermeneutic consciousness seeks to realize the hermeneutic potential of its effective history is, as we have seen, by the foregrounding of prejudices. Because “the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being,” hermeneutic consciousness seeks to bring these prejudices into play in the encounter with historical tradition.\(^\text{24}\) The concept of the fusion of horizons is Gadamer’s attempt to express the dynamic context—or, rather, the dynamic ontological structure—brought into effect in the dialectical play of our encounter with tradition. In our earlier discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic turn in *SOE* we noted how Ricoeur will seek to look along in order to see the world opening before the text. The notion of looking along language toward the non-ostensive reference of the text is closely related to Gadamer’s concept of fusion of horizons. By foregrounding our prejudices in the encounter with tradition, we seek to look along the trajectory of language within the horizon opened by that dialogue.

Neither is hermeneutic consciousness distinct from modern consciousness because it experiences truth as the fusion of horizons. Every event of genuine historical understanding partakes of the character of fusion of horizons; it is one more instance of “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.”\(^\text{25}\) The difference is that, whereas modern consciousness either cannot account for this experience or else seeks to limit its effect, the hermeneutic consciousness recognizes the fusion of horizons as the

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 278.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., xxvi.
distinct shape of understanding, and seeks to bring it about in a regulated way. This bringing it about in a regulated way is what actually distinguishes the fusion of horizons as it is operative in hermeneutic consciousness from its accidental occurrence over and above the subjectivity and scientific method of modern consciousness. The phrase “in a regulated way,” in fact, is fundamental to Gadamer’s project. In the first place, it demonstrates that while Gadamer is certainly opposed to the logic of method, he is not opposed to organizing and directing his interpretive efforts. The critique of method does not imply the dismissal of rigor or discipline. The notion rather that hermeneutic consciousness brings about in a regulated way what are essentially fundamental orders of our being reveals a dynamic of the hermeneutic project that is key to the concept of interity that we discuss at length below.

At this point, the question presents itself, why hermeneutic reflection is necessary if it is concerned with orders of our being that are neither arbitrary nor manipulable by us but that simply demand our respect? Or, to put it more, directly, why bother with the elucidation of the concept if all genuine understanding has the character of the fusion of horizons? The answer touches the role of imagination in human experience. As human beings, the meaning of what we experience is determined in large part by what we imagine ourselves to be experiencing at any given moment. At one level, therefore, it suffices to respond to these questions by saying that hermeneutics will have important imaginative consequences for the experience of understanding. While this is doubtless correct, at a more profound level, the answer requires reflection upon the nature of the hermeneutic project itself. As we do, it becomes clear that the historically-effected consciousness is no more the result of a theory of hermeneutic experience than it is
simply the result of hermeneutic practice. There is rather what we might call the head-down and body-up dynamics at work in the hermeneutic project itself.²⁶ Hermeneutic practice brings about the fusion of horizons as it is carried out within a hermeneutic imaginary; this imaginary is acquired in hermeneutic practice. The hermeneutic consciousness comes to presence in the dialectic of what we are strongly tempted by force of habit to dichotomize as theory and practice, but which we have come to see as truly inseparable dynamics. The head-down dynamic of hermeneutic theory only comes to effect in the body-up dynamic of hermeneutic practice, and vice-versa. In this way, the hermeneutic project itself partakes in the dialectical play of the hermeneutic circle. It is specifically with this dialectical character of hermeneutics in mind, that we consider the radical significance of the characteristic interdisciplinary practices of orientation toward the problem, application, and dialogue.

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²⁶ I am borrowing the head-down, body-up scheme from a presentation given by Calvin College professor Dr. David I. Smith on the topic of education, embodiment and the significance of practices (Thursday, February 12, 2015 in Winter Park, FL).
The Concept of Interity

With the image of the historically-effected consciousness that experiences truth in the fusion of horizons, as well as the other elements that contributed to the disclosure of this image, we are finally able to discuss the character of interdisciplinary experience directly and in detail. As the reader will recall, our inquiry began with the claim that interdisciplinarity suffers from being interpreted within the static conceptual frames of modern consciousness. As such, interdisciplinary theory and practice have been largely concerned with working out what we might call the disciplinarity of interdisciplinarity—inviting disciplines to join conversations, compiling disciplinary perspectives on a given problem, facilitating disciplinary collaboration on concrete areas of practice, and so on. It was necessary, therefore, to transpose interdisciplinary theory from the disciplinary statics to the dynamics of hermeneutic experience. The goal of the present chapter is thus to realize the interity of interdisciplinarity.

Because interdisciplinarity has been conceived according the disciplinary model, it has simply taken disciplinarity for granted. As such, its creative efforts have been directed toward developing methods or techniques to organize or relate disciplines. A hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, however, understands that the introduction of the prefix inter radically changes the interdisciplinary project. Indeed, following the direction of the prefix inter, it will take the dynamics of being in the middle, in between, or among, rather than the disciplines, as its point of departure. It too is concerned with collaboration,

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1 This relocation was twofold. First, we argued that the true impetus for interdisciplinarity is the alienation of modern consciousness. Then, via Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutic experience, we sought to develop an alternative theory of hermeneutic consciousness, one that would avoid the alienation implicit in the subjectivity and method of modern consciousness.
conversation, and practical application. Beginning with *interity* rather than *disciplinarity*, however, these practices take on a subtly but profoundly different character. Indeed, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity will bring to light the radical significance of these characteristic areas of interdisciplinary emphasis.

If we are to follow the word *inter* it is important to bear in mind something of its etymology. In Latin, the preposition *inter* denotes, simply enough, *between* or *among*.² Often, the word has a spatial or positional reference, as in the following phrases: *locus inter duos lucos* (the space between two groves), *inter multitudinem* (in the midst of a crowd), and *Via Appia inter Romam Tusculumque est* (The Appian Way is between Rome and Tusculum). In each of these examples, the phrase could well be a response to a question about where something is. But there is also a relational sense to the word as well, as, for example, in the phrase *inter nos* (among or between us). *Inter* also carries a temporal sense, as in *inter agendum* (while). The linguists’ warnings about making too much of etymologies notwithstanding—the meaning of a word, they remind us, is to be discovered in *parole* not *langue*—it is interesting that, whether considered spatially, positionally, or temporally, there is an irreducibly dynamic character to the word *inter*. Indeed, it is defined by being in relation. To speak of the space between two groves, for instance, is not simply to denote a location; it is to define a space by its relation to other spaces. This dynamic and relational feature is more pronounced in the example of the *Via Appia*. That the Appian Way runs between Rome and Tusculum is not simply, or even

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² Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, “Inter,” *A Latin Dictionary*. [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=inter&la=la#lexicon](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=inter&la=la#lexicon) (accessed March 23, 2016). With the exception of *Via Appia inter Romam Tusculumque est*, the phrases used as examples in this paragraph are adapted from this listing. It is important to note as well, that after arriving at the initial insight concerning the word interity, I worked out much of this etymology in conversation with a colleague, Matthew Frazer, who teaches Latin classics at The Geneva School of Winter Park, Florida.
essentially, a fact of spatial extension or coordinates on a map. It is not so much that the Appian Way lies between these two cities as it relates them dynamically.

The relevance of this brief etymology of the word *inter* for our notion of *interity*, and thus for the hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, comes more fully to light in an insight concerning the hermeneutic situation that occurs to Gadamer in his discussion of foregrounding prejudices. Recognizing how foregrounding prejudices places one’s thought in an interpretively productive tension between the familiarity and strangeness of a text, Gadamer discovers that “[t]he true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between”³ In the original German of the text, Gadamer’s reflection reads, *In diesem Zwischen ist der wahre Ort der Hermeneutik*. Two items are of note here. The first is the emphasis he achieves by leading with the prepositional phrase, *in diesem Zwischen*, literally, “in this between.” Expressed in this way, Gadamer highlights that it is in this in-between of strangeness and familiarity, that we truly discover the hermeneutic phenomenon. In fact, the second item of note is captured here as well: the in-between is not a location somewhere along the spectrum, as it were, between the strangeness and familiarity of the text, but is a space defined in dynamic tension of both strangeness and familiarity. That is to say, the *dynamic of being in-between itself* is the locus of the hermeneutic phenomenon. Paul Ricoeur makes a similar observation when he identifies the dialectic of *verfremdung* (critical distanciation) and *zugehörigkeit* (participatory belonging) as the productive

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³ Ibid., 295. Italics original. Of course, Gadamer develops this insight more fully in terms of *der Mitte des Sprechens*, as part of his dialogic ontology of language, in the Third Part of *TM*. The decision to limit our focus to this earlier and less developed statement of the very insight he develops at length later does not indicate the failure on our part to perceive either the philosophical significance of this concept or the relevant scholarship available on it. In fact, it is precisely for these reasons we focus on the more economical and almost matter of fact statement above. Moreover, it has the elegance in one phrase of expressing the central claim of this thesis, namely, that interdisciplinary experience is thoroughly hermeneutic in character.
tension at the heart of hermeneutic thought. Hermeneutics, therefore, is a distinctly contemporary possibility for Ricoeur. Whereas pre-critical thought experienced the zugehörigkeit of the immediacy of belief, and critical modernity is exiled to the desert of verfremdung, the hermeneutic consciousness finds itself in the dialectic of critique and belief. This dialectic is the Zwischen that is truly the locus of hermeneutics.

When Gadamer speaks of the in-between (in diesem Zwischen) as being the locus (der Ort) or place of hermeneutics is important to remember that this locus is not, strictly speaking, a place at all. Or, rather, if it is, it is so in a virtual sense. The point in here is not to be pedantic; it is to draw proper attention to the meaning of the fact that the “between” itself is the locus in question. It is not a static place between two points but the being-in-between strangeness and familiarity itself—hence its dynamic and virtual character. Much hinges on this distinction. To speak of the dynamics of the in-between as being a place recalls what Gadamer claims with respect to being in play in a game. The being “in” in regard to play refers to the fact that the game constitutes a context, with its own structure and its own rules. While the game may be played in a given location, and while, like a tennis match, the field of play is essential to playing the game, the structure that the game constitutes is in no way identified with the place of play. To be in play refers to being caught up in the dynamics of the game rather than being in the field of play. In this way, the dynamics of being in play constitute a virtual locus as well.

To say that the locus of play is virtual, however, is not to contrast it with being real. Neither is it to speak in merely metaphorical terms.4 It is rather to identify the temporal and relational character of the event (Ereignis) as Gadamer conceives of it. The

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4 Though, as Ricoeur and Derrida have taught us, in different ways, metaphors themselves are by no means simply metaphorical.
event, say, of the sacred drama, is the locus of play because it constitutes a real transformation into structure of play and players, time and space. Being is made present in the dramatic performance that was not previously there. The event of the performance is the place where the being of the play comes-to-presence. It is a virtual space, but real nonetheless. We see a similar temporal and relational dynamic in Gadamer’s notion of the event character of historical understanding. Entering into dialogue with the text by means of foregrounded prejudice constitutes the event of the fusion of horizons. This event is the locus of historical understanding in the sense that it is a real though virtual structure that constitutes text and reader as interlocutors of a dialogue in which the being of tradition comes to presence.

Realizing the interity of interdisciplinarity, therefore, is to realize the contours of an alternative, and indeed hermeneutic, ontology of understanding. The locus of interdisciplinarity is the in-between, the dynamic and virtual space of interaction, relation, and difference. It is dynamic because, as we have seen, the event of understanding—the fusion of horizons—is a dialectic of relation in difference and difference in relation. The space of the in-between is virtual because of the temporal and relational structure of the event. The truth of art or of historical tradition, for example, comes to presence in the total mediation of the drama or the fusion of horizons with the witness to past life. The alternative ontology of understanding realized in the interity of interdisciplinarity, moreover, extends to consciousness as well. The consciousness at work in interdisciplinary experience is thoroughly hermeneutic, understanding itself to be the effect of history and taking that effect as a point of departure rather than seeing it as a problem to be overcome by method. The hermeneutic discipline of questioning is the
means of transforming the effect of history into an opportunity for the fusion of horizons. In this way, we see that it is the historically-effected consciousness that is at work in interdisciplinary experience, bringing about the fusion of horizons in a regulated way.

