

# interpretation

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# interpretation

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DILTHEY'S ESSAY *THE POETIC IMAGINATION*:  
A POETICS OF FORCE

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In no other period in the history of art have so-called cultivation (*Bildung*) and authentic art confronted one another with as much repugnance and disgust as today [1871]. . . .  
—Nietzsche

Politics is a realm akin to art insofar as, like art, it occupies a creatively mediating position between the spirit and life, the idea and the reality, the desirable and the necessary, conscience and deed, morality and power.  
—Thomas Mann

I

Since the late 1960s, Wilhelm Dilthey has enjoyed in this country a considerable reputation as theorist of the depth and ontological distinction of subjectivity. "In our lie-filled human society," wrote Dilthey, "one kind of work is always truthful—the work of a great poet." This truthfulness lies precisely in its character as "the faithful 'objectivation' of a subjectivity (*der wahre Ausdruck eines Seelenlebens*)."<sup>1</sup> The fidelity of the work to the inner life—a work that may indeed also be that of a "religious genius or a genuine philosopher"—assures, moreover, that it can be interpreted "completely and objectively" (V, 320).<sup>1</sup>

Writers on literature have thus been swift to embrace Dilthey as a thinker fundamental to their discipline. Dilthey is profiled in that aspect that dignifies the self on the basis of expressive and hermeneutic activity. His hermeneutics is understood as promising the recovery of positive and abundant meaning from the objectivations of the inner life, a practice precisely illustrated in the interpretation of literary texts.

It is therefore somewhat ironical to discover that Dilthey's most important work explicitly devoted to poetics should, on closer inspection, be a brief as much for the individual subjectivity as for the constitutive power of the individual's social and political life—many of the chief "subjective" components of the poetic process figuring as representatives or doubles of social and institutional agencies. This is the thesis I mean to develop.

Dilthey's involvement in politics is unmistakable. It is generally evident in the institutional character of the categories of his critical rhetoric, and it is specific in the many indices of his fascination with the political struggles of Wilhelmine Germany. In the United States, the political dimension of his work

<sup>1</sup>Roman numerals in parentheses refer to volume numbers, Arabic numerals to page numbers, of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*, 18 vols., 1914–77. Vols. I–XII, Stuttgart: B. B. Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Vols. XIII–XVIII, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

is almost unknown, or at most it has been noticed in passing in a philosophy valued for its existential and interpretative pathos.

In Germany, however, the question of Dilthey's politics has been scrutinized both subtly and polemically. One debate turns on the support that Dilthey's alleged vitalism—his "philosophy of Life"—and his view of history as "irrational facticity" is supposed to have lent to fascism.<sup>2</sup> A related question concerns the uncertain fervor of Dilthey's belief in the possibility and urgency of social transformation and historical action.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the quiescent, conciliatory, pseudo-Goethean serenity of his political and literary-historical consciousness has been criticized. It led (it is alleged) to a century-long unquestioned installation of the literature of German Idealism in top position in the canon of German literary history.<sup>4</sup>

The consensus of these views holds that while there is indeed an indisputable reliance in Dilthey's rhetoric on categories drawn from history and politics, his tendency is to undervalue the possibility of rational political action. This is the thesis of such writers as Hans-Joachim Lieber, Josef Derbolav, and Bernd Peschken. The question, in my view, however, has not been decided. Frithjof Rodi and Christofer Zöckler, for example, constitute an effective ad-

<sup>2</sup>This position was advanced with unacceptable bluntness and vehemence by Georg Lukacs in *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft: Der Weg des Irrationalismus von Schelling zu Hitler, Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. IX (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962). For Lukacs, Dilthey is the founder of the philosophy of Life regnant during the period of German imperialism—an irrationalism propagated by a parasitical intelligentsia serving the interests of the imperialistic bourgeoisie. Hans-Joachim Lieber asserted this position, but with a good deal more tact and care, in two important articles: "Geschichte und Gesellschaft im Denken Diltheys," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 17 (1965), 703–42; and "Die deutsche Lebensphilosophie und ihre Folgen," *Universitätstage 1966, Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Universität* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966), pp. 92–108. Lieber's charge that Dilthey's "irrationalism" played into the hands of the Nazis was countered very cogently by Frithjof Rodi in "Die Lebensphilosophie und die Folgen: Zu zwei Aufsätzen von H.-J. Lieber," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 21 (1967), 600–12.

<sup>3</sup>Josef Derbolav discusses Dilthey's subordination of practical energies aiming at real social transformation, to theoretical contemplativeness in "Dilthey und das Problem der Geschichtlichkeit," in *Rationalität, Phänomenalität, Individualität, Festgabe für Hermann und Marie Glockner* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966), pp. 189–239.

<sup>4</sup>Bernd Peschken has described Dilthey's political consciousness as seriously vacuous and conciliatory in *Versuch einer germanistischen Ideologiekritik* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1972). Christofer Zöckler's study, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik: Diltheys Begründung der Hermeneutik und die Geschichte ihrer Rezeption* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975), speaks with finer nuances on behalf of Dilthey's "oppositionalist" spirit in politics. Zöckler's admirable study marshals a rich range of historical and biographical materials in an effort to define Dilthey's political understanding, but he suspends this venture for the period after 1871, the period that is of greatest interest to students of Dilthey's poetics.

My own sense of *The Poetic Imagination* has been confirmed by Zöckler's work. It furnishes me with corroborative evidence for my thesis of the political bearing of Dilthey's poetics. On the other hand I find unintelligible Zöckler's explicit paraphrase of his own argument: "It is the thesis of this study that in this tradition [of Dilthey–Gadamer–Habermas] no positive impulses for literary theory are possible" (p. 9). It simply does not follow from his work—as I mean to make clear in my own work, by reproducing (some of) his scholarship for the very purpose of focusing Dilthey's study of *The Poetic Imagination*.

versary position on behalf of a rationalist, activist Dilthey. All these writers, meanwhile, are richly informative about little-known aspects of Dilthey's political culture and little-stressed tendencies of his thought. Yet, what is remarkable in this work is that they leave almost unmentioned Dilthey's poetical chef-d'œuvre, *The Poetic Imagination: Contributions to a Poetics* (*Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters: Bausteine für eine Poetik*, 1887).<sup>5</sup> A close reading of this text should allow us to describe with the right complexity the involvement of Dilthey's political consciousness in his poetic theory.

Ever since Georg Misch, Dilthey's most faithful disciple, declared in 1923 that "Poetics—along with the theory of history—was the germ-cell of [Dilthey's] ideas about life and about the understanding of life: he continually nurtured it, continued to work on it" (V, ix), a good deal of commentary on Dilthey has centered on Dilthey's poetics and especially on his major text, *The Poetic Imagination*. This text confirms the interpreter's decision to focus on it. It assigns to poetic and philological analysis an exemplary methodological character and hence presents the possibility of validating a science of the humanities.

This claim is based on the aptness of the literary object for "causal investigation" (*Kausaluntersuchung*). Dilthey writes:

We now possess observations on poetic creation and on aesthetic receptivity (the two are related) as well as accounts [by writers] of these processes. We can bring the psychological insights thus obtained to bear on the outer history of the formation (*Ausbildung*) of literary works. In analyzing, finally, the completed transparent structure of these works and thus confirming and completing our insight into their genesis, a captivating prospect opens up in this domain. Here, perhaps, we could have our first success in achieving a causal explanation (*Kausalerklärung*) from generative processes. The conditions of performing poetic analysis appear to make it possible for it to become the first to achieve by the causal method the inner explanation of an intellectual-historical totality (*eines geistig-geschichtlichen Ganzen nach kausaler Methode*) (125).<sup>6</sup>

The "totality" named here is that of a single literary work.

This passage touches the center of Dilthey's concerns. It bears on intellectual history from the angle of the privileged kind of research that poetics does—the depth of its subject matter (genesis), the scope of its explanations (causal relations), and the possibility it holds out of reliable results. Another passage often profiled in studies of Dilthey brings poetics to bear on intellectual history from the angle of the privileged kind of product that it treats. In *The Rise of Hermeneutics* (*Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik*, 1900), Dilthey writes:

<sup>5</sup>This work is found on pp. 103–241 of Vol. VI of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, subtitled *Die geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens, zweite Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Poetik, Ethik und Pädagogik*, ed. Georg Misch, 2nd ed., 1957. First published in 1924.

For a short bibliography of the secondary literature, see note 13 infra.

<sup>6</sup>Arabic numerals in parentheses without Roman numerals refer to pages in Vol. VI.

the immeasurable importance of literature for our understanding of mental life (*des geistigen Lebens*) and for history lies in the fact that only in language does human inwardness find its complete, exhaustive and objectively intelligible expression. Therefore the art of understanding has its center in the explication or *interpretation of the remains of human existence contained in writing* (V, 319).

The first passage, however, makes explicit what the second does not: the royal road to the study of intellectual history is specifically poetics, or reflection on the distinct character of literary language. It stresses, moreover, as the second passage does not, the involvement of an “external,” potentially political dimension in the literary work; as such it is more faithful to Dilthey’s poetics as a whole.

The passage projects a number of lines of inquiry, concerning especially:

1. The implications of the claim for the centrality of poetics within a program of intellectual-historical research;
2. The importance within this claim of the power of poetics to exploit a certain notion of causality (*Kausalität*); and
3. The content of this poetics, especially its practical (cultural and political) consequences.

These issues are linked. My own remarks will move freely between them with the intention—certainly not of doing exhaustive justice to these topics—but of opening them up for a discussion they have not yet had in the United States.

It is important to stress from the outset, in the exemplary relation of poetics to intellectual-historical understanding, its ultimately practical bearing, its final contribution to social and political praxis. The evidence for this bearing is both general, within the whole of Dilthey’s work, and particular, in the essay on poetics we are considering.

Consider, first, the general evidence. In guiding the enterprise of the *Geisteswissenschaften* as a whole, poetics guides that “totality of the sciences which take as their object (*zu ihrem Gegenstand haben*) historical-social reality” (I, 4). I read this point strongly. The verb “haben” (here, *take*) is genuinely transitive and implies an active and selective manipulation of experience. This manipulation has practical force, involving, in Gadamer’s phrase, “the dissolution of the life-bond—the gaining of a distance to one’s own history, which is the only way to make it into an object.”<sup>7</sup> And this, our own history, Dilthey never tires of repeating, is the history of the social world. “Society is our world. With the power of our entire being, we experience sympathetically (*miterleben*) the interplay of social conditions. From within, we are aware of the states and forces which in all their restlessness constitute the social system” (I, 36–37).

To take social reality as an object is therefore to provoke a transformation

<sup>7</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965), p. 5.

in the investigator and his experience—a change that is not in itself merely theoretical. “He who investigates history,” writes Dilthey, “is the same being as he who makes history” (VII, 278). There is an ideal of mastery, in its way altogether practical, within the “investigation of history,” based on the wholeheartedness of “the dissolution of the life-bond” (Gadamer)—on the thoroughness of an act of self-distancing, self-alienation, that aims at the “re-experiencing of alien states-of-mind” (Dilthey). Indeed, “action is everywhere presupposed by our understanding of others” (V, 317).

Historical investigation is, therefore, an act at once individual and social; rightly understood it is the exemplary form of social praxis, for our task is principally understanding (*Begreifen*)—and no other form of mastery (I, 5). The producer and the product of such comprehension are themselves always already practical: they precipitate more historical life. “Every structure of historical life is finite and as a consequence contains a distribution of joyous strength and force, . . . which similarly releases a new distribution; hence, therefore, actions constantly arise” (VII, 288).

The key sentence reads, “He who investigates history is the same being as he who makes history.” The polemical force of this maxim becomes clear when we recall the banality that is its target. In Goethe’s play *Egmont*, for example, a certain Machiavelli (not Niccolò) repeats to Margarete von Parma her charge to him: “You see too far, Machiavelli! You ought to be an historian. Whoever acts [i.e., *makes history*], must be concerned about the object closest at hand” (act I, scene 2). Dilthey’s enterprise is aimed at complicating this conception of the different temporalities informing historical thought and action. Such thought proceeds only through an action. This action is concerned, it is true, with the object closest at hand—but only in order to put it at a distance, to make it at once past (it is no longer immediate) and future (it will be reproduced by the labor of thought). What is humanly close at hand, moreover, is never simply present. As part of the social-historical order it is always already a survivor; it exists as the objectivation, as the trace, of inner life past.

In this way objectivity in the historical sciences is doubly complex. It is complex as the science of an object that, as a “scriptive monument,” can never be self-enclosed or self-identical. It is complex, moreover, in being (liminally) obtained only as the consequence of an asceticism—an *action* difficult to learn to make but at the basis of all individual development. It is an action that therefore needs to be taught and for which the university is the traditional site. Dilthey is speaking in his own voice when he writes of Humboldt’s founding the University of Berlin as first, a “perhaps not as yet hoped-for sanctuary of the sciences” (XII, 81); and second, as “a university in the highest sense,” where all scientific institutions “cooperate in the one great purpose . . . of arousing new enthusiasm and new warmth for the renaissance of the German states” (XII, 80–81). A recent writer, Christofer Zöckler, aptly comments: “Scientific freedom [i.e. objectivity] is conceived as producible only by reflec-

tion on its basis in social interests, not as tied to the fiction of disinterested neutrality.”<sup>8</sup>

The immediate point is that the act on which genuine objectivity is founded requires social protection; in turn it contributes to the truthfulness and cohesion of that society. This idea is plain in Dilthey’s *Introduction to the Historical Sciences* (*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, 1883). Here Dilthey spells out the specific kind of contribution objectivity in the social sciences can make to the society that guarantees it.

It appeared necessary to provide a service [similar to that provided by scientists writing about the basis and method of the natural sciences] to those who occupy themselves with history, politics, jurisprudence or political economy, theology, literature and art. Those who devote themselves to these disciplines are accustomed to approach them from the standpoint of the practical needs of society, from the purpose of a professional education, which equips the leading organs of society with the knowledge necessary for their task. . . [The isolated professional, the technician] is an instrument serving society, not *an organ consciously helping to shape it*. This introduction means to simplify, for the politician and jurist, the theologian and the pedagogue, the task of becoming acquainted with the relation of the principles and rules by which he is guided to the comprehensive reality of human society.

Thus conceived, this task, which is founded on the needs of practical life, confronts a problem posed by the state of pure [social] theory (I, 3–4; emphasis added).

This “theoretical problem” is that of the interrelation and justification of the social sciences.

To sum up: the “structure of historical life” Dilthey is addressing in his *Introduction* (and we in ours) is the mind that consciously produces and reproduces meaning in history. These expressions arise from a primary act of self-detachment<sup>9</sup> and in turn precipitate new acts—the “shaping acts of conscious men.” Translated into social categories, Dilthey’s introduction to the historical sciences, as an educative instrument, addresses the *Bildungsbürger*—the bourgeois who finds his sense of personal value on his educability, his powers of self-cultivation.

In documenting the practical implications for Dilthey of the act of historical understanding, I have made free use of chronology. I move back and forth between the *Reorganizers of Prussia (1807–1813)* (*Die Reorganisatoren des preußischen Staates (1807–1813)*, 1872, in Vol. XII; the “Introduction to the Historical Sciences” in Vol. I; *The Rise of Hermeneutics* in Vol. V; the *Plan for the Continuation of “The Construction of the Historical World in the His-*

<sup>8</sup>Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 5. The passages cited from Vol. XII above and from Vol. I in the paragraph following are also mentioned by Zöckler on pp. 4–5.