To translate Gadamer’s statement, therefore, into the terminology of the present discussion, we might say that the true locus of the hermeneutic phenomenon is in this inter. As we do, we recognize the profound connection between hermeneutics and interdisciplinarity, as well as the inspiration for the neologism interity. When we first introduced the concept of interity we glossed it briefly as referring to both the dynamic and virtual space of interaction, relation, and difference in which interdisciplinarity thrives as well as the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience. In so doing, we sought by interity to capture something of the character both of the locus of interdisciplinary experience as well as the experience itself. As we turn to consider the implications of interity for how we understand the significance of characteristic interdisciplinary practices, it is necessary to contrast the notion of practices informed by interity with method in more detail. For while interdisciplinary practices, thus understood, do indeed satisfy the need for a coherent interdisciplinary method, interdisciplinary practice is not the hermeneutic corollary of method. It is worth taking the time to make this point, since, as even the English translation of TM betrays, it is easily missed.

Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall’s English translation of TM has Gadamer concluding his work with the following statement: “Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of
questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth.”\(^5\) This translation conveys well Gadamer’s final word on the failure of method as well as his signature notion of the discipline of questioning. The decision to render the German of the final phrase as “a discipline that guarantees the truth,” however, is problematic for at least three related reasons. It seems to indicate that what method cannot achieve (namely, guaranteeing the truth) is achieved by a discipline of questioning. This implies that a discipline of questioning is in fact the corollary of method, and that truth is its object. Were this simply a short-coming on Gadamer’s part and not the fault of the translators it would represent a remarkable failure at the very conclusion of his argument. Fortunately, the text allows a different rendering, leading to a vastly different conclusion.\(^6\)

The original German of this text reads as follows: “Was das Werkzeug der Methode nicht leistet, muß vielmehr und kann auch wirklich durch eine Disziplin des Fragens und des Forschens geleistet werden, die Wahrheit verbürgt.”\(^7\) It is possible to render this in English: “What the tool of method does not achieve—still more [what] must and really can be achieved through a discipline of questioning and inquiring—the truth guarantees (authenticates, stakes, warrants, or vouches for).”\(^8\) This translation is superior to the Weinsheimer’s and Marshall’s for several reasons. First, it places the

\(^5\) *TM*, 484.

\(^6\) I was first made aware of the discussion surrounding the translation (and thus interpretation) of this closing passage as a student under the direction of Georgetown University Professor Francis J. Ambrosio. Ambrosio has published on the interpretation of this passage as well, most notably: Francis J. Ambrosio, “International Philosophical Quarterly XXVII, no. 1. (March 1987).

\(^7\) *WM*, 494.

\(^8\) Ambrosio opts for the word warrants both to distinguish the shades of meaning between the two words leisten and verbürgen in the German text, and to contrast the tool of method with the discipline of questioning. We chose to render verbürgen “guarantees,” both since we addressed the plurality of German words by rendering leisten “achieves” and for the poignancy the word “guarantees” lends to our rendering of the text.
contrast between method and truth, which is fitting given the title of the work, rather than between method and discipline. In this way, Gadamer’s point is clear: what method ultimately fails to achieve, the truth guarantees. Moreover, our translation maintains the contrasting parallelism between what the instrumentum of method does not achieve (nicht leistet) and what is really achieved (wirklich...geleistet werden) through the discipline of questioning and inquiring. The double contrast here is between tool and discipline, on the one hand, and not achieving and really being achieved on the other. In fact, if hermeneutics, as we have argued, is truly a matter of experience understood as Erfahrung, the contrast between tools and discipline could not be more powerful. It is surprising that Weinsheimer and Marshall overlook this; it seems rather too important to miss.

The rendering of this text is not simply a question of translation but of interpretation. Thus it is necessary to see as well that the participatory character of understanding is best preserved if truth is the subject rather than the object of the verb verbürgt. Gadamer has not sought simply to replace scientific method with a discipline of questioning, as if questioning were more effective or authentic than method at bringing about the desired result. (In fact, according to our argument, method has never actually been about guaranteeing truth, regardless of its stated purposes, but about overcoming the alienation of modern consciousness.) Gadamer’s point, as we have shown, is that following the question brings about a fusion of horizons where the truth asserts itself.

What method cannot achieve—participatory belonging, the return from the exile of criticism—is achieved through discipline of questioning. What guarantees this end? Our methods? Our discipline? No, answers Gadamer; the guarantee comes from truth itself. Understood in this manner, therefore, this final phrase of TM echoes the sentiment
Gadamer expresses earlier in the work, in the final phrase of the second part: “This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but, rather, in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth.”

Note especially the contrast he draws between the successful conversation and the use of tools, as well as his recognition of the influence the truth asserts over the interlocutors. Truth submits neither to our methods nor our disciplines—“not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.”

Truth rather comes to presence in the dynamic and virtual space of the in-between. This in-between—this interity—is opened precisely through a discipline of questioning and inquiring; hence the radical hermeneutical significance of interdisciplinary practice, to which we turn.

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9 *TM*, 371. Italics mine.

10 *TM*, xxvi.
**The Radical Significance of Interdisciplinary Practice**

Interdisciplinarity literally begins with the problem. The word *interdisciplinary* was coined, as we have seen, by the SSRC in the mid-1920s in order to describe its goal of dialogue and collaboration across intellectual boundaries: “[t]he organization was shaped by the need to cross the boundaries that separated these disciplines from each other, university scholarship from public affairs, and the social sciences from the humanities and the natural sciences.”¹ Note that the decidedly interdisciplinary focus of the SSRC has nothing to do with a critique of disciplinarity—indeed, the disciplinary academy as we know it does not come to bear until after the Second World War.² It is rather the goal of addressing the complex problems facing modern culture that provides the impetus for the SSRC’s interdisciplinary approach. The SSRC defines its mission as “an international, interdisciplinary network of networks dedicated to galvanizing knowledge and mobilizing it for the public good.”³ This phrase “galvanizing knowledge and mobilizing it for the public good,” in fact, expresses well the basic sense of what it means to say interdisciplinarity is oriented toward the problem. For SSRC, the problem of securing the public good elicits, limits, and directs the inquiry. This kind of orientation toward the problem is also what accounts for the proliferation of interdisciplinary institutes, research centers, and journals that Jacobs noted in his study of interdisciplinarity.⁴ The interdisciplinary focus of these institutes, research centers, and

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 37-68.
journals—and, indeed, their intellectual efforts as such—are best understood, like SSRC, as a response the demands of the problem. We will return to this notion shortly.

There is, however, another sense in which interdisciplinarity is oriented toward the problem. It is, we might say, the reflective counterpart to this practical orientation toward the problem. Where a research center, for example, seeks to galvanize knowledge with a view toward addressing a particular concrete problem of application—e.g., poverty, Middle East politics, ethnicity and healthcare inequities, etc.—interdisciplinary research or inquiry itself seeks to galvanize knowledge around a problem of thought or significant area of philosophical disagreement. Armand Nicholi’s famous Harvard seminar turned best-selling book and PBS film, The Question of God, is an excellent illustration of this theoretical orientation toward the problem.Nicholi seeks to engage students in the classic problem of belief in God by considering how belief or non-belief in God problematizes questions in areas beyond the specific purview of religion or theology. Nicholi is most concerned with problems such as the nature of love and the purpose of human life. He makes us of the problem, however, to generate interest and dialogue across disciplinary boundaries in what might seem at first to be a narrowly religious or theological question. As with practical problems concerning the public good, the problems of thought Nicholi poses also elicit, limit, and direct the inquiry of those involved.

As we trace out the radical implications of interity in interdisciplinary practice, we must consider the significance of the problem in both the practical and reflective

senses. We look first to the practical sense, however, because it is a specific instance of
the more general interdisciplinary emphasis upon application. The problem in its more
reflective sense is best considered in connection with the practice of dialogue because, as
we will see, when encountered this way the problem of thought takes on the logical form
of a question.

We noted above how orientation toward the problem accounts for the
proliferation of interdisciplinary initiatives. Each institute, research center, and journal
seeks to galvanize knowledge from various disciplines, ordering it with respect to a
specific practical problem or set of problems. Jacobs notes two examples as illustrative
of this trend, *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care* and *International
Journal of Society Systems Science*. Although the former journal is narrow in scope and
the latter more general, the focus of each of these journals is delimited by a problem or
set of problems. Again, the resulting interdisciplinary focus here is due, not to a critique
of disciplinarity, but is determined by the demands of the problem. If, however, we
follow the analysis of thinkers like Jacobs, who interpret interdisciplinarity as a response
to the perceived insularity of the disciplines, we are tempted to understand the emergence
of journals like these as an ironic and unintended consequence of interdisciplinarity.
What begins as a strategy for breaking down barriers to communication across disciplines,
so the thinking goes, eventuates in an effective micro-fracturing of the disciplinary
academy into as many perspectives as there are problems to be addressed. Thus while a
specific research center or journal may enjoy interdisciplinary communication within its

6 Ibid., 66.
own domain, the net effect is the balkanization of the academy into un-navigable
diversity of perspectives.

According to the initial argument of the present thesis, however, interdisciplinarity is not to be interpreted as a response to the insularity of the disciplines but as a reaction to a more basic experience of alienation in modern consciousness. The prolific growth of interdisciplinary initiatives around specific problems is thus an indication, not of unintended consequences, but of the radical significance of the problem itself. Indeed, the galvanizing effect of the problem addresses modern consciousness precisely at the point of its perceived alienation. Since interdisciplinarity has hitherto failed to understand itself in light of the alienation of modern consciousness it has yet to realize the significance of its orientation around the problem. Moreover, while it is doubtless true that the proliferation of interdisciplinarity initiatives frustrates the hopes of comprehensive or universal knowledge, this frustration indicates rather the restricted economy of modern consciousness than an ironic outcome of interdisciplinarity. It is modern consciousness that seeks comprehensive knowledge by means of a universal method, or at least seeks to institutionalize the production of knowledge by means of a

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7 In our investigations of the alienation of modern consciousness, we found how the subjectivity presupposed by modern consciousness serves to alienate it both from the putative objects of its possible experience and from certain fundamental features of its own experience. For example, the world or human tradition, considered as objects, are essentially separate from the subjective modern consciousness. As objects, moreover, they are passive with respect to epistemological methods of the modern consciousness. Indeed, the modern consciousness imagines that overcoming its alienation from the object is essentially a problem of method. Our study of both Ricoeur and Gadamer has shown, however, that the dichotomies of modern consciousness ignore a more basic experience of being in the world; for beyond our methodological pretensions there exist the fundamental orders of our being that we can neither manipulate nor ultimately ignore, but must simply respect. In our consideration of the symbolic language of confession, the experience of the work of art, and historical understanding, we found that there is always already a prior orientation toward the world, that not only is not the result of method, but that provides the conditions of possibility for experience itself. The alienation of modern consciousness is thus most fundamentally an alienation from these orders of its own being and experience.
comprehensive social structure like the modern research university.

Following the indication of interity we see how the orientation toward the problem precisely addresses the alienation of modern consciousness. Allowing the problem rather methodology to direct inquiry completely changes the dynamics of the situation imagined by modern consciousness. First of all, the model of a subjectivity plying its method on an object is not adequate to describe the experience of being directed by the problem. The experience is rather more like that of a player being caught up in the play of the game. The problem establishes the context for play. It has its own rules, projects its own horizon of possibility, and constitutes, as well, its own players. The problem stands to inquiry as the game stands to play; it is not the object of inquiry but provides the very context for both thought and action. In this way, the alienation implicit in subjectivity is overcome as the experience of being-in-the-world exposes the subject-object dichotomy for the abstraction it is. The problem discloses that the relationship is always prior to what is related in inquiry and knowledge.

Moreover, the problem addresses the alienation implicit in method as well. As we saw in our study of aesthetic and historical consciousness, method implies that the potential object of experience is passive with respect to knowledge and understanding. Questions of method, however, are not relevant in light of the nature of the problem itself. Rather, oriented by the question, we encounter a series of new questions. What does the problem demand? What possibilities does it permit? What is necessary in order properly to address it? And so on. Thus, by being oriented toward the problem the very active-passive scheme of method gives way to an experience of understanding that is dialectical and participatory. The problem exerts its influence the way that play plays its
players and the dramatic performance transforms both players and audience into the structure of the play. Like the game, the dramatic performance, the experience of a work of art, or genuine historical understanding, therefore, the problem constitutes an event of understanding. Herein lies the connection with application A consideration of Gadamer’s notion of the hermeneutic significance of application will serve to bring both the event-character and participatory dynamic of the problem more fully to light.