<sup>9</sup>Dilthey mitigates the violence of this “rupture.” He aims to suggest a continuity always of self and life (see *infra*, section II); in self-reflection life comes knowingly to itself. Hence what the great poet experiences (“a kind of splitting of self [*Spaltung des Selbst*] [or] transformation into another person”) serves finally to produce forms that objectively represent the spirit of an historical age (166, 231).

torical Sciences" (*Plan der Fortsetzung zum "Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in der Geisteswissenschaften"*), after 1910, in Vol. VII. Nobody reading these pages could detect in them the conventional account of the trajectory in Dilthey's understanding of the act of historical interpretation. This trajectory is frequently described in three stages.

First, in the 1860s Dilthey conceived a *Life of Schleiermacher* as a test case for a method that purported to grasp and represent the inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) of the historical subject, but he abandoned this project. It survives as a fragment, as testimony to the felt ineffectuality of his method and his goal. Second, the key term of his philosophy of historical "reading" in the 1880s becomes "inner experience" (*innere Erfahrung*). The term of experience is held to incorporate a greater measure of constituted social and historical reality. Third, Dilthey's late turn to the objective spirit is inspired by his continuing need to defend against the objectivist scientific position and his suspiciousness of introspection. This turn toward a more powerful mode of mediating between these extreme positions is fulfilled by the concepts of *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Verstehen* (understanding), and involves renewed interest in poetry. This, then, is the "story."<sup>10</sup>

By moving freely through the range of Dilthey's texts, however, I mean to make a polemical statement, which will be obvious. It is possible to find throughout his works, no matter what their source, propositions authorizing the claim for the intrinsically practical character of historical understanding.

This argument for the practical character of thought should not, meanwhile, seem archaic, quaint. Read, for example, Foucault, whose audacity and modernity are not in question. He writes:

Thought is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave. Even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done, even before exhorting or merely sounding an alarm, thought, at the level of its existence, in its very dawning, is in itself an action—a perilous act.<sup>11</sup>

In registering the intrinsically practical character of Dilthey's historical understanding, however, we do not solve but merely identify a problem. The problem runs throughout the whole of his work, but is articulated nicely in a sentence we earlier abridged. The entire sentence reads: "These data of the spirit (*geistige Tatsachen*), which have developed historically within the human world and to which, according to common usage, we apply the term sciences of man, of history, of society, constitute the reality which we do not want to master but above all (*zunächst*) to comprehend" (I, 5). *Zunächst* can mean

<sup>10</sup>See the similar account of Dilthey's intellectual development in J. Kamerbeek, "Dilthey versus Nietzsche." *Studia Philosophica, Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Philosophischen Gesellschaft*, 10 (1950), 52–84.

<sup>11</sup>Michel Foucault, cited in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, Selected Essays by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 5.

“above all,” “principally,” “chiefly,” but it can also mean merely “to begin with” or “for one thing.” What is Dilthey saying? Is the dignity of practice ever anything more than, or even as much as, that act of self-detachment that constitutes the basis of historical thought, of comprehension? Is the truth value of voluntary instrumental action “principally” secondary? A passage in Vol. VII confirms this reading. There the energies of thought, action, and expressed experience are contrasted.

Through the power of a decisive motive, the act emerges from the fullness of life into one-sidedness. However meditated, it nonetheless expresses only a part of our being. Possibilities which lay in this being are annihilated by it. Thus the act detaches itself from the background of the context of life. And without clarification of the way in which in its circumstances, purpose, means and life-context are connected, it does not allow a full-sided definition of that inwardness from which it sprang. Quite otherwise the objectivation of experience! [etc.] (VII, 206).

It is at this juncture that Dilthey’s political critics on the left have had their sharpest quarrel with him. In disputing the relative truth and authority of expression and conceptual thought versus instrumental activity, Dilthey speaks mainly on behalf of expression. Hence it cannot be the practical component of understanding, however conceived, which is the source of its dignity. The understanding of alien states of mind may be the basis for an act; but this does not mean that the value of experiencing alien states of mind lies in the act that issues from it or even, paradoxically, provokes it.

There is, however, another possible reading of the sentence in question. The word *zunächst* may indeed imply nothing more than “provisionally,” “for the time being,” and describe a merely interim project. The habitus of this thought is a familiar one from the German Idealist tradition. Schiller’s *Letters Concerning the Aesthetic Education of Man* states that the aesthetic cultivation of individuals must precede moral action in the sense that man is not yet ready for moral action. When, however, will he be ready? This consideration is principally postponed; at the same time it cannot allow the valorization of the aesthetic dimension over the moral, any more than it would allow in Dilthey the valorization of even the most genuine understanding over practical acts (deeds) of mastery. Only if this “interim” reading were true could we venture to assert the primacy of the practical act in Dilthey; to do so, of course, is to diminish the intrinsic value and importance of historical and, by implication, aesthetic understanding. The sort of practical bearing they contain leads to comprehension and not mastery or, indeed, only to what a modern writer calls “mastering [the ‘relations between things’] by knowing them from outside rather than being . . . in the relationships.”<sup>12</sup>

Such ambivalence, however, pervades all of Dilthey’s work and so cannot

<sup>12</sup>Norman Holland, “Transactive Criticism: Re-creation through Identity,” *Criticism*, 18 (1976), 336.

be permitted at this point to arrest our analysis. It may not be possible to assert unequivocally that the mere decision to perform aesthetic analysis—as it is performed in *The Poetic Imagination*—has itself a measurable practical meaning. I still mean to assert it, and to stress for the moment the less disputable idea that the analysis that Dilthey—or, by his own account, any aesthete—performs has a practical social meaning. This idea, which is plain in *The Poetic Imagination*, is prepared for by an analogy with the relation in Vol. I between the cultural system of law and the external organization of law.

The cultural system of law comprises individual acts and theories informed by, articulating, and authorizing legal consciousness. The external organization of law is the legal code enforcing positive law. The two, however, are intimately related. Dilthey notes that both the cultural system of law and its external organization “exist always and only side by side and with one another. To be sure, they are not connected as cause (*Ursache*) and effect, but each has the other as the condition of its existence. This relation is one of the most difficult and important forms of the causal (*kausal*) relation . . .” (I, 55).

Rudolf Makkreel, author of an important full-length study of Dilthey, comments on this passage in a suggestive way.

It is significant that in the above passage Dilthey rejects the substantive *Ursache* and uses the adjective *kausal* in introducing a mode of coexistence particularly important for the human studies. What he may have had in mind is that *Ursache* can be etymologically analyzed into *Ur-sache*, meaning primary fact. It is exactly this aspect of primacy in causation that Dilthey finds inappropriate in the human studies and wants to exclude from his proposed notion of a reciprocity which is *kausal*. Just as causality in the strict explanative sense was not applicable to psychology when correlating neural processes with states of consciousness, so when considering the relation of the ideal and the actual in the other systematic *Geisteswissenschaften*, we cannot simply make one the primary fact (*Ur-sache*) of which the other is the mere effect.<sup>13</sup>

I should be inclined, however, considering the context of Dilthey's reflections on law, to leave to one side the psychological parallel, and instead substitute for the word “causal” in Dilthey's sentence the more direct word “political.”

<sup>13</sup>Rudolf Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 66. Makkreel's study contains an extensive discussion of *The Poetic Imagination* but gives no account of the political and historical consciousness elaborated in this work. This bearing is consistently absent from other works discussing *The Poetic Imagination*, as, e.g., René Wellek's “Wilhelm Dilthey's Poetics and Literary Theory,” *Wächter und Hüter, Festschrift für Hermann J. Weigand* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 121–32; and Michael Heinen's *Die Konstitution der Ästhetik in Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophie* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1974). Kurt Müller-Vollmer, in *Towards a Phenomenological Theory of Literature: A Study of Wilhelm Dilthey's Poetik* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), mentions an “historical consciousness” in Dilthey's poetics but never his concrete sense of political and institutional forces. Frithjof Rodi's lucid work, *Morphologie und Hermeneutik. Zur Methode von Dilthey's Ästhetik* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 1969) briefly discusses writers who have reflected on the political character and effect of Dilthey's work, like Lukacs and Lieber (cf. note 2, supra). Rodi's own approach, however, eschews all attention to Dilthey's political awareness and effect.