In his elucidation of a theory of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer claims that the chief task of the historically-effected consciousness is to bring about the fusion of horizons in a regulated way. Achieving this fusion is a matter of situating oneself with respect to what confronts one—say, some traditionary material—such that understanding and making a contemporary application of this understanding are one and the same dynamic. This insight allows Gadamer to restore application, and phronesis, the kind of moral reasoning required in application, to its rightful place in human understanding. Legal and theological hermeneutics, for Gadamer, are exemplary in this regard. “A law does not exist in order to be understood historically,” he writes,

but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.9

In theology, therefore, the kind of understanding (subtilitas intelligendi) and interpretation (subtilitas explicandi) involved in theoretical inquiry only truly becomes

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8 Gadamer, TM, 306.

9 Ibid., 307-308.
understanding in the application (subtilitas applicandi) of proclamation.\textsuperscript{10} Thus the theologian has neither properly understood nor interpreted the scriptural text until he applies it in the event of proclamation. The same situation abides for legal hermeneutics as well. A judge, for example, has not properly interpreted a law until he or she applies it in a given case over which he or she is presiding. Gadamer explains: “discovering the meaning of a legal text and discovering how to apply it in a particular legal instance are not two separate actions, but one unitary process.”\textsuperscript{11} The meaning of law, then, perhaps even more so than a theological text, is determined precisely by its application in a particular situation.

The temptation is to grant the legitimacy of Gadamer’s insight concerning the unitary process of understanding, interpretation, and application when practicing law or preaching the Gospel, but to limit it to the exigencies of the courtroom or the pulpit. In this way, we might recognize the necessity of application in these so-called practical fields, while at the same time maintaining the theory-praxis dichotomy when it comes to the disinterested philosophical, historical, or theological reflection undertaken only for the sake of knowledge. But this is to miss the significance of Gadamer’s critique of historical consciousness that we explored above. Even those historical investigations that are most exacting—not simply in terms of maintaining theory over practice, but in seeking completely to extinguish the individual in the pursuit of purely historical understanding—nevertheless betray their own interests and motivations. This influence of interest and motivation, as we saw, is not a failure on the part of historical scholarship,

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 306.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 309.
but is part of “the splendid magic of immediately mirroring the present in the past and the past in the present” that defines the classic works of historical scholarship. This magic, as we have seen, is the operation of foregrounded prejudice—the very best of scholarship is the response to questions raised from the depths of its historical being. In this way, application in what are considered to be the more scholarly or theoretical pursuits is another way of expressing what we might call relevance.

Gadamer illustrates the unitary process of understanding, interpretation, and application by turning to the arts. He writes:

No one can stage a play, read a poem, or perform a piece of music without understanding the original meaning of the text and presenting it in his reproduction and interpretation. But, similarly, no one will be able to make a performative interpretation without taking account of that other normative element—the stylistic values of one’s own day—which, whenever a text is brought to sensory appearance, sets limits to the demand for a stylistically correct reproduction.

In art, as in historical scholarship, interpretation is always already application. Also like historical scholarship, however, there is the temptation to conceive of application at a merely practical level—staging a play, reading a poem, or performing a piece of music—and ignore the more basic way the stylistic values of one’s own day set limits on what can be experienced as a correct reproduction. Learning to respect these limits is not a matter of allowing an element of subjective taste into our artistic considerations; it is a recognition of the inseparability of interpretation and application. Gadamer writes: “Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of

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understanding." Unfortunately, so long as interdisciplinarity has been conceived according the conceptual frames of the modern disciplines the particular form of interpretation called application has been understood precisely in terms of a post facto supplement. The interdisciplinary emphasis upon application has been called upon to supplement the vast stores of theoretical knowledge produced by the disciplinary academy. It is clear that this proceeds from a false dichotomy. From the perspective of interity, interdisciplinarity seeks to recover application, not as a vital supplement to theoretical inquiry, but as the integral event of understanding.

The mere theoretical knowledge of the modern disciplines is something of a short-circuit of understanding if it does not come to bear in application. As we will see in our consideration of the problem in its reflective sense, this application need not be understood in terms of a practical solution to social problems. At its most basic level, application understood as the event of understanding means that genuine understanding is always situated with respect to the “interpreter’s present situation.” There is thus a radical character to application. Transposed from the sterility of the theory-praxis schema, where interdisciplinarity’s practical focus is seen as supplementary, a corollary to the kind of theoretical knowledge the disciplines seek to guarantee, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity recovers the fundamental significance of application as the event of understanding.

According to the logic of our analysis of the alienation of modern consciousness,

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13 Ibid., 306.

14 Ibid., 307.

15 As we will see, this point is well illustrated in Ricoeur’s conception of reading as an act of creative appropriation of being-in-the-world of the text.
and especially in light of what we have just discussed concerning application, the interdisciplinary orientation toward the problem is not surprising. If it is generally desirable for knowledge to have a relevant area of application to the interpreter’s present situation, there is no better way to ensure this relevance than to let inquiry be directed by the specific practical exigencies of the problem. In this way, the problem provides the event context for application in an inescapably concrete way. If understanding is the event of bringing interpretation to bear in one’s own present, there is no more poignant means of achieving this than in application of knowledge to the problem. As in the application of law, theology, and aesthetic interpretation, the particularity of the problem sets its own demands and determines what knowledge is relevant. The problem is thus like the effect of historical tradition in historical understanding. Attending to the problem, like attending to the effect of history, determines what is possible to understand. The likeness here, however, is not merely by analogy; the significance of problem and application both reflect the dialectical and participatory character of knowledge.

At this point, we are able to see that the problem, so to speak, with interdisciplinarity’s orientation toward the problem has been largely at the level of imagination. To be engaged in inquiry that is oriented toward the problem is already to experience the event and participatory character of understanding, as well as the dialectical nature of knowledge. It is an entirely different matter to be conscious of the dynamics of interdisciplinary experience as such. Hitherto, the interdisciplinary focus

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16 As we noted with respect to the historically-effected consciousness, historical tradition will have its effect in all authentic historical understanding, irrespective of our prejudices or philosophical presuppositions. Indeed, the alienation of historical consciousness consists not in the failure to experience the effect of history in historical understanding but to perceive this effect for what it is. The historically-effected consciousness is distinct in that it recognizes the effect of history and seeks to make productive use of it in by foregrounding prejudices in the fusion of horizons.
upon the problem has been seen as ensuring relevance. This is well and good; truth is relevant.\textsuperscript{17} From the perspective of the integrity of interdisciplinarity, however, the significance of the problem lies in the fact that it constitutes the event of understanding. Our discussion of the interdisciplinary practice of application and its orientation toward the problem converge to disclose the basic structure, or rather dynamic, of understanding—the dialogue which we are. That something happens when multiple viewpoints converge in conversation is a basic interdisciplinary insight, hence its characteristic emphasis upon dialogue. Unfortunately, when considered according to the statics of the disciplinary model this has simply amounted to the recognition of the effectiveness of collaboration for solving problems or making new disciplinary subdivisions.\textsuperscript{18} Within the disciplinary model, dialogue appears to be the compilation of viewpoints or perspectives; to the hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, it is the event of the fusion of horizons. Moreover, whether it is conversation among persons or disciplines, the encounter with traditionary materials, texts, or a work of art, or ultimately the reconciliation of explanatory and interpretive attitudes toward understanding, it is clear the practice of dialogue, like the practice of application and orientation toward the problem, is a reaction to the alienation of modern consciousness. In order to realize the significance of dialogue we must begin with Gadamer’s notion of the logical priority of the question, since it is in following the question that the dialectical shape of experience appears.

\textsuperscript{17} I am reminded of the English translation of Gadamer’s famous essay, \textit{"die Actualität des Schönen"}—“The Relevance of the Beautiful.”

\textsuperscript{18} The metaphor of disciplinary subdivisions appears (without irony) in the report prepared by the faculty of arts and humanities at Harvard College, published under the title “Mapping the Future: The Teaching of the Arts and Humanities and Harvard College.”

\url{http://artsandhumanities.fas.harvard.edu/files/humanities/files/mapping_the_future_31_may_2013.pdf}. This metaphor, while entertaining, is illustrative as well. It illustrates precisely what we mean by the claim that interdisciplinarity has often been conceived within the \textit{statics} of the disciplinary model.
comes to light.

We have already encountered Gadamer’s notion of the importance of the question in our discussion of foregrounding prejudice and the fusion of horizons. Acknowledged or not, prejudices rather than historical judgments are the basis of our historical being in the world. The hermeneutic consciousness becomes aware of the presence of prejudices the experience of the unfamiliar or offensive in the encounter with historical tradition, for example, or in the recognition that a given work of art is “classical.” Because it acknowledges that the prejudices themselves have already performed the possibility of these experiences, the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to foreground its prejudices in hopes of understanding the traditionary material or experiencing the work of art. Foregrounding prejudices means to suspend them as judgments and to realize them instead as conditions of openness to the world. Put another way, foregrounding prejudices means realizing them as questions rather than judgments. As Gadamer writes, “all suspension of judgments, and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a question.” Since prejudices constitute the conditions of our openness to the world, then the question constitutes the only viable path to knowledge. In fact, writes Gadamer, “only a person who has questions can have knowledge.” He expresses this notion in terms of the logical priority of the question.

Acknowledging the logical priority of the question in knowledge is to make the departure from the subjectivity and method of modern consciousness in the most

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20 TM, 298.

21 TM, 357.
profound way. To have questions is always already to have been addressed, as the precondition of experience. As such, understanding depends not upon following a method but upon a discipline of following the question. The precise point of departure, however, is the recognition that the question is not original to the person, at least not solely; for while foregrounding prejudice is the act of the hermeneutic consciousness, the prejudice itself is the effect of history. There are two sides to this recognition. On the one hand, it is misleading to imagine that questioning means that we simply pose questions to experience. Foregrounding the prejudice as a question merely discloses its logical structure. This is why any notion of a method of inquiry or questioning is fundamentally misguided.22 “There is no such thing,” Gadamer concludes from his reading of Plato, “as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable.”23 Yet, on the other hand, neither is it adequate to conceive of the question merely as a response to the stimulus of the foregrounded prejudice. Prejudice’s logical structure as a question is only disclosed when it is foregrounded.

Furthermore, acknowledging the logical priority of the question departs from modern consciousness because it affirms the dialectical and participatory character of experience as such. Thus to have questions in the experience of a work of art is to undermine the aesthetic differentiation from which aesthetic consciousness seeks to ground its experience on the basis of aesthetic judgment alone. Similarly, to have questions in the experience of historical tradition is to undermine the methodological extinguishing of the individual, whereby historical consciousness seeks to ground its

22 It exposes as well the misguided nature of the modern pedagogical technique of “Socratic questioning,” by which one means asking a series of leading questions.

23 Ibid., 359.
historical being in the world on the basis of historical judgment alone. Indeed, to have questions in the interpretation of texts undermines the misunderstanding between I and Thou that hermeneutic consciousness presupposes in its method of avoiding errors, because it affirms the more basic understanding that must support even the experience of distance and unfamiliarity. In this way, acknowledging the logical priority of the question also provides the critical link to the realization of dialogue as well. Gadamer writes, “the priority of the question in knowledge shows how fundamentally the idea of method is limited for knowledge, which has been the starting point for our argument as a whole. There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable.”