The interaction of legal theorizing and enforcing positive law occurs as a play of political forces. Dilthey remarks: "Even the consciousness of law is not a theoretical state-of-affairs but a state-of-affairs of the will" (I, 55). "And the study of the systems into which the *practical* action of society has been articulated cannot be separated from the study of the *political* body, since its will influences all external actions of the individuals subject to it" (I, 52; emphasis added).

The will is a "context of purposes" bent on objectivation—all objectivations being, for Dilthey, at once texts and institutions.<sup>14</sup> Institutional force—hence politics—is the key (if sometimes inexplicitly stated) direction of Dilthey's essay on poetics. The practice of poetic analysis bears vitally on the cultural system of literary works, their mode of production, and on the "political body."

If nowadays (in 1887), writes Dilthey, poetics, the cultural system of literary works, and the external organization of society have cleaved wide apart, that is because

anarchy prevails in the wide domain of literature in all nations. Our [German] aesthetics, to be sure, is still alive here and there on the lecturer's rostrum but no longer in the consciousness of the leading artists or critics, and only there would it be [truly] alive.

When, ever since the French Revolution, the monstrous realities of London and Paris, in whose souls a new kind of poetry is circulating, attracted the attention of writers as well as the public, when Dickens and Balzac began to compose the epic of that modern life coursing through these cities, at that moment it was all over for the principles of that poetics which once upon a time in idyllic Weimar had been debated by Schiller, Goethe and Humboldt. Thus today art grows democratic, like everything else around us (104–05).

The vital task is that of "restoring the healthy relation of aesthetic thought and art." This task falls to "contemporary philosophy and the history of art and literature" (104).

Now we will grant "institutional" force to the academic disciplines of philosophy and literary history, but "political" force? And political force to theorizing about poetics? This bearing is explicit in the passage above, although it is not always so in this essay. The political bearing of inner contexts, texts and institutions, in Dilthey, is frequently only speculative. Yet Dilthey, in his essays, encourages us, by his example, to take up and valorize the inexplicit.

In, for example, a closely linked sequel to *The Poetic Imagination*, the essay called "The Three Stages of Modern Aesthetics and Its Task Today" ("Die drei Epochen der modernen Ästhetik und ihre heutige Aufgabe," 1892), Dilthey fashions a polemic against "experimental" aesthetics. He concludes by attacking its "isolated analysis of impressions," noting that the "driving interest

<sup>14</sup>On the word "text," cf. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 227ff., esp. p. 227: "Dilthey considered his task as that of providing the *Geisteswissenschaften* an epistemological justification by conceiving of the historical world as a text to be deciphered."

behind all reflection on art . . . is the question of *the function of art in the intellectual economy of human life*. To the extent that this question can be given a more rigorous answer," he continues, "we must expect it to emerge from the connection of the analysis of impressions with the historical-social study of art. Here, too, there is a point at which a circle in the efforts of the analysts of the impression swiftly makes itself felt. Some sort of inner position toward art, an idea of its inner significance, will guide their work, even where they have no consciousness of such presuppositions" (265–66). It is impossible, Dilthey is saying, to practice poetics without bringing into play a notion of the meaning of art. This notion is a reflection of the social and historical situation of the aesthete: "The understanding of the world (*Weltverständnis*) which ['philosophical thought' and 'poetic creation'] can have is determined by the historical situation of consciousness and is relative" (232). But this line of determinations is a line of force that flows in both directions, so that it is indeed also impossible to assign an *Ur-sache*, a primary cause, to its movement. The specific practice of aesthetics in turn modifies the "inner position toward art" that guides it. That inner position (to cite Foucault again) is, as thought, "no longer theoretical. It offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites, or reunifies. . . ." The object of this action is the understanding of the world that inspires it. And that understanding, that consciousness, thus revised, in turn transforms or consolidates the "function of art" in the historical situation, in the "intellectual economy of human life."

Indeed, this circle of cooperating determinations is in its form the very trope of Dilthey's thought and in its substance exemplary. Idea and objectivation, poetic imagination and social text, are moments in that reciprocal exchange that Dilthey calls *Kausalität*. The pivotal terms of the human order are art and the historical situation grasped as foci of an "intellectual economy."

This double privilege in Dilthey's system has often been perceived. "There appear in the images and structures [of art]," writes Peter Hünemann, "the ruling figures in which the thought, feeling and activity of a generation, a milieu, of this age are reflected. . . . At the same time they are themselves subject to historical change."<sup>15</sup> The field of this exchange is politics. The word is to be understood in both the wide sense in which I have been using it, as equivalent to social and historical life, and in the more concrete sense, as the regulation of institutional forces. All objectivations—to repeat this point—are at once texts and institutions. We will therefore not be surprised, then, to find in the analytical practice of Dilthey himself—the analyst of the *expression*—"a point at which a circle . . . makes itself felt." Dilthey's poetics is informed by a political consciousness, even if, for a variety of reasons, he will not or cannot profile this consciousness in its more concrete form.

My own concern is to fill in the political context of the "inner significance

<sup>15</sup>Peter Hünemann, *Der Durchbruch geschichtlichen Denkens im 19. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 1967), p. 151.

of art" that guides Dilthey's own poetics. I stress this even in a work ostensibly preoccupied with subjectivity. The path to a political reading of this essay lies through a renewed examination of its subjectivity.

The first obstacle to a political reading of Dilthey's poetics is a general one. Stated briefly, the very possibility of a reciprocal involvement of the terms subjectivity and political power is generally discounted or overlooked in Romantic and post-Romantic texts, so intent are we on reading into these texts the idea that these terms are antithetical, adversary. Writers are at work altering this prejudice. Paul de Man, for example, notes apropos of Rousseau's *Écrits sur l'Abbé de Saint Pierre*, "Consciousness of selfhood (*se connaître*), whether individual or political, is itself dependent on a relationship of power and originates with this relationship."<sup>16</sup>

This example of the correction of an intellectual-historical prejudice is not haphazard; the fortunes of Dilthey and Rousseau are linked. The conception of Rousseau as promoting individual ineffable subjectivity is one to which Dilthey contributed at one point in his career but to which he does not (or need not) finally contribute. The change in Dilthey's understanding of Rousseau is not explicit but occurs through Dilthey's changing conception of the category *Erlebnis* ("lived experience").

The term *Erlebnis*, which is crucial coin current in modern German, is surprisingly recent: it was not commonly used until the 1870s. Dilthey, of course, contributes fundamentally to its naturalization. The word recurs in his biography of Schleiermacher (1870) and above all in the first version of his essay on Goethe (1877), in which he contrasts Goethe with Rousseau. The main event in the naturalization of the term *Erlebnis*, especially in its now almost obligatory association with literary expression, is Dilthey's volume *Lived Experience and Poetry* (*Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*); but this collection of essays, with its powerful title, did not appear until 1905.

In the 1877 version of the Goethe essay, however, the term *Erlebnis* recurs, although not with the meaning it has in Dilthey's later technical usage. Dilthey uses it mainly to describe Rousseau's novel mode of writing from the standpoint of his inner experience. The key point is "inner." In this stage of Dilthey's conception of *Erlebnis*, the meaning of the word shifts from context to context, and it can mean a wholly interior construction. Gadamer, who comments informatively on these matters, cites from this essay the following phrase. Dilthey is describing a certain imaginative construction of Rousseau and defines it as one that Rousseau, "in light of his ignorance of the world, spun together (*zusammenphantasierte*) as lived experience."<sup>17</sup> But, Gadamer notes, "An *Erlebnis* that has been spun together does not fit in with the original sense of 'erleben'. . . . The word 'erleben' . . . carries the aura of the immediacy in

<sup>16</sup>Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 256.