To transform this recognition of the priority of the question into dialogue, however, requires attending to the character of the question as such. “The essence of the question is to have sense,” writes Gadamer. That is to say, the question is intentional; it indicates a certain direction of thought. As such, it also forms a horizon of possibility for an answer. The discipline of following the question, therefore, means a discipline of attending to the sense of the question as well as framing answers according to the horizon of the question. As we observe in Plato’s dialogues—at times to our amusement, though more often to our frustration—when an interlocutor fails to follow the sense of the question or to frame his answers within the horizon of the question, his response is no answer at all, neither is the exchange truly a dialogue. This is why for Gadamer “the

\[\text{24 Ibid., 359.}\]
\[\text{25 Ibid., 356.}\]
\[\text{26 Below we look to Gadamer’s reading of Plato’s \textit{Lysis} as an illustration of this point. In the \textit{Lysis}, as we will see, the interlocutors are unable to follow the sense of the question, and thus fail to abide by the logic of question and answer. Rather than concluding that this dialogue is a failure, however, Gadamer}\]
critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue” depends on the question.\textsuperscript{27} It must be asked and answered in earnest—that is, with a view to gaining insight and not just to proving oneself wise. Genuine dialogue, for Gadamer, operates according to the logic of question and answer.

As the game masters its players, so dialogue compels its interlocutors according to the logic of question and answer. To participate in the question and answer of dialogue, therefore, is to participate in the play of conversation. With this recognition we can say why the simplistic notion of dialogue as the compilation of perspectives is inadequate. Like the play of the game or the dramatic performance, where the what-is, the being of play, comes to presence, so too in the play of conversation the what-is of the dialogue comes to presence. “To conduct a conversation,” writes Gadamer, “means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented.”\textsuperscript{28} Thus the truth of the dialogue is the not the compilation of perspectives provided by the interlocutors, it is rather the subject matter at hand (\textit{die Sache selbst}) that comes to presence among the interlocutors. In dialogue, writes Gadamer, “the speaker (der Redende) is put to the question (zur Rede gestellt) until the truth of what is under discussion (wovon der Rede ist) finally emerges.”\textsuperscript{29} Our responsibility as interlocutors is to situate ourselves with respect to what confronts us in this emergence.

interprets it pedagogically. In the \textit{Lysis}, Plato is teaching not teaching us the nature of friendship and love, but it teaching us dialectic understood as the art of following the question. As such, we offer a reading of Gadamer’s interpretation of the Lysis as an illustration of how the art of dialectic can be a pedagogy for the hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity.

\textsuperscript{27} TM, 356.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 361.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
Dialogue, therefore, like application and orienting one’s inquiry toward the problem, is not a corollary to method. It is not a non-methodical alternative way of guaranteeing the truth. It is rather a practice the places one in diesem Zwischen—the in-between that is the true locus of the hermeneutic phenomenon. The characteristic interdisciplinary emphases of dialogue, application, and orientation of inquiry toward the problem are thus practices that open the dynamic and virtual space of interity. In so doing, the address the experience of alienation of modern consciousness. This applies as well to the problem in its theoretical sense we discussed earlier, to which we turn briefly.

Framing discussions in terms of problems rather than by topics is an effective means of engaging student interest. For topics, like entries in an encyclopedia, are of interest only insofar as someone is already looking for them. When a topic becomes a problem, however, it attracts attention—especially when it literally becomes the locus of a disagreement. This is especially the case if the parties of the dispute are authorities in their own right and if their disagreement has implications that extend well beyond the parameters of the specific problem. Recall the example of Armand Nicholi’s seminar on belief in God. Nicholi sets Sigmund Freud in opposition to C. S. Lewis, showing how two men with similar life experiences and intellectual acumen come to very different conclusions about central issues in human experience. The hope is to engage students from a variety of disciplinary fields in the question of God. And while it certainly achieves this goal, there is more than shrewd pedagogical technique on display. In light of our argument, we see rather an intuition of the priority of the question. So long as belief or non-belief in God remained a static topic, there was little to raise attention. By placing it within the dynamics of disagreement, however, the problem was raised to the
status of the question. Within these dynamics it exists as an undecided pro or contra; there is room for deliberative reason and demand for a decision. Furthermore, because the authorities in disagreement are representative of basic postures towards the world, so to speak, one enters the question oneself already disposed toward one answer or another.

As we mentioned with respect to the practical problem, the problem with interdisciplinarity’s orientation toward the theoretical problem is also at the level of imagination. From the perspective of interity, we understand that we do not problematize topics so much as we realize the question at stake in the problem. The effectiveness of framing our intellectual endeavors—our inquiry—by problems is evidence not so much of the fecundity of the problem per se as it is of the fruitfulness of a discipline of questioning.
PART III.

REALIZING THE LIBERAL STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES AS INTERDISCIPLINARY PEDAGOGY
The Experience (erfahrung) of Play

The final section of the present thesis looks again to interdisciplinary practice. Here the focus is the non-disciplinary or liberal study of the humanities that is characteristic of interdisciplinarity as it is actually practiced in the academy,¹ and that informs Gadamer’s hermeneutical reflections on the non-methodical experience of truth.²

As with application, orientation toward the problem, and dialogue, the goal is to show how the liberal study of the humanities is transformed in light of the interity of interdisciplinarity. Specifically, we seek to show how interity realizes the liberal study of the humanities as an interdisciplinary pedagogy that undermines modern consciousness while cultivating historically-effected consciousness in its place. Thus realized, an interdisciplinary pedagogy of the humanities serves the twofold hermeneutic project Gadamer sketches in the second preface to TM—confronting the will of modern man with the truth of remembrance, and awakening and keeping vigilant hermeneutic consciousness.³ Thus, while an interdisciplinary pedagogy is concerned with knowledge, and indeed with truth, it is nevertheless subversive of the particularly modern pretension of guaranteeing knowledge and truth. In this way, is also thoroughly Socratic in character; for, like a Socratic dialogue, it is not a method or set of techniques, but a way of being in the world.

The full realization of the liberal study of the humanities as an interdisciplinary pedagogy is far-reaching and as varied as the philological, historical, and aesthetic

¹ Julie Thompson Klein, Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity.

² Jean Grondin, Sources of Hermeneutics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 111-123, esp. 120.

³ See: TM, xx-xxxiv, esp. xxxiv.
pursuits of the traditional humanities syllabus. Its full development is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here we seek to sketch the contours of this pedagogy, offering value and texture, as it were, only with respect to play and the liberal arts of grammar and dialectic. These three items are illustrative, however: play discloses the basic dynamics of hermeneutic experience, while grammar and dialectic orient experience particularly with respect to the effect of language. In this way, play, grammar, and dialectic are not simply three examples among many, but indicate how the pedagogical potential of the humanities may be realized.

**Alienation, Elebnis, and Hermeneutic Experience (Erfahrung)**

Although we have already discussed Gadamer’s phenomenology of play and theory of aesthetic experience, it is important to bring various points of that discussion together as we turn to the pedagogical potential of play. Gadamer’s reflections on play come in the context of his attempts to retrieve the question of the truth of art, where he follows play in order to disclose the ontology of aesthetic experience. Importantly, however, the impetus for Gadamer’s reflections upon aesthetic experience in general, and play in particular, is the phenomenon of the changing meaning of experience in the humanist tradition over the past several centuries. Thus, as we seek to realize play as the fundamental interdisciplinary pedagogy, it is necessary to consider it within the context of Gadamer’s investigation into the guiding concepts of the humanist tradition, and especially his critique of the romantic concept of experience (*Erlebnis*) operative in its appropriation by the *Bildung* tradition.

The most compelling feature of Gadamer’s investigations of the truth in the aesthetic, historical, and philological experience of the humanities is their descriptive and interpretive character. He is not concerned to enunciate an epistemological theory, much
less to prescribe a methodology for the humanities. Rather, his project is philosophical: to identify the experience of truth that transcends the domain of method and to inquire into its character. He began his investigations into such experience with reflection upon the so-called Geisteswissenschaften because they were relative late-comers to method—indeed, art, history, literature, and philosophy only came to model themselves according to the methodological standards of modern science in the nineteenth century. For Gadamer, this development was to disastrous effect.

Methodologically ensured objectivity is the genius of modern science. Maintaining critical distance (Verfremdung) by suppressing the effects of familiar association (Zugehörigkeit) is the ideal. This ideal of opposing critical distanciation to participatory belonging applies equally with respect to the subject and object of scientific investigation alike. The validity of scientific claims to knowledge depends both upon the objectivity of the observer with respect to object of his or her inquiry, as well as upon the isolation or abstraction of the phenomenon under observation from its context. One thinks of Galileo’s famous discoveries concerning motion as examples of this point. It was by setting aside the opinion of Aristotle and attending instead to a description of the phenomenon itself that Galileo observed pendular motion.\(^4\) He observed the constant rate of falling objects only by isolating the movement of the objects from their context—literally, considering them within a vacuum.

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\(^4\) Thomas Kuhn notes, of course, that even in this regard history had had its effect on Galileo despite his intention to attend to the phenomenon itself: “the scientist who looks at a swinging stone can have no experience that is in principle more elementary than seeing a pendulum.” The pendular paradigm is pre-requisite for the experience of the observation itself. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3\(^{rd}\) ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 128.
The human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) look not to phenomena in the natural world, but to human tradition. Human tradition dwells in language (as Gadamer expresses it, in der Mitte des Sprechens), as does the human subject who seeks to understand elements of that tradition. The attempt to hold oneself at critical distance from the effect of human tradition in the investigation of witness to past life is quite different, therefore, from seeking to ensure the objectivity of observations in scientific investigation.

Similarly, isolating a given witness to past life from its place in human tradition in order to contextualize it according to historical method is a radically different undertaking than isolating a falling object from the resistance of air in order to determine its rate of acceleration. Understanding human tradition depends entirely, as Gadamer’s investigations have shown, upon the dynamic inter-play between Zugehörigkeit and Verfremdung experienced in language.

This in-between of language comes to bear in the spatial, temporal, and relational dynamics of human experience. Applied to the arts of human tradition, therefore, the tools of method all but extricate understanding from the spatial and temporal conditions upon which it depends. Gadamer’s apocalyptic assessment of modern consciousness in the preface the second edition of TM must be understood in this light. “The will of man,” he writes, “is ever intensifying its criticism of what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness.”5 Thus, whatever the consequences might be for science, the adoption of the tools of method, and the ideal of objectivity these tools putatively secure, has undermined not simply the experience of truth in the humanities, but the basis itself of our historical being in the world. In this way, it is clear

5 TM, xxxiv.
that the ideal of methodological objectivity ultimately entails transcending the human character of human understanding in the most profound way. This is precisely the critique of alienation we discovered earlier in this thesis.

Recall Paul Ricoeur’s final word on the attempt to escape the contingency of the historical character of human understanding and to “stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated objectivity.” He was tempted at first to see it merely as truncation, maintaining a dichotomy among interpretation and explanation. He writes that such a one “would at most know everything, but would understand nothing.” Correcting himself in light of his discovery of the situatedness of human consciousness, however, he corrects his initial judgment: “In truth, he would seek nothing, not being motivated by concern about any question.”  

Note the profound character of alienation in the attempt to maintain objectivity. At first, it appears to be an alienation of knowledge from a deeper or more personal understanding or appreciation for the symbolic character of language. In actuality, however, objectivity represents an alienation of consciousness from both inquiry and knowledge as such. The alienation here could not be more radical—it is nothing less than alienation from the dialogue that we are.

When Gadamer begins his investigations into the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method that has so dominated the human sciences, he recalls the guiding humanist concepts of judgment, common sense, and taste. As ways of knowing, these concepts have been eclipsed by a universal and omni-competent modern science. His goal is not simply to seek to recover them, however; for their eclipse is not owing simply to the effect of modern science itself. Rather, the concepts undergo a subtle

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but devastatingly profound change in self-understanding in the modern era. This change is most evident in the development of the Bildung tradition.

Though its roots are deep in the tradition, Bildung is essentially a modern phenomenon. It comes to full flower with the German romantics as a modern appropriation of the humanist tradition. Heir to this tradition, Bildung is guided by the concepts of judgment, common sense, and above all taste. It is with respect to taste, however, that Bildung’s development of the humanist tradition is most clearly evident. Whereas prior to modernity, taste is considered to be a cultivated sense of what is good or fitting—Gadamer cites Vico in this regard—to the modernity of the romantic era taste is the refinement of subjective aesthetic sensibilities. In the building tradition, taste is about meaning; the question is how to amass experiences in order to enrich one’s life. Since the humanities are essential to cultivating taste understood in this way, they are still essential to the educational project. In fact, it is the role the humanities play in the cultivation of taste in this sense that explains Helmholtz’s notion of the humanities as providing the subjective-intuitive corollary to the objective-empirical sciences.

For Gadamer, the concept of life experiences is not problematic per se—who could disagree with the significance of experience as Erlebnis, literally to be alive when something happens? The problem is rather how Erlebnis functions within an economy, as it were, characterized by subjectivity and judgment as the basis of being in the world. Within such an economy, experience can be nothing more than the subjective-intuitive counterpart to objective-empirical science, though it is often conceived in terms of

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7 See: John Arthos, “‘To be Alive When Something Happens’: Retreiving Dilthey’s Erlebnis,” *Janus Head* 3, no.1 (Spring 2000).
subjective personal experiences. This economy, moreover, excludes in principle a more basic kind of experience operative in the cultivation of taste—experience as captured by the German term *Erfahrung*.

As we have seen already, whereas *Erlebnis* refers to life’s experiences, *Erfahrung* refers to experience in life. The difference is subtle here, but its implications could not be more profound. Experience as *Erlebnis* does not challenge the subjectivity of modern consciousness—indeed, it serves more radically to reinforce it by relegating any non-methodical experience to the realm of personal experience, thereby relativizing any claim this experience might have to knowledge and to truth. *Erfahrung*, however, like the experience in the actions that occur in life required for moral reasoning Aristotle references in the *Ethics*,\(^8\) is not simply the effect of so many private experiences that serve to enrich one’s subjectivity. It is rather experience that opens one to knowledge and truth. The historically-effected consciousness is constituted by *Erfahrung*; for its effectiveness at bringing about the fusion of horizons in a regulated way is a function of this experience, not the result of method. As such, *Erfahrung* challenges the subjectivity of romanticism and radically undermines the methodological pretensions of modern science. To the former it represents experience, not as private subjective experiences, but as the effect upon consciousness of language and history and the world. Thus, in a sense, *Erlebnis* is compatible with *Erfahrung*—indeed, *Erfahrung* may actually provide the only context that allows *Erlebnis* to flourish without being relegated to subjective taste. To the latter, however, *Erfahrung* presents a far more radical challenge. While it in no way

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rejects the notion of method as an organized epistemological effort; it rather
circumscribes method’s exclusive claims of guaranteeing truth.

The point of this lengthy excursus on Gadamer’s consideration of the guiding
humanistic concepts and their transformation in the *Bildung* tradition is to address in a
different way a central claim of the present thesis, namely, that the concept of experience
itself is the point upon which interdisciplinary theory turns. Interdisciplinary theory has
yet to come to coherent and compelling expression because it has yet to address the
interdisciplinary phenomenon in terms of the character of interdisciplinary experience as
such. Neither has it engaged the interdisciplinary phenomenon from the experience of
alienation of modern consciousness; for the alienation of modern consciousness consists
precisely in its un-consciousness with respect to the effect of experience understood as
*Erfahrung*. This slumbering consciousness, which must be awoken and kept vigilant is,
for Gadamer, the hermeneutic consciousness. If the cosmic night of the forgetfulness of
being has not fully closed in upon us, and hope truly remains for awakening hermeneutic
consciousness, then it will come through the confrontation with the truth of remembrance.
Since Gadamer turns to play when he seeks to bring about the confrontation, our
interdisciplinary pedagogy must begin here as well.

**Hermeneutics at Play**

Understood in terms of interity, interdisciplinarity is directed at the cultivation of
hermeneutic experience. It realizes the priority of play in this process. Play’s
pedagogical priority is both temporal and logical. We might say that interdisciplinarity at
first began and now everywhere continues to begin in play. Since the role of play in early
childhood education lies beyond the scope of our investigation, we focus most of our attention upon the role of play in interdisciplinary inquiry, referring specifically to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol in SOE. Rather than “stand[-ing] apart from the game in the name of a non-situated objectivity,” Ricoeur will engage in play by following the detour among the symbols, entering the circle of believing and understanding, and wagering on the symbols. Our discussion of play culminates in a return to Gadamer’s discovery of play as the basic dynamic in the aesthetic disciplines in the first part of TM. Thus understood, the non-disciplinary encounter with art is a potent interdisciplinary pedagogy for cultivating hermeneutic consciousness.

Interdisciplinary pedagogy begins with play because it manifests the basic participatory dynamic at work in interdisciplinary experience. As such, it addresses the twofold goal of undermining the subjectivity of modern consciousness while cultivating hermeneutic consciousness in its place. As we mentioned above, however, this pedagogy is not a method or set of techniques designed to enact, but a practice to be imitated in light of its perceived significance. The hermeneutics of the symbol Paul Ricoeur develops in the context of his investigations into meaning of religious confession is a compelling illustration, not only of the radicalized practice of following the question, dialogue, and application that flows from interity, but of the practice of play in interdisciplinary inquiry. As such, it is a model of an interdisciplinary pedagogy of play.

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9 Play’s connection, for example, to the Greek musical and gymnastic education—especially as Plato develops it in book three of the Republic (esp. III.402a and following).

10 The whole phrase: “Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated objectivity would at the most know everything, but would understand nothing” (Symbolism of Evil, 24, italics mine).
As we explore at length above, in *SOE* Ricoeur is particularly concerned to identify the transition from the possibility of evil given in human finitude and fallibility to the actuality of evil in human fault. From the outset he decides to make confession rather than philosophical speculation, the object of his inquiry. The phenomenology of confession he intends turns mid-stream into a hermeneutics of symbolism when he makes the “astonishing” observation that “the preferred language of fault appears to be indirect and based on imagery.”  

At first, his phenomenological approach is unshaken; he need only get beneath the symbols. Ricoeur soon finds that this is not possible: “the consciousness of self seems to constitute itself at its lowest level by means of symbolism and to work out an abstract language only subsequently, by means of a spontaneous hermeneutics of its primary symbols.”  

The symbolism he sought to get beneath actually goes all the way down—indeed, self-consciousness is not prior to its expression in symbol. The implications of this discovery are many and profound. “Living experience,” Ricoeur concludes, “in spite of its lifelike appearance...is never immediate; it can be expressed only by means of the primary symbolisms that prepare the way for its treatment in myths and speculation.”  

What appeared at first glance to be simply a preference for symbolic expression turns out to be the very condition of experience. The abstract, speculative language of philosophy only comes later.

A radically different philosophical approach follows from this insight, in which Ricoeur is not so much compelled to abandon his basic phenomenological approach as

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12 Ibid. italics mine.
13 Ibid., 10; italics mine.
14 Ricoeur reflects upon the significance of this “detour” his philosophy takes in the introductory
his entire inquiry comes to be framed within the larger dynamics of the hermeneutic circle. Consider the dynamics at play. The experience of fault is not only expressed in, but is the effect of, the irreducibly symbolic language of confession. Moreover, “the symbols wherein the avowal of fault was inscribed” are themselves products “of the great cultures of which ours is the heir.”\textsuperscript{15} As such, interpretation, like the experience it would interpret, is ineluctably oriented, situated: “hermeneutics proceeds from a prior understanding of the very thing that it tries to understand by interpreting it.”\textsuperscript{16} Hence Ricoeur’s renunciation of the chimerical notion of a philosophy without presuppositions mentioned above, and hence the hermeneutic circle.

Importantly, the dynamics we find ourselves within do indeed form a circle. Ricoeur does not hesitate to deny either the possibility or desirability of what he calls naïve immediacy of belief. For Ricoeur, our modernity provides unique possibilities for understanding: we can no longer remain exiled in the desert of criticism any more than we can return to the jungles of un-interpreted symbolism. We are possessed rather by a conflict of competing desires for critical distanciation and participatory belonging. Such a conflict stymies the merely modern consciousness; it stands apart from the game, hoping to find away around this irresolvable tension. By contrast, the hermeneutic consciousness recognizes that while it cannot avoid its critical task, following the symbols is nevertheless the only path available. But this is no simple affirmation of the Augustinian maxim \textit{crede ut intelligas}—believe that you might understand—though it is a creative appropriation of the insight. To the modern thinker, for whom naïve immediacy of belief

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\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{16} Idem, \textit{SOE}, 352.
(and thus zugehörigkeit) is no longer possible, the only means to regaining the ability to participate in any capacity whatever lies in restoring symbols as symbols, that is, by removing their etiological function. This implies critique, but not in service of the dream of a philosophy without presuppositions. It is critique in service of belief, critique as a means of restoration. While it does not effect a return to the immediacy of belief, it produces what Ricoeur calls a second naïveté, a notion similar to that of Gadamer’s hermeneutic consciousness. For Ricoeur, then, the hermeneutic circle is such that “we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand.”

If symbol gives rise to thought, then the only path available for interpretation is that of following the symbols in what Ricoeur will call sympathetic engagement. Sympathetic engagement is how he enters the hermeneutic circle of believing and understanding. One engages the symbols in as much as one realizes oneself as implicated, that is, possessed of certain presuppositions. “In order to appropriate in each case a particular symbolism,” he writes, “one must abandon the position—or, rather, the exile—of the remote and disinterested spectator.” It is a sympathetic engagement, however, in that one must not merely acknowledge one’s presuppositions, but must in a sense put them to work. Or, rather, in the sense indicated by the language of engagement and spectators, one must allow oneself to be drawn into the play of the symbols.

Ricoeur’s sympathetic engagement with the symbolism of evil illustrates well what it means to be drawn into play. In the case of the problem of evil, Ricoeur understands himself to be situated within the symbolism of what he calls the “Adamic

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17 Ibid., 351. The dynamics of this circle are precisely those observable in Ricoeur’s own reading of symbol.

18 Ibid., 354.
myth.” Putting these symbols to work amounts to recognizing their contingency, but nevertheless viewing them as expressions in “objective language the sense that man has of dependence on that which stands at the limit and origin of his world.”

Sympathetic engagement, therefore, is akin to Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons, where one effects a dialogue with historical tradition in the foregrounding of one’s prejudices. Ricoeur understands his own identification with the symbolism of the Adamic myth as his entrance into the circle of believing and understanding. His hope is that thus following the symbols will pay off in self-knowledge, that is, in truth understood as situation in being.

There are two further observations to make with respect to Ricoeur’s notion of the hermeneutic circle. The most important is that it is based upon a conceptual tension Ricoeur understands to be at the very heart of hermeneutics, namely, the tension between participatory belonging and critical distanciation. It is precisely this tension that turns the hermeneutic circle. Where there is either naive immediacy of belief or merely critique, there is no movement—neither is there understanding. For Ricoeur the postmodern milieu is the unique habitat of hermeneutic understanding because it is precisely in the play of tension between critique and belief that the hermeneutic phenomenon arises. We will see in the next chapter that the identification of this conceptual tension and the appreciation of its creative potential motivates Ricoeur’s project of reconciling explanation and interpretation. Here it is important to consider the meaning of an

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alternative possibility to the circle of believing and understanding we have briefly outlined. Instead of sympathetic engagement and understanding, the critique of symbols may be directed toward a reductive or demystifying end. Ricoeur terms this reductive use of interpretation the hermeneutics of suspicion, and lists as its chief practitioners Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. The decision to follow the symbols, therefore, is inextricably bound up in the play of the hermeneutic circle, and as such reveals a further dimension of play.

Following the symbols, therefore, ultimately takes the form of a wager. Ricoeur places at stake the gains putatively secured by suspicion—the confidence of not having been deceived—in hopes that the payoff will be “a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings.”\(^\text{22}\) In this way, wagering is another way of expressing the notion of the total mediation of play. In order to follow symbols as symbols, one must be “all in,” so to speak. The wager, however, is more like placing a bet on a good hand in poker than it is like taking one’s chances with roulette. There is still no guarantee on the wager—no way of hedging one’s bets—but some symbols are more promising than others. Indeed, evoking Kant, Ricoeur refers to the wager as a “transcendental deduction of symbols,” where one evaluates a symbol by its power of raising up, illuminating and giving order to human experience.\(^\text{23}\) By speaking in terms of the transcendental deduction, however, he does not intended to “[orient] us toward the idea that the justification of the symbol by its power to reveal constitutes a

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 355.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
simple augmentation of self-awareness.”

Ricoeur thinks that understanding ultimately involves an invitation “to situate [oneself] better in being” rather than an exercise in discovering the categories or content of one’s own mind. As a matter of fact, “the symbol gives reason to think that the *Cogito* is within being, and not vice versa.”