<sup>17</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 58. This entire discussion of the history of the word *Erlebnis* is devoted to Gadamer's discussion of this subject on pp. 56ff.

the way something real is grasped, as opposed to something which one also asserts one knows but which is not corroborated by one's own experience."<sup>18</sup> An experience alleged to be entirely imaginary, then, does not fit in with the original sense of *erleben*, nor does it match any better "Dilthey's own scientific use of the term in his mature period, where *Erlebnis* means, precisely, the immediate *donnée*, which is the basic material of all imaginative constructions."<sup>19</sup>

Rousseau's influence on European Romantic writers was to make the authenticating standard of experience, especially of cognition, *lived experience*. But our understanding of what such a standard can have meant has been shaped by Dilthey's conceptions of Romanticism and lived experience—conceptions which, moreover, are not firm. When Gadamer writes, for example, "The neologism '*Erlebnis*' obviously invokes a critique of the rationalism of the Enlightenment—a word which in the wake of Rousseau validated the concept of Life," he is repeating a commonplace strengthened at certain moments (but not uniformly) by Dilthey.<sup>20</sup> This is the notion that there exists a fundamental difference between, on the one hand, political consciousness and activity and, on the other, experience shaped by the requirements of a unique inwardness.

What does it mean, finally, when Dilthey is represented as theorist and advocate of the category *Erlebnis*? In his mature work the term is projected as a totalizing category fusing Inner and Outer, preceding the dissociation of subject and object. But it has otherwise tended (not without Dilthey's support) to be understood as subjectivity pure and simple.

We do not have to return to 1877 to find the subjective sense of *Erlebnis*. In *The Poetic Imagination* itself, for example, Dilthey lines up the term *Erlebnis* with "that vitality which is enjoyed in feeling" and which, by virtue of "the aesthetic process," is only subsequently grasped as form or subsequently represented in an image (*Anschauung*) (117).

This terminological difficulty is analyzed by Frithjof Rodi, who identifies Dilthey's retrograde "Cartesian" tendency to split apart the category of *Erlebnis* into an Inner and Outer.<sup>21</sup> But, Rodi points out, this division is contrary to the spirit in which Dilthey writes—indeed, later on in the very text of *The Poetic Imagination*—that "The real core of poetry, *Erlebnis*, contains a relation of Inner and Outer, 'spirit and garment,' inspiration and materialization, the significance of structure or of phonetic sequence and the figurative visibility of the fleeting psychic moment . . ." (226). At various moments *Erlebnis* may mean,

<sup>18</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 59, 57.

<sup>19</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Frithjof Rodi. "Grundzüge der Poetik Wilhelm Diltheys," *Beiträge zur Theorie der Künste im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. H. Koopmann and J. A. Schmoll-Eisenwerth (Frankfurt a. Main: V. Klostermann, 1971), pp. 79–80.

alternately, a state of mind or the event experienced. This vacillation does not finally trouble Rodi; he is certain that

in reality, however, Dilthey always has before him, as the dynamic unity of *Erlebnis*, the interpenetration of "Inner" and "Outer." With this [term] he means neither pulsing inwardness which still needs to assume structure, or experienced factuality which still needs to be grasped in its significance. When he speaks of two possibilities, he does not mean the two components of the interpenetration ("Inner" and "Outer"), but two modes of their interplay, two equally privileged forms of the unity of life and form. Both are called "*Erlebnis*" and can be differentiated only by the "direction of the process of phantasy" as materialization and inspiration.<sup>22</sup>

This salvaging attempt does not work. It does not eliminate the division, but merely shifts it onto a plane of increased complexity. At first we were forced to distinguish between an "inner" *Erlebnis* (state of mind) and an "outer" *Erlebnis* (event experienced). According to Rodi, however, Dilthey always means to name with *Erlebnis* a prereflexive unity of mind and event, an unvarying interpenetration of Inner and Outer. This unity nonetheless occurs in two different modes. We are now faced with the distinction between an "inner" inner-outer *Erlebnis* (phantasy) and an "outer" inner-outer *Erlebnis* (objectivation) and hence a divided meaning.

Rodi cannot tell us which meaning Dilthey "always has before him" but only what we "always have before us"—namely, the printed page. Dilthey will frequently stress the subjective dimension of *Erlebnis* as the felt intensity of inner life, and as a result underplays the degree of metamorphosis the aesthetic impulse receives in the course of its materialization. The vacillation persists. It would be important to attempt to determine in each case the position and the logic of the vacillation.

Yet this is not the task at hand now. The main point at this juncture is that Dilthey's oscillating conception of *Erlebnis* has tended to be interpreted all on the side of inwardness. My concern is to evoke a horizon of understanding in which the material and, finally, the political component of the concept of *Erlebnis* can be identified and given its due.

The resistance to this perspective is, as I have suggested, particularly entrenched in the American reception of Dilthey. I shall glance briefly at the way in which this obstacle appears in a number of American critics—indeed precisely in those whose philosophical sophistication and knowledge of Dilthey is beyond any doubt and who, in other places, plainly register Dilthey's effort to enlarge the field of the individual subjectivity in the direction of an "intellectual economy."

Richard Palmer's essay on Dilthey in his *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* opens with the usual stress. "Dilthey," writes Palmer, "began to see in hermeneutics the foun-

<sup>22</sup>Rodi, "*Grundzüge der Poetik Diltheys*," p. 82.

dations for the *Geisteswissenschaften*—that is, . . . all those disciplines which interpret expressions of man's *inner* life . . ." [emphasis added].<sup>23</sup> Dilthey's critique of Kant turns on Kant's category "feeling," which did not "seem to do justice to the *inner*, historical character of human subjectivity" [emphasis added].<sup>24</sup>

Palmer's mode of constituting Dilthey's full subject is then to add "feeling," "will," and "life" to the knowing subject.<sup>25</sup> What is left out of this addition is the social and political dimension—a nonpsychological or not merely psychological definition of interest.

You do not find in Palmer's account this sort of Diltheyan sentence: "Far more intricate, more mysterious than our own organism . . . Society—that is, the entire historical-social reality—confronts the individual as an object of scrutiny. In it the current of events flows unstopably, while the particular individuals of which it consists appear on the stage of life and then take their leave. Thus the individual finds himself in it as an element in circulation with other elements. . . . We are forced to master the image of social conditions in perpetually active value-judgments, to restructure it, at least conceptually, through incessant will-power" (V, 36–37). How adequate, then, to this sentence is Palmer's paraphrase of Dilthey: "We [do not] experience life . . . in the mechanical categories of 'power' . . ." <sup>26</sup> Such resistances can be multiplied at will.

Fredric Jameson responds to the same crux in Dilthey's thought as did Frithjof Rodi, namely, that of the subject-object relation. Commenting on Dilthey's essay "The Rise of Hermeneutics," Jameson alludes to Dilthey's "false start" in constituting the *Erlebnis*-like act of understanding (*Verstehen*) as a junction of an understanding monad and an understood monad. Jameson writes:

Even the doctrine of *Verstehen* itself is not without its own shortcomings; and we may well feel today that thus construed, the dilemma is insoluble; that where the subject is thus initially and irrevocably separated from its object, or the understanding monad from the monad understood, no amount of theoretical or descriptive ingenuity can put them back together again. Any successful theory of understanding must in other words begin after the fact, in the presence of an understanding or an interpretation already realized.<sup>27</sup>

How well-founded on Dilthey's text is this statement? Dilthey is in fact a lot closer to a "successful theory of understanding" on Jameson's account than Jameson is ready to admit.

At the outset of the essay, Dilthey describes the object of intellectual-

<sup>23</sup>Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969), p. 98.

<sup>24</sup>Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 100–01.

<sup>25</sup>Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 102.

<sup>26</sup>Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup>Fredric Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History*, 3 (1972), 230.

historical understanding in such a way as precisely to extract from it its object-character. He writes, "Human studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*) have indeed the advantage over the natural sciences that their object is not the phenomenon as it is given to the senses, [i.e.] is no mere reflection in consciousness of something real, but is itself *immediate inner reality* and thus, indeed, as a context or *coherent structure* (*Zusammenhang*), is experienced from within" (V, 317-18) [translation and emphasis mine]. Jameson's translation curiously omits the word "immediate."

After reading this passage, how can one complain—as Jameson complains—that Dilthey's theory of understanding fails to begin "after the fact, in the presence of an understanding already realized"? An interior object transparent as to its structure is already (at least implicitly) understood.