It is at this point of full involvement or appropriation in the form of the wager that Ricoeur sees hermeneutics becoming genuinely philosophical, because it is only here that hermeneutics is a search for truth beyond mere coherence or understanding. It is also here that philosophy becomes genuinely hermeneutic. By recognizing that experience is fundamentally mediated, pre-interpreted, Ricoeur renounces for good the claim to a foundationalist or positivist philosophy. His is a hermeneutic philosophy, one that starts from a full language, a language situated and constituted by symbol. The recognition of language as the point of departure for hermeneutics, however, brings us naturally to our discussion of grammar and dialectic. Before following the lead of language here, however, it is important to relate Ricoeur’s notion of following, and indeed of wagering on, the symbols to our earlier discussion of play and aesthetic experience.

In the wager, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol partake most fully in the dynamics of play. As play plays its players by providing the context of the game, so the symbols engage one in thought precisely by giving it something to think about. In this way, a hermeneutic philosophy following a full language also corresponds to the total mediation of play. Language, as Ricoeur demonstrated, is not a medium *through* which one encounters the truth, say, of the experience of fault. It is rather a medium in the sense

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24 Ibid., 356.
25 Ibid.
that it is in language that the experience of truth comes to consciousness itself. Like play, therefore, the mediation of language is total.

Gadamer does not develop language in terms of play, but of foregrounding prejudices and fusing horizons. This is fitting. The phenomenon of philosophical understanding achieved in light of a full language is most properly understood as such. Yet, relating Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol to play helps to raise the profile of the participatory dynamic at work in hermeneutic understanding, and to suggest how it might be developed pedagogically. What difference might it make, for instance, if one were to engage Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol, not simply to learn a method for conducting multi-disciplinary investigations into a matter of philosophical anthropology, much less as a technique for ensuring the correct interpretation? What if instead it were carried out as a discipline of questioning directed at gaining experience (Erfahrung) with respect to the dynamics of hermeneutic understanding? To gain a feel, that is, for the play of symbols in historical understanding, to discern how they engage one’s prejudices, and to gain facility at putting them to work in fusing horizons with the text? The aim of such a practice would be not simply to gain knowledge, but to experience truth, understood in terms of Erfahrung. This would realize Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol as a pedagogy for confronting modern consciousness and for cultivating historically-effected consciousness in its place. Such experience would serve to awaken the hermeneutic consciousness and keep it vigilant.

Like we noted with respect to the practice of application or dialogue, however, this kind of pedagogical realization of the hermeneutics of the symbol depends upon imagination. Returning briefly to a notion mentioned above concerning the implications
of our pedagogical reflections for early education, it is clear that the realization of this project depends upon an imaginary founded in play. Gadamer’s example of the child bouncing a ball and Aristotle’s examples of the child playing make-believe and the dynamics of the sacred drama depend intimately upon a body of shared experience in play. While it is, again, beyond the scope of the present study to work out a primary education of play, it is nevertheless clear how advantageous it would be to engage a child in play from the earliest days with a view toward cultivating hermeneutic consciousness.

For such a one, the encounter with the truth of remembrance would not be a confrontation but a reunion. It is in this sense that we understand Socrates’ words about musical education in the *Republic*:

> And therefore, I said, Glaucon, musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful, or of him who is ill-educated ungraceful; and also because he who has received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art and nature, and with a true taste, while he praises and rejoices over and receives into his soul the good, and becomes noble and good, he will justly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why; and when reason comes he will recognise and salute the friend with whom his education has made him long familiar.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{26}\) Plato, *Republic*, III.402a.
Grammar, Dialectic and New Pedagogy of the Humanities

From the realization of the pedagogy of play in the aesthetic arts we turn to a consideration of the pedagogical potential of the liberal arts. First, we interpret Ricoeur’s reorientation of hermeneutics around the text as the realization of reading as a new pedagogy of grammar, understood not simply as analysis, but as the art of creative appropriation of the being in the world of the text. Moreover, because Ricoeur’s grammar reconciles interpretive and explanatory attitudes in an act of creative appropriation, it is the headwaters of a new philological arts of Rhetoric, Poetics, and Hermeneutics as well.

We look also to Gadamer’s hermeneutic discipline of questioning as the realization of dialogue as a new pedagogy of dialectic. The art here is not that of rational deduction but of attending to discourse. Gadamer’s reading of Plato’s *Lysis* in his hermeneutical studies of Plato is key in this regard.¹ The significance of this study for the realization of dialectic as perhaps the most important interdisciplinary pedagogy is manifold. Gadamer’s reading of Plato reveals Socrates as the shrewd pedagogue, who is particularly skilled at confronting the will of man with the truth of remembrance. He is the practitioner, not of some technique termed the socratic method, but of the dialogic art of following the question. As a creative interpretation of Plato, however, Gadamer’s study itself exemplifies the fecundity of this socratic art of following the question. The logical analysis of Plato had rendered the voice of the text nearly inaudible; Gadamer’s dialogic interpretation tunes our ears again to its voice. In both respects, therefore, Gadamer’s work serves to realize dialectic as the dialogic art of following the question.

The central problem for hermeneutics is the existence of two competing attitudes toward understanding. Wilhelm Dilthey expresses this problem famously in terms of the opposition between interpretation and explanation, though Hans-Georg Gadamer captures it most poignantly in the title of his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*. As we saw above, Gadamer’s objective in *TM* is to contrast what method fails to achieve with what truth guarantees through a discipline of questioning. Though he follows Gadamer in circumscribing the pretensions of modern consciousness with respect to method, Ricoeur nevertheless understands that the principal task of hermeneutics is to reconcile these two attitudes. Ricoeur’s most important contribution to hermeneutics is that, by reorienting hermeneutics within the problematic of the text, he is able to situate both interpretation and explanation “along a unique hermeneutical arc…within an overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning.”² As such, he continues in Gadamer’s trajectory of a hermeneutics guided by language, while at the same time availing himself of the explanatory methods of linguistics and semiotics, properly understood. The significance of this reconciliation of explanatory and interpretive attitudes within the practice of reading extends beyond the discourse of hermeneutics, however; it realizes reading as a new pedagogy of the art of grammar. Moreover, it realizes it as an interdisciplinary pedagogy, not only because it reconciles the basic disciplinary distinction—i.e., the distinction between explanatory and interpretive disciplines—but most importantly because it draws one into the very participatory dynamics of the text.

Learning to Read with Ricoeur

While Ricoeur is undoubtedly indebted to Gadamer in many ways, it is easy to see his refusal to oppose truth to method as simply a departure from Gadamer’s thought. While there is an important sense in which Ricoeur’s attempt to reconcile explanatory methods to hermeneutics is in tension with Gadamer’s thought, it is easy to miss an important nuance in Ricoeur’s use of method that relieves this tension somewhat. It is actually twofold. First, he distinguishes among foreign and native explanatory methods. While hermeneutics has rightly resisted the incursion of foreign explanatory methods from the natural and positivist historical sciences, it has yet to make productive use of explanatory methods native to the humanities, like those available in structural linguistics and semiotics. Explanation that is directed at language itself, for Ricoeur, no longer represents a foreign incursion but rather opens what he calls “the obligatory path to understanding.”

This leads to the second point about Ricoeur’s nuanced understanding of method. While explanation is the obligatory path to understanding, it neither guarantees nor exhausts meaning. For Ricoeur, in fact, when followed in the dynamics of what we have termed interity, explanation will transcend itself. In this way, interpretation and explanation are no longer antinomies but dynamics within the circle of believing and understanding.

Before looking to Ricoeur’s work as a specific example of what we are calling a new pedagogy of grammar, it is important to see why the text is so significant for him in this regard. While he thinks that explanatory and interpretive questions arise equally from within the realm of discourse, this is especially the case when discourse is realized as a

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text. This is due to the fact that the text represents the paradigmatic example of participatory belonging “in and through” distance. As such, a reorientation around the text promises not only to reconcile attitudes toward understanding but exposes the root of the problem—the antinomy of participatory belonging and critical distanciation. Ricoeur’s task, then, is the realization of discourse as text.

Ricoeur enumerates a fivefold criteria of textuality, in which language as discourse is shown to be a structured work that projects a world in which self-understanding is mediated. Note each of the five criteria—language, discourse, structured work, projection of a world, mediation of self-understanding—for each plays an essential role in his understanding of the significance of the text. What does it mean to realize language as discourse? Ricoeur defines discourse memorably in the essay “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” as what happens when someone says something to someone about something. There are several items of note in this definition. First, to become discourse language must be enacted. Someone must say something to someone. What someone says, however, must also have sense and reference. Someone must say something to someone about something. Language as discourse is thus a dialectic of meaning and event. As event, discourse actualizes a language system (which entails sense); as meaning, discourse brings about some effect, whether locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary (hence reference).

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4 What follows is a summary of Ricoeur’s discussion in pages 132-38 of this article.

5 Ibid., 133. This threefold schema distinguishes the three main ways discourse’s intention is exteriorized: respectively, the act of saying, what we perform in saying, and what we effect by the fact that we have spoken.
Discourse, we might say, is the event of meaning’s coming into language, but not in a haphazard way. So, where the first two criteria realize language as discourse, it does not become a text until it is articulated as a finite and closed sequence, having a particular form and a unique configuration. In literary terms, the third criterion of textuality realizes discourse as a structured work or composition, in a distinct genre, and style. As far as structural analysis is concerned, these three criteria constitute a text. As a text discourse is not only capable of being explained in terms of its structure (i.e., in terms of its compositional, generic, and stylistic features), Ricoeur argues that responsible interpretation requires such structural explanation. It is in this sense that “explanation is the obligatory path to understanding.”

For Ricoeur, the first three criteria situate discourse within the domain of explanation, while the remaining two—the projection of a world and mediation of self-knowledge—establish the necessity of interpretation. At this point Ricoeur anticipates a potentially devastating objection from linguistics. It is important to summarize this objection, if only to appreciate how cleverly Ricoeur deals with it. The linguist might object that so far Ricoeur has only addressed the text in terms of its sense, not its reference—i.e., author’s intent, original audience, situation. As Frege et al point out it is the interaction of sense and reference that produce meaningful discourse. Thus Ricoeur has not demonstrated in the least that explanation is unable to arrive at the meaning of the text. Neither has he established the necessity of interpretation. He has simply privileged interpretation by withholding consideration of reference from the purview of explanation. According to the linguist, however, explanation is completely capable of addressing a text’s reference. To counter this objection, Ricoeur considers the text specifically in its
written form. For irrespective of the linguist’s confidence in fully explaining the reference of face-to-face conversation, it is clear that writing radically decontextualizes the text, making it autonomous with respect to authorial intent, situation, and original audience. This is a fact of important hermeneutical significance, not least of which because it entails *verfremdung*—distanciation—is a condition of writing as such. Also, Ricoeur has just shown that explanatory methods are not only legitimate, but necessary if understanding is ever to happen. Yet, it is precisely in recognizing their indispensability that explanation is denied its pretension to totalization: reference and thus meaning lie beyond the structure of the text. Further, since psychological and sociological factors lying beneath the text must remain irretrievably elusive, any attempt at objective psychological (Dilthey) or subjective divinatory (Schleiermacher) interpretive methods—what Ricoeur terms short-circuits of self-knowledge—are denied as well. By considering the text as writing Ricoeur has effectively identified the paths that are closed to hermeneutics; has he left any open?

Ricoeur acknowledges Frege’s basic linguistic insight that meaningful discourse must consist of sense and reference; his brief detour on the problematics of the written text is not only offered in anticipation of objections, but is also intended to raise the profile of a question to which his fourth and fifth criteria are the answer. If not to the *ostensive* context of speaker, text, referent, and audience, then to what does a text refer? Following a line of thought suggested by Gadamer’s notion of horizons, Ricoeur answers that the text’s referent is nothing other than the *world opened up by the text itself*, what Gadamer would call the matter itself (*die Sache selbst*). The text does not refer to a world beneath or behind itself, but rather projects a world, a horizon, in front of itself.
Ricoeur terms this projected world the *non-ostensive reference* of the text, and it is clear now why such a reference is completely removed the domain of explanation. (Interestingly, the locus of a text’s meaning, like the locus of hermeneutic experience, is only a *locus* in a virtual sense.)

It is not yet clear, however, how the text effects the projection of a world, or whether it does so on its own.

Ricoeur explains that just as writing decontextualizes the text from its ostensive references, a text’s non-ostensive reference is restored through the event of re-contextualization he identifies as reading. The reader, therefore, plays an integral role in the actualization of this proposed world, a fact that, like the very notion of a text’s non-ostensive reference, has profound implications for the task of hermeneutics. The most important of these implications concerns the event and relational character of the text’s projection of a world; for it is in the reading of the text itself—the concrete event of application involving reader and text—that the world is projected. Ricoeur describes the reader’s role in the recontextualization of the text as the reader’s achievement of self-understanding in front of the text. This is the fifth and final criterion of textuality he enumerates. It is important to see how thoroughly Ricoeur avoids the object-subject dichotomy of subjectivity in this regard. While it is true that interpretive self-knowledge involves what one might be tempted to call a subjective appropriation of the text’s non-ostensive reference, this reference is a world set forth *by the text itself*. Reading is neither the discovery of a hidden intention behind the text, nor is it “a question of imposing upon

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6 It would interesting to see just how extensive are the parallels between Ricoeur’s notion of the text’s non-ostensive reference and Gadamer’s notion of *virtuality*. When we see below that for Ricoeur this reference is projected in the act of reading and meaning apprehended in the act of subjective appropriation, and that he compares this event to what Peirce describes as the *interpretant* that arises between object and sign vehicle, the parallel becomes more striking.
the text our finite capacity of understanding.” Reading is rather the event of participation in the being of the text, where the what-is of the text comes to presence. Neither the text’s meaning nor its reference are in standing reserve, as it were; but neither are they created by fiat. The interpreter must think, even think creatively, but the appropriation of the text’s reference will “follow the path of thought opened up by the text.” Meaning must be appropriated, but only “en route towards the orient of the text.”

Having simply enunciated the criteria of textuality that privilege his concern for “a strict complementarity and reciprocity between explanation and interpretation” does not at all establish that such a complementarity is actually achievable. We consider therefore two examples of Ricoeur’s notion of reading. The first example illustrates, via a creative reinterpretation of Aristotle’s theory of metaphors, how sense and reference are actualized in the creative appropriation of the being in the world of the text. The second example is an interdisciplinary experiment of sorts that places the explanatory methods of structural analysis in dialogue with semiotics in order to provide a concrete model of this complementarity at work.

In “Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics,” Ricoeur introduces a semantic theory of metaphor, one that he will develop at length in his book The Rule of Metaphor. His aim is to displace a lexical theory that conceives of metaphor as the artful substitution of a word’s literal meaning for a non-literal meaning, replacing it with a theory that sees the word rather as the locus of a text’s “emergent meaning” where

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7 Ibid., 143.
8 Ricoeur, “What is a Text?,” 162.
9 Ibid., 150.
meaning is determined by the “metaphorical twist” that happens to the word in context. The former conception is of course the predominant theory of metaphor, deriving from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and continuing through the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Ricoeur develops his own theory by re-reading Aristotle, this time allowing the *Poetics* to play the leading role in shaping his theory. For Ricoeur, the central insight of the *Poetics* is Aristotle’s notion of the relation of diction (*lexis*) to the narrative (*mythos*) and of both to the creative imitation (*mimesis-poiesis*) of tragedy. Ricoeur actually develops the notion of the non-ostensive reference of the text in the context of this discussion.

As a work of discourse a poem has both sense (i.e., what it says) and reference (i.e., that about which it says it). A poem’s sense is secured, according to Aristotle, by its *mythos*, its fable or story. For Ricoeur, this is the fundamental insight of the *Poetics*, and implies a radically different way of reading Aristotle’s theory of metaphor. Like the *Rhetoric*, the *Poetics* discusses metaphor in terms of diction (*lexis*). Unlike the *Rhetoric*, however, it explicitly relates diction to its function in the poem’s narrative (*mythos*). The poem’s *mythos* gives diction its sense. Ricoeur writes: “We must draw the consequence that it is only in relation to the mythos of tragedy that its *lexis*, and hence its metaphor, makes sense. There is no local meaning of metaphor outside of the regional meaning secured by the mythos of tragedy.” At first glance, there is nothing surprising in this observation. To say that *mythos* secures the poem’s sense, is akin to saying the community in which a language is spoken determines the limits of the sense of words.

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12 Ibid., 179.
Aristotle’s true insight comes to light when he claims that it is the overall intention of the poem that provides it reference. This intention, for Aristotle, is “imitating human actions in a poetic way.”\textsuperscript{13} Note both of these aspects, imitation and creation. Ricoeur argues that Aristotle is often misread because his readers fail to take note that he links the imitative and the creative in his theory of poetry. This link, however, is critical. Indeed, “with these two keywords—mimesis and poiesis—we reach the level which I have called the referential world of the work.”\textsuperscript{14} As we saw above in our discussion of Gadamer’s theory of aesthetic experience, mimesis is not duplication, but the creation of a reality which “represent[s] human actions as higher than they are in reality.”\textsuperscript{15} The poem creates a world, then, and it is only in reference to that world that the poem’s diction has meaning. The world of the poem, however, is not lying behind or beneath but before the text.

In our discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol, we spoke of following symbols, of wagering upon them. Now that process takes more concrete shape in “a theory of interpretation which places the emphasis on ‘opening up a world’” into which we follow those symbols. As the world thus opened up is the product of both imitation and creativity, this theory of interpretation will involve both analysis and imagination. Ricoeur concludes:

\begin{quote}
Are we not ready to recognise in the power of imagination, no longer the faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves? This power would not be conveyed by images, but by the emergent meanings in our
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 180.
language. In this way, a new link would appear between imagination and metaphor.\textsuperscript{16}

The art of reading poetry, therefore, is the art of galvanizing analysis and imagination in order to follow the path of thought opened by the text.

The second example seeks to provide a concrete model of the complementarity of explanation and interpretation by placing structural analysis in dialogue with semiotics. A complete analysis of this model is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is worth discussing in outline in order to appreciate the significance of Ricoeur’s achievement. In the essay “What is a Text?” he considers Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis of myth, arguing that while a myth can be explained in terms of the structural elements of a narrative, this explanation does not exhaust the myth’s meaning—not even according to the standards Lévi-Strauss enunciates. For according to Lévi-Strauss, myths are devised in order to overcome a contradiction of human experience. To which Ricoeur replies with the simple but shrewd observation: “There would be no contradiction, nor any attempt to resolve contradiction, if there were not significant questions, meaningful propositions about the origin and end of man.”\textsuperscript{17}

It is precisely in this regard that structural analysis transcends itself, and forges for Ricoeur the necessary link between explanation and interpretation. It is worth quoting his conclusion in full:

\begin{quote}
Far from dissolving this radical questioning, structural analysis reinstates it at a more radical level. Would not the function of structural analysis then be to impugn the surface semantics of the recounted myth in order to unveil a depth semantics which is, if I may say so, the living semantics of the myth? If that were not the function of structural analysis, then it
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 160.
would, in my opinion, be a sterile game.\(^\text{18}\)

By exposing the “depth semantics” of myth structural analysis confirms the importance of its explanatory methods as the obligatory path to understanding. Interestingly, Ricoeur does not propose a complementarity but a dialectic of explanation and interpretation. That is to say, for Ricoeur, explanation and interpretation are not two irrefutable but irreconcilable systems as, say, particle and wave physics. Ricoeur argues rather that the relationship is reciprocal: interpretation depends upon explanation, and explanation leads to interpretation. Put another way, Ricoeur reconciles explanation and interpretation as participation not complementarity.

Ricoeur now employs C. S. Peirce’s notion of the *interpretant*, the effect of the relation of sign-vehicle and object upon the interpreter, as a concrete model for how interpretation might follow on the path opened by structural analysis. Considered at the lexical level, Peirce notes that there is a dynamic at work among three distinct foci: the sign-vehicle, the object it signifies, and the *interpretant*, that is, the effect of the relationship of sign-vehicle and object upon the interpreter. Note carefully the dynamics of Peirce’s semiotics: the *interpretant* is the effect that the *relationship* of sign-vehicle and object has upon the interpreter, not the effect of sign or object, sense or reference, itself. For Peirce, therefore, the interpretation of a sign transcends the dichotomy of subjective creation of new meaning and objective deciphering of latent meaning. Interpretation of a sign is the creative appropriation of meaning effected by the relation of the sign-vehicle to its object.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 161.
The resonance with Ricoeur’s fourth and fifth criteria of textuality is striking—so striking in fact that Ricoeur transposes to the level of discourse as a whole Peirce’s semiotic insights concerning the dynamics of meaning at the lexical level. Thus he transforms the semiotic triad—object, sign-vehicle, interpretant—into a hermeneutic triad consisting of text, depth semantics, and interpretation. In so doing, he completes his compelling model of an understanding that situates explanation and interpretation along a unique hermeneutical arc of which the text is key.

**Cultivating the Art of Following the Question**

In a sense, we have already discussed the art of dialectic in some detail in our investigations into the radical significance of the practice of dialogue and orientation toward the problem, specifically in its reflective sense. At least, this discussion disclosed the hermeneutic significance of the question and identified the role of following the question in dialogue. Here, therefore, we look to how the art of following the question is practiced in the concrete act of interpretation. As with our reading of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the symbol, the goal is not to elicit a method for interpreting texts, but to illustrate a model to imitate in hopes of gaining experience.

By approaching Plato according to the *dialogic* of living discourse rather than the *monologic* of the philosophical treatise—as conversations directed at cultivating understanding, rather than arguments designed to elicit correct opinion—Hans-Georg Gadamer effects something of a revolution in the interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. For, while a logical reading of Plato seeks to chart the lines of argument in a given dialogue from the putative fixed point of Platonic doctrine, Gadamer traces the

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movement of conversation in the dialogues relative to the question in play—an approach he terms recognizing the hermeneutic priority of the question. Gadamer writes, “[T]he reasonable hermeneutic assumption on which to proceed is that we are dealing with a discussion. And we ourselves do not conduct our discussions more geometrico. Instead we move within the live play of risking assertions, of taking back what we have said, of assuming and rejecting, all the while proceeding on our way to reaching an understanding.”

Moreover, by foregrounding their pedagogical intention, Gadamer rehabilitates the educational relevance of the Dialogues as well as the pedagogical rather than methodological significance of Socratic questioning. In this way, Gadamer’s Socrates, as well as Gadamer’s discipline of reading, serve to realize the discipline of dialogue as a new interdisciplinary pedagogy of dialectic. As with Ricoeur’s art of grammar, the dialectical art of following the question serves to make one at home within the participatory dynamic of language.

The Lysis is a classic example of the aporetic dialogue. Socrates engages some boys in a discussion over the nature of love and true friendship, they give a number of responses, all of which Socrates refutes, and the dialogue ends with the question of friendship unresolved. While there is virtually no disagreement over the fact that the question at play in the Lysis is friendship, Gadamer’s insight concerns the “sense” of this question—that toward which the question is actually intending. If the sense of the question in the Lysis is the truth of friendship, Socrates is both pedagogically and logically unsuccessful. The teacher fails to make his case and his students fail to arrive at the correct doctrine. Gadamer questions, therefore, whether this is actually the sense of

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20 Ibid., 5. Italics original.
the question. He suggests instead that the sense of the question of friendship is pedagogical rather than doctrinal in character, aimed at cultivating the souls of the interlocutors, not disclosing a doctrine. Of course, this would disrupt the concept of a stable Platonic doctrine of friendship that the logical reading of Plato presupposes. It challenges as well the concept of the “Socratic method” understood as the technique of posing leading questions.

Gadamer supports this interpretation by recalling the notion expressed in Plato’s *Laches* that knowledge is the harmony of *logos* and *ergon*, the harmony, that is, of one’s account of oneself with one’s practice. 21 Now this harmony is disrupted when, either through inexperience in life or the acquisition of bad habits, one’s practice is deficient, or when, through ignorance or dogmatic persistence in opinion, one lacks the ability to give an account for one’s claims. Since Socrates’ interlocutors in the *Lysis* are youth, the pedagogical situation he faces is that particular disharmony of *logos* and *ergon* that is the property of youth, namely, a combination of inexperience in the affairs of life with the dogmatic assertion of untested opinion. 22 If the sense of the question is truly pedagogical, as Gadamer claims, then Socrates’ purpose in questioning is to address this disharmony, not the doctrine of friendship.