The same nuance of the "already-realized" character of the object to be understood is present in another formulation of Dilthey's following soon after. In the same essay Dilthey supplies a definition of understanding—but not quite the same one as Jameson, in his slightly tendentious translation, supplies. Jameson translates this definition of understanding as the "process by which an inside is conferred on a complex of external sensory signs." But what Dilthey literally writes is, "We term *understanding* the process by which we come to know (*erkennen*) an inner dimension from signs which are given to the senses from the outside" (V, 318). The conferring of "insiderness" is not done, as Jameson suggests, from a subjectivity, an interiority, which in its magnetism and power draws in and endows an external object, meager and halted at the outside. Coherent determinations are not supplied to the naked sign, whence it acquires inwardness and becomes "insidable." If there is any conferring implied in this exchange, it is done by the object; an inner dimension is read off from signs; these signs come from the outside. This passage and the passage cited earlier complement each other in an important way. The earlier passage made quite plain that the object of historical understanding is always already "inside" the subject—an inner reality immediately apprehensible to a subjectivity. In the passage defining understanding, Dilthey in turn supplies the sign-like outer object an "insiderness" that it virtually confers upon the cognizing consciousness.

What we have here is not inconsistency but a fine adumbration of the hermeneutic circle or, if you prefer, that reciprocity of cooperation, of mutual exchange, which defines Dilthey's conception of the causal (*kausal*) nexus. If Dilthey's shortcomings as an historical thinker are grounded, according to Jameson, on the alleged shortcomings of his psychological hermeneutics, we see that the suspicion is premature. There is nothing in Dilthey's account of the Inner/Outer relation in *Erlebnis*; the subject/object relation in historical understanding (*Verstehen*); or the cause/effect relation in causality (*Kausalität*) to provoke the charge of unhistorical subjective idealism. The alerted reader will find that Dilthey has insistently marked out the social and political objectivity of the field in which the subject feels its life and the political character of the

mode by which the subject regulates the different claims that life makes on him. The political model shapes even what is alleged to be the most internal of acts—inspirations. The politics of the “outer” field (the concrete political struggles of a certain stage in the evolution of German society) and the politics of the inner field (in a word “psychology”) are inextricably involved, as we have seen: that is what underlies Dilthey’s repeated appeal for an “historical psychology” of the human spirit.

The most comprehensive term for this imbrication of politics and inwardness in Dilthey is “causality” (*Kausalität*). Causality evokes a cause/effect model that resists absolutely the attribution of firstness to either term. Indeed it is the uniform operation of this model of causality in the historical sciences that, more than the specification of a suitable object, defines the historical sciences as such. We realize that “data of the spirit” (*geistige Tatsachen*) are precisely those data that submit the “investigator” to the energizing perplexities of the hermeneutic circle. In this perspective Dilthey has already anticipated Heidegger’s potentiation of the category of understanding as more than cognition or some activity of cognition; understanding is a constitutive category of *Dasein* (human being). Dilthey is still prepared to demark a zone of theoretical activity—that of performing natural science—which is free from the reciprocities of causality; but he does this mainly to signal the special depth of involvement of the historical sciences in such models, in such a mode of being.

Part of the obstacle in appreciating the originality of Dilthey’s formulation of the cause/effect relation in interpretive experience will hardly come as a surprise; it is that it has been with us since Dilthey. It would evidently come as a surprise—or, at any rate, as the token of an unsuspected modernity—for writers on aesthetics in countries governed by a prevailing materialism. We read, for example, in a recent manual from East Germany, the following laudatory citation of a certain concept of literary reception.

The concept of reception is shaped from the reader’s standpoint. The reader himself “takes” the work as the object which is his *donnée*. On the other hand, the concept of effect stresses the angle of the work: in being “received” the work itself also takes the reader, operates an effect on him.

What we have before us is not therefore a causal relation, in which the work occurs as cause and the events in the reader as effect or, conversely, in which the effects of the work have their cause in the reader. It is a question of a special form of reciprocity, a relation in which both members mutually interpenetrate.<sup>28</sup>

We have here the feeling that the North Pole is being discovered for the second time. Dilthey was there first.

<sup>28</sup>Manfred Naumann, ed., *Gesellschaft, Literatur, Lesen* (Berlin-Weimar, n.p., 1973), p. 87. Cited in Norbert Krenzlin, *Das Werk “rein für sich”: Zur Geschichte des Verhältnisses von Phänomenologie, Ästhetik und Literaturwissenschaft* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1979), p. 71.

## II

It is now time to look at the concrete political dimension of Dilthey's exemplary text, *The Poetic Imagination*. We shall attend particularly to the figurative underlayer of Dilthey's language. His images again and again are of political interaction and conflict. Grasped in their real historical context, they alone can help us understand some of the obscurity and conflict in Dilthey's argument.

The presence of an institutional political consciousness in *The Poetic Imagination* can be felt from the outset. Almost all readers will read the work in Vol. VI of the *Collected Writings*. There, the text is printed immediately following the 1886 essay "Poetic Imagination and Madness" ("Dichterische Einbildungskraft und Wahnsinn"), which was delivered to an audience of students at an academy for army doctors. The concluding sentence of this essay thus appears on the page facing *The Poetic Imagination* and reads inescapably as its epigraph: "May God preserve and defend his majesty our Emperor in whom we honor an example (*Vorbild*) of all noble, humane and lofty sentiment" (102). *The Poetic Imagination* then follows.

What meaning for this work, if any, has Dilthey's gesture of political deference? One trembles a little from this sentence for the fate of the poetological word "example" (*Vorbild*). Presumably the word means one thing when it is written to characterize the relation of poetics to all other intellectual-historical disciplines, and another when it is spoken of Kaiser Wilhelm I and all "noble, humane and lofty sentiment." *The Poetic Imagination*, then, might be conceived of as (1) extending, (2) contesting, or (3) entirely bypassing this obeisance to the crown. But if we incline to the third view—which is evidently the position of all those commentators who have written on *The Poetic Imagination* without once alluding to its political character—we find ourselves from the start having to read against the grain. From the outset the work is explicitly oriented to the life of literature as a social institution, as a species of social praxis. It is misleading to the thrust of *The Poetic Imagination* to stress apropos of it, as does Makkreel, that "literature constitutes a cultural system where public institutions are of minimal importance. . . ." <sup>29</sup> This is to conceive of "institution" in a narrower and more harmless sense than Dilthey does in this essay. Literature is an institution for Dilthey because it institutes relations of force between acts of creation, enjoyment, and theorizing. Threading through these three kinds of activity—and most conspicuously in acts of enjoyment—is the movement of desire. Where there is the recognition of aesthetic form, there is the acknowledgment paid by desire to force.

<sup>29</sup>Makkreel, *Dilthey*, p. 81. Dilthey does make statements—in the *Introduction to the Historical Sciences*, for example, in I, 158—that specifically diminish the institutional character of the arts. On the other hand, he speaks of the process by which a style comes to dominate as a "question of force" (*Machtfrage*) pure and simple (VI, 274): the process by which artistic domination arises is the same as in other institutional struggles.

Peter Brooks makes this point in writing about the force of plots in verbal narratives. "As well as form, plots must have *force*: the force that makes the connection of incident powerful, that shapes the confused material of a life into an intentional structure which in turn generates new insights about how life can be told. The powerful fiction is that which is able to restage the complex and buried past history of desire as it covertly reconstitutes itself in the present language."<sup>30</sup> As a theorist of verbal art, Dilthey is deeply involved in a play of desire and force. This is especially the case when he writes, not on literary forms alone, but on the *genesis* of literature as a social institution. For, if a genetic account may be understood as an allegory of norms; if the instantiation of a first state may be grasped invariably as the instantiation of a native and natural, hence authentic being; he thus writes normatively and hence with political force.