Two important implications follow from claim. First, it is the boys’ inexperience in the affairs of life—not their skill, intelligence or their ability to formulate a reply—that determines the horizon of possibility within which Socrates can exercise his pedagogy. The intellectual and moral capacity of the student determines the limits of learning, and

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21 Ibid., 6ff.

22 Ibid., 20.
this for philosophical and not merely practical reasons. To have greater command of explanation (logos) than one’s experience (ergon) supports is not truly to have knowledge, but merely opinion—however true that opinion might be. Thus it is no indictment of Socrates or his line of questioning that the dialogue ends in aporia—how could it end otherwise? As Gadamer writes, “any discussion which Socrates conducts about friendship with two young boys must end in aporia.”

This leads us to the second implication of Gadamer’s claim. Since a deficiency in ergon cannot be remedied by the inculcation or elucidation of logos, the boys’ untested opinions must be refuted—even if correct. They are mere opinion pretending to be logos. The significance of aporia and of the practice of Socratic questioning are best seen in this light.

Socrates works his pedagogy by means of elenctic, a playfully ironic refutation of the answers to his questions. Because they lack of experience, Socrates will seek harmony by inculcating a certain kind of unknowing with respect to boys’ opinions. Aporia brings their logos in tune with their ergon. He achieves this end by posing questions. As we have noted already, the point of questioning is not to lead the youth along a predetermined path to a proper answer. Neither is it to teach them the means of resisting the power of opinion through refutation, however much the critique of ideology may appeal to the contemporary reader. Neither, however, is it merely sophistic technique. Rather, as Gadamer keenly observes, the question is Socrates’ way of laying open what is questionable in the question of friendship itself. For the problem

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{24}\) Cf. TM, 360.
with the boys’ answers is not that they are incorrect, but that they are not truly a response to the question given in the experience of friendship itself. Their answers are merely words and do not concern “choice or commitment in life.” All of this serves to add a deeper philosophical dimension to the poignancy of the boys’ lack of experience: they have nothing to offer but platitudes and untested opinions because they have not yet become open to the question presented to them in the experience of life.

In Gadamer’s reading of the *Lysis*, the figure of Socrates emerges as a shrewd pedagogue, in comparison with whom the dialectician portrayed by a mere logical analysis appears to be made of straw. Indeed, according to the logic of question and answer, Plato’s Socrates accomplishes his pedagogical purposes flawlessly when the discussion ends in aporia. The inculcation of aporia is not to end the discussion but to awaken his interlocutors to the question, which is the only path to genuine dialogue. This insight also serves to display the philosophical significance both of Socrates’ practice of questioning as well as the kind of unknowing he seeks to instill by the negative dialectic of *elenctic*. Openness to experience is not some practical know-how, some *techne*, that can be acquired in practice without self-reflection, nor is it a method to which one subjects a given body of knowledge. Openness is rather the characteristic of a hermeneutic consciousness that allows itself to be addressed—by Socrates, by human tradition, by experience in life. Thus Socrates’ *elenctic*, his so-called method of continually problematizing opinions offered in response to his questioning, is thoroughly pedagogical, and in a multifaceted way: it is meant to lay open before the youth the very questionableness of the question of friendship; to call into question the things they think

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they know, but in truth only opine; and in so doing to cultivate within them the openness to experience that lays open the only path to understanding. For it is only in coming to realize what is truly questionable—to reduce something, in Gadamer’s words, to a “state of indeterminacy, so that there is an equilibrium between pro and contra”—that one is able responsibly to pursue understanding.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{TM}, 357.
CONCLUSION: INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN THE DISCIPLINARY ACADEMY

When seeking to identify and to understand the problem of interdisciplinary theory, we noted the academic cachet interdisciplinarity has come to enjoy over the past twenty-five years or so. We spoke, in fact, of its having made its way from the margins of the academy to the middle of academic life. Now that our investigations have come to a close, they have also, in a sense, come full circle. For we are going to invoke the metaphors of the middle and the margins again, though this time to address, not from where interdisciplinary has come, but to where it is must move in order to come fully into its own in the midst of the disciplinary academy. As we explore briefly, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity must find its (virtual) place in the dynamics of the middle of speech and, as paradoxical as it might seem, in the margins of academic life.

The aim of our investigations into the hermeneutic character of interdisciplinary experience has never been to refute or to displace disciplinarity. Disciplinarity, by its own standards of assessment, is the most successful system of knowledge production yet devised in human tradition. Were this not the case, it would be difficult to account either for the prolific increase of knowledge touching all areas of modern life or the unopposed institutionalization of disciplinarity in all areas of human learning and endeavor. From the experimental sciences and mathematics, to the fine and performing arts and the humanities, disciplinarity’s effectiveness is manifest and its claims to universality virtually uncontested. Nevertheless, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity is subtly but profoundly subversive of a disciplinary model. While the aim has never been to repudiate, acknowledging interity radically circumscribes disciplinary claims. Like Gadamer, we have been “concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the
domain if scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy.”¹ And, yet, to a domain that is universal, if not in principle, at least in practice, the “yes, and” of this search for a non-methodical experience of truth has all the force of “no, but.” A Hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity must take responsibility for the critical edge its presence will have in the academy.

At this point, one is tempted to point to the scores of flourishing interdisciplinary studies programs as counterevidence to the claim of critique. While it is true that there are indeed a large and growing number of such programs (not to mention institutes and research centers), the point of departure for our argument is the claim that interdisciplinarity has been thoroughly framed by the modern conceptual frames of the disciplinary academy. Interdisciplinary discourse is still expressed in the conceptual language of subjectivity and method, and still understands itself largely as the facilitator of inter-disciplinary dialogue and as the locus of problem-oriented inquiry. As we have argued at length above, when interdisciplinarity is transposed from the statics of disciplinary discourse to the dynamics hermeneutics, not only does it challenge the very concept of subjectivity and the domain of the tools of method, it radically transforms our understanding of the significance of dialogue and our practical orientation toward the problem.

Because interdisciplinarity has come to enjoy its status in part by emphasizing what we have expressed as the disciplinarity of interdisciplinarity, realizing its interity might appear to be a retreat to the margins of the academy. It is nothing of the sort. Properly understood, it is a decisive move to the margins; for this is precisely the

¹ Tm, xxi.
meaning of realizing the radical significance of interdisciplinary practices. As we have argued, the intellectual and practical organization of the disciplinary academy presupposes a modern ontology of understanding, to which subjectivity and methodology are central. So, on the one hand, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinary—which privileges deliberative practice over deductive method, sees application as the event of understanding (rather than looking for events to apply knowledge), and thus refuses to reduce knowledge to epistème but seeks to recover something of phronésis as a distinctly human way of knowing—must resist acquiescing to the structural demands emanating from the middle of the academy.

The move from the middle to the margins of the academy, however, is not a retreat to the sidelines. As Jacobs’s research suggests, the greatest energy and productivity in the contemporary academy is at the nexus between disciplinary domains. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is often the case that the collaboration necessary for application and the complexities of problems result in so-called interdisciplinary initiatives. There is also the phenomenon of the emergence of new sub-disciplines as we come to understand older knowledge in new ways. Moving to the margins, therefore, means that interdisciplinarity will set diligently to work where discourses meet or even clash. It will mean attending to the loci of intellectual movement in the academy, the loci of interaction, collaboration, and, again, even conflict of existing departmental and disciplinary structures. It will do so with the appreciation for the radical significance of these practices made available by a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, rather than concept if interdisciplinary practices as techniques.
As interdisciplinarity relocates itself to the margins of academic life, properly understood, it must also occupy more robustly its locus in the middle—Gadamer’s notion of *in dem Zwischen* we discussed at length above. That is to say, if a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity is truly to thrive in the disciplinary academy, it will do so only so much and insofar as it seeks to realize the *interity* of interdisciplinary experience. A hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity must develop both a coherent theory of interdisciplinary experience and practice, as well as a pedagogy for cultivating that experience and practice in order, to borrow a phrase from Gadamer, to bring about that experience in a regulated way. This is the full meaning of our stated goal of developing a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, understood both as a theory of interdisciplinary experience and pedagogy for its cultivation and practice. It will serve to cultivate the experience of being in the middle, to bring about, in a regulated way, the dynamic and virtual space of interity. To recall an image from earlier in our study, this involves a dialectic of head-down and body-up dynamics.

Beginning with the head-down dynamic, though this is somewhat arbitrary given the truly dialectical character of hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity must develop a coherent theory of hermeneutic experience. There is both a critical and constructive edge to this theory. Critically, it must understand the true nature of its critique of disciplinarity. As we have argued at length, the impetus for the interdisciplinary phenomenon is the alienation of modern consciousness. Modern method, though promising to recover what is lost in the development of the subjective *erlebende* conscious, only serves to exacerbate the sense of alienation. Constructively, interdisciplinary theory must identify and understand the character of the experience it
enjoys and seeks to cultivate. Again, as we have shown above, this experience is understood variously as being in-play, aesthetic non-differentiation, and ultimately as the transformation-into-communion of the fusion of horizons. In each understanding, however, the basic character of experience is a participatory dynamic where what-is comes to presence—not simply into view—and exerts its influence over our understanding. A hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity is conscious of this dynamic and seeks, through the cultivation of historically-effected consciousness to bring it about in a regulated way. This task, however, is a matter of experience, understood as Erfahrung rather than Erlebnis.

Experience takes practice. Thus a hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity will also be possessed of a body-up dynamic as well. It will intentionally engage in practices that both open the space of interity and that cultivate it as experience. In our discussion of the orientation toward the problem, application, and dialogue, we noted how each, in unique though related ways, serves to open the space of interity. For each of these characteristic interdisciplinary practices partake of the structure of the event. As such, they provide the context of play in which hermeneutic consciousness thrives. The pedagogical aim of these practices is to build up the experience of opening up the virtual locus of interity and of being engaged in play. Moreover, in our discussion of the practice of the liberal arts, we focused specifically upon play, grammar, and dialectic for their pedagogical fecundity. Like the characteristic interdisciplinary practices, these arts open the virtual and dynamic space of interaction and difference we have termed play. However, they have the added pedagogical benefit of developing the discipline, to adopt a phrase from Gadamer, of attending to the dynamics of participation, especially those of language. Play, as we saw
above, is fundamental in this regard, since in a most humble way it acquaints one to the very dynamics one will later recognize in the truth of remembrance. ² The liberal arts of grammar and dialectic, however, because they are explicitly directed at language, confront one more directly with the truth of remembrance.  

Understood hermeneutically, the arts of language are in fact disciplines in the most faithful sense of the word. They are not techniques or methods, but practices that both open the dynamic and virtual space of understanding and cultivate the kind of experience properly tuned to dwelling in that space. In this way, the liberal arts are part of that effective discipline of questioning and inquiry that Gadamer contrasts with the ineffectual tools of method. They provide the critical context for the truth to accomplish in thought what the tools method fail to achieve.  

A hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity, therefore, is clearly the development of the project Gadamer announced in his preface to the second edition of *Truth and Method*. Given the shape of our discussion, it bears quoting again at length.  

The hermeneutic consciousness, which must be awakened and kept awake, recognizes that in the age of science philosophy’s claim of superiority has something chimerical and unreal about it. But though the will of man is more than ever intensifying its criticism of what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness, the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront that will with something of the truth of remembrance with what is still and ever again real.³  

A hermeneutics of interdisciplinarity promises a way forward, not simply a longing glance backward. Applying itself to the reinterpretation of contemporary practices, it sets to work in the space where hermeneutic consciousness is already stirring, and where one

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² See discussion above of Plato’s *Republic*, III.402.  
³ *TM*, xxxiv.
is still capable of being confronted with the truth of remembrance, even if not aware of
the significance of the confrontation. The hope of this project is that realizing the interity
of interdisciplinary practice and reflection will rouse hermeneutic consciousness to
vigilance and allow it once again to situate itself with respect to what it is still and ever
again real.
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