The first sign of literature as a social institution appears at the very outset of the essay: Dilthey writes about the influence of traditional poetics on philological practice.<sup>31</sup> He does so, however, with the awareness of a crisis in the life of the institution of literature. "Crisis" is linked at its root (*κρίνειν*) with the concept of separation.<sup>32</sup> When philology is named, it is named as a sign of the separation and divisiveness that has occurred within the institution of literature. It is named as marking the separation within this institution of the agencies of production, reception, theory (poetics), and its own analytic practice.

Dilthey conceives of a future poetics as joining a once powerful and creative tradition of poetic theory that has fallen into anarchy and impotence. The tradition can be grasped as having functioned in two vital moments: the Aristotelian and the German Idealist. Dilthey specifically considers his program as the enterprise of "supplementing and furnishing a deeper foundation" (119)

<sup>30</sup>Peter Brooks, "Fictions of the Wolfman: Freud and Narrative Understanding," *diacritics*, 9 (1979), 80.

<sup>31</sup>One effect of the new poetics on philological practice would be to detach philology from any temptation to found itself on linguistics. It would place philology instead squarely on the basis of an "historical psychology." Dilthey followed linguistics. Müller-Vollmer notes Dilthey's close relation with Lazarus and Steinthal: Dilthey was "involved in [their] venture of founding a journal for social psychology and comparative linguistics, the well-known *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*" and contributed a number of articles to it (90). If philology in mid-nineteenth-century Germany can be fairly described as inspired by the methodology and specific findings of linguistics, then Dilthey's enterprise can be grasped as a reassertion of the priority of (nonspeculative, nonexperimental) poetics over philology and of the necessity of resituating philology. The crucial difference between poetics and linguistics-based philology is based on the fact that "the productive powers which form language are the same as those which can by and large be grasped in the life of mind. Their relation to the language process (*Sprachvorgang*), however, is not in any way experienced but is instead arrived at by deduction. On this is founded the relation of the method of linguistics to natural scientific method" (125).

<sup>32</sup>See Deric Regim, *Freedom and Dignity: The Historical and Philosophical Thought of Schiller* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 28; and also Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971). De Man writes: "We can speak of crisis when a 'separation' takes place, by self-reflection, between what, in literature, is in conformity with the original intent and what has irrevocably fallen away from this source" (8).

to the theorem of Idealist aesthetics associated with the names Kant, Schiller, and Schopenhauer. This theorem in brief “shifts into center-position the importance of feelings for aesthetic processes” (119). But as both these moments—the Aristotelian and the Idealist—writes Dilthey, have shaped the practice and self-understanding of philology, it follows that Dilthey’s own psychological and historical poetics will also transform philological practice, if even in ways it cannot envisage precisely.

In Dilthey’s narrative, Aristotelian poetics dominated the practice of literature and philology until the second half of the eighteenth century. It was “the tool of poets at work and the dreaded standard of critics through to Boileau, Gottsched, and Lessing. It was the most effective auxiliary of the philological interpretation, critique and evaluation of Greek literature” (103).

The hegemony of Aristotelian poetics was usurped in the latter part of the eighteenth century by German Idealist aesthetics. This aesthetics shaped the work of Goethe and Schiller and the critical perspectives of Humboldt, Schelling, Hegel, and the Schlegels; and finally it utterly transformed philology.

It supplemented rational hermeneutics—as it had been worked out in the struggle between Tridentine Catholicism and the Protestants and extended by Ernesti—with that aesthetically-founded hermeneutic praxis whose rules Schleiermacher, following the procedure of Friedrich Schlegel, derived from the principle of the form of a literary work. It supplemented those value-discriminations and a criticism based on reason, the rules, and grammatical, metrical and rhetorical techniques with that aesthetic criticism which proceeded from the analysis of form and whose important results are evident in the work of Wolf, Lachmann and their successors. Indeed this German aesthetics accelerated the fall in France and England of the old forms and influenced the first still tentative productions of a new poetic age (103).

This German discovery is conceived from the start as having political force, as hastening the fall of older cultural and institutional forms in France and England. German Idealist aesthetics is said to have had a revolutionary impact on two societies which, unlike Germany, had revolutions in every area of their life except the aesthetic. If these fallen “older forms” to some extent allude to the older forms of philological practice, we see that the political force of change in aesthetics has once again been illustrated par excellence by its effect upon philology. (Or put more moderately, philology *and* the immediate forms of artistic production and consumption are throughout this essay for Dilthey the objects of the political force of aesthetics.)

The political implications of German Idealist aesthetics adumbrate the political implications of Dilthey’s own text. The future transformation of philology is one and indeed not the least of the real effects that his text aims to have—a text whose ambitions are graphic at the level of its figures.

Speaking of the hegemony of German Idealist aesthetics, Dilthey writes of this system: “Through these two princes of German poetry [Goethe and Schiller] it dominated the entire empire of literature—with the assistance of Humboldt,

Moritz, Koerner, Schelling, the Schlegels, and, finally, Hegel as the Ministers of Fine Arts acting under them" (103). Dilthey conjures an effective empire of German poetry at the turn of the nineteenth century, with a ruling aristocracy still worthy of first rank, served by a loyal bureaucracy of critical talents. The image calls up Dilthey's forever declared admiration for the unified nation-state ("the empire of literature").<sup>33</sup> The image also alludes briefly and polemically to the view—which Dilthey always abjured—of Goethe as an antidemocrat, as the reprehensible tool of "princes," a notion that cost Goethe his popularity in Germany during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Dilthey, on the other hand, was a single-minded student of Goethe even at the lowest ebb of the latter's fortunes; hence *he* can write "prince." A major component of his political ideal was based in the most literal way on what he perceived as Goethe's exemplary wholeness. We find this view set out most authoritatively in the text of Dilthey's inaugural lecture in Basel in 1867, where it figures as part of a canonization of the German philosophical tradition. The inaugural lecture, an important document in Dilthey's intellectual development, has often been examined as part of the suspicious scrutiny to which German critics have submitted Dilthey's political consciousness and good faith. A passage from Bernd Peschken's study is a good example, and also suggests the thrust of Peschken's entire argument.

After the North German Confederation was founded as the preliminary stage of Empire, Dilthey proclaimed, in his inaugural lecture at Basel in 1867, the great [harmonious and positive] "life-substance" (*Lebensinhalt*) in the sphere of the history of [German] philosophy and literature. He seizes this moment to offer a total overview of German literary history, in which Classicism—including its political dimension—is given a core position. Because of the year 1866, Classicism acquires political relevance. With this valuation as a starting point, a view of life is canonized which operates on the political consciousness and is itself projected as political consciousness. The point of convergence of the notion of Classicism and political consciousness in Bismarck's Empire lies in the *reluctance to admit conflict* within both conceptual orders [emphasis mine]. It brings together fear of the institutionalization of political conflict through a parliamentary hegemony as well as the resistance to anything problematical in Classicism on the assumption that its essence is harmony. Political consciousness and the idea of Classicism approach one another from different sides, converging on this ideology of Empire.<sup>35</sup>

Well and good for 1867, but this reading of Dilthey's concept of harmony, conciliation, and totality as nourished by the image of the German nation-state

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, inter alia. Dilthey grasped, from 1852 on, that "great men, 'geniuses'—who not only cultivate their inner life but also put this culture into practice—can only be produced by a nation which experiences no obstacle to the unfolding of its power. The universality of Shakespeare and Calderon was made possible only by the 'great fullness of national power' of their nations" (235). The inner quote is from Dilthey's 1867 inaugural lecture at Basel, "The Literary and Philosophical Movement in Germany, 1770–1800" (V, 14).

<sup>34</sup>Peschken, *Versuch einer germanistischen Ideologiekritik*, pp. 11–49; Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, pp. 229–36.

<sup>35</sup>Peschken, *Versuch einer germanistischen Ideologiekritik*, p. 134.

obviously cannot be allowed to have the last word. We need only consider the period of twenty-one years between Dilthey's inaugural address at Basel and the writing of *The Poetic Imagination*. These years, politically speaking, are years of uniform consolidation of Empire, of the hegemony of a state over a bourgeois political consciousness, of a steadily increasing domination by national authority. Yet Dilthey's text of 1887 will speak of the absence of national consciousness, of the felt impertinence of German Classicism as a guiding aesthetic in an age of aesthetic upheaval, of productivity that has lost all familiar bearings. He speaks of a time of crisis, of rift, of dismaying multifariousness, that cries out for the creation of an as yet absent national ideology in the form of an epic. Peschken's simple, single link of political and literary awareness will not work: it has no temporal dimension to it; and it is precisely here that the *décalage* widens utterly. At the heart of Empire Dilthey discovers not cohesion but chaos, not conciliation but crisis, not harmony but collision and force. Let us grant with Peschken that in Dilthey acts of aesthetic judgment "acquire, indeed, possess, political relevance," but the direction and implication of this relevance in 1887 is quite different from what Peschken found in 1867, some twenty years earlier.

It is true that Dilthey continues to look for guidance to the German tradition defined in its basic directions by Classicism in literature and objective idealism in philosophy. This is not the same as saying, however, that he means to import into the present chaos the values of a certain single content obtained from making a cut into the tradition at, say, 1800. Earlier I cited a passage from *The Poetic Imagination*: "Our (German) poetics . . . is still alive here and there on the lecturer's rostrum but no longer in the consciousness of the leading artists or critics, *and only there would it be [truly] alive . . . It is all over* for the principles of that poetics which once upon a time in idyllic Weimar had been debated by Schiller, Goethe and Humboldt" (104; emphasis added). Reading Dilthey, are we really inclined to add "nevertheless . . ."? We shall see the distinctions of position Dilthey will take toward what is valuable and what is dead in Classicism; it is the present that has the last word. "What is *classic*," writes Dilthey, "is precisely not what corresponds to certain rules. A work is classic to the extent that it gives human beings in the present complete satisfaction and extends its effect in space and time" (236).

We are considering Dilthey's image of a princely Goethe, dominating, with his Idealist aesthetic, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the "empire" of German literature. This image of the poet-prince has additional political implications. It points to that Liberal bourgeois perspective of the 1860s—consistently Dilthey's own—which looked to the enlightened, progressive, bourgeoisified sector of the nobility for political leadership.<sup>36</sup> The figure of the

<sup>36</sup>Golo Mann, *The History of Germany since 1789* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 297ff., a translation by Marian Jackson of *Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a. Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1958).

Kaiser, meanwhile, goes unnamed in the metaphor. It does not belong, of course, if the image is one only of an earlier state of affairs around 1800. But if we are going to construct a rigorous analogy, so that the image at the same time projects Dilthey's own contemporary political ideal, it interestingly suppresses the Kaiser. The imperial figure does remain subliminally in play in the metaphor as the *Zeitgeist*, the historical spirit of Idealist poetics; but its only subliminal status also alerts us to an important assertion appearing later in the argument. This is Dilthey's sense of the priority of the constitutive, individual poetic-interpretive act over the imperial spirit, the *Zeitgeist*. "The unity in an age and a people," he writes, "which we characterize as the *historical spirit* of an age, first arises only through the *creative power* and self-glorification of the *genius*" (230). This key passage establishes the primacy of genius (including explicitly that of the political figure) with respect to the historical stage of consciousness, and also projects again a political ideal of the hegemony of enlightened aristocracy. This genius may or may not be an artist. Dilthey writes apropos of the possible unity of an historical age through the "coordination of its facts": "the genius of the ruler or of the statesman brings the recalcitrant facts themselves into a unity of purpose (*Zweckeinheit*) possible by virtue of their coordination." It is opposed to that [genius] of the artist or philosopher in its direction but is like their genius in its scope and grandeur" (230). Dilthey's argument for the scope and grandeur of the statesman is an inescapable reminiscence of Bismarck, and the act of genius, that of national unification.<sup>37</sup> He concedes the grandeur of the statesman, but we should keep intact the nuance: this grandeur is conceded to be comparable with the incontestable authority of poetic activity.

In another passage Dilthey does tend to efface the difference between poetic and political activity.

This circle of experience, in which the poet operates, is no different from that out of which the philosopher or the politician creates. The youthful letters of Frederick the Great, like those of a statesman of today, are full of elements likewise found in the soul of a great poet; and many thoughts of Schiller could be those of a political orator. [Given Dilthey's judgment on Schiller's poetry, the distinction and priority of genuine poetry is being nonetheless ironically maintained.] A powerful life-force (*Lebendigkeit*) of soul, energy of experiences of the heart and of the world, generalizing power and the power to convince (*Kraft des Beweises*) form the common maternal soil of intellectual achievement of very different kinds, among them, however, those of the poet (128).

Dilthey's main point here is to repeat his insistence on the greater *normality* of the poet: he wishes to free him from the charge of passivity or pathology with which the Naturalist writers, especially, were regarded by the philistines of

<sup>37</sup>"Bismarck, 'sovereign man of action' (VII, 142), offered Dilthey the hope of lending the German *Weltanschauung*—that objective idealism 'intimated' by Goethe—an entirely new validity on the basis of a 'fullness of national force'" (V, 14). Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 235.

Berlin. This passage does not jeopardize, however, the special privilege of poetry. This distinction of priority has an exact (and important) counterpart in Dilthey's position against Treitschke in the debate in 1870 about the relative rank of free cultural activity and self-effacing activity in the service of the state. Dilthey spoke on behalf of free cultural activity.<sup>38</sup>

I return finally to the metaphor of the poet-prince. Dilthey accords a special place to philological practice, which here serves as a subministry accessible to all other "Ministers of the Fine Arts" and indeed to the two princes, but otherwise uncertain of its efficacy and authority apart from the influence of the imperial spirit, the Kaiser. It is in this place that the *Bildungsbürger*, someone like Dilthey himself, finds his function, a region for practice in the effort to shape through metaphilological (poetological) thought another *Zeitgeist*. This one means to secure for philology, according to Dilthey, an independent foundation on the "eternal" psychological laws of poetic activity, laws intrinsically favorable to *the individual subject*. Dilthey's own philological ventures, as Gadamer observes, are guided by an ideal of scientific rigor, but at the same time illustrate—more decisively—"genuine individual tact presupposing a moral (*seelisch*) culture which proves the survival of . . . the romantic belief in individualism."<sup>39</sup>

Dilthey concludes the overture to his essay by detailing the effect of German Idealist aesthetics on philological practice. In this way he adumbrates the kind of effect that he means his own aesthetics to have. The central category of this aesthetics is once again that of feeling having access to its "own truth"; as such it is central to "the processes of creation, metamorphosis of images, and composition" (119). German aesthetics everywhere, writes Dilthey,

set into causal (*kausal*) relation the *Seelenzustand* (psychic condition, state of soul, mood, *état d'âme*) which produces a literary work and the form which is peculiar to it. This was grosso modo the step forward, which indubitably defines and does honor . . . to the view taken of works in this epoch. As a consequence the philology and criticism of this time may be characterized as aesthetic. Formal analysis according to the method of proceeding explanatively from a point within the inner life of the psyche was thereafter applied to the manifold forms of European literature. . . . Thus there arose the great age of our German philology, criticism and aesthetics (122).

It is impossible, Dilthey continues, to overestimate the productivity of this perspective, which nonetheless carried within it at all times its own decadence.

<sup>38</sup>Dilthey wrote to Treitschke, in reaction to his militarist-nationalist position: "It does not seem historic to me to declare in every instance those interested in gathering together all forces in the unified purpose of national defense to be patriots, wise men of vision, having genuine political sense" (*Der junge Dilthey: Ein Lebensbild in Briefen und Tagebüchern, 1852-1870*, ed. Clara Misch-Dilthey, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960]), p. 290. And further: "The proposition is false that the defense system, as the expression of self-preservation, has the right, until it has reached its saturation point, to injure every other system of culture" (p. 291). Both passages are cited in Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>39</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 5.

The valuation of form as expressive of or as effectually embodying psychic force swiftly became a grievous overvaluation of form, as in Schiller's "adoration of a domain of pure and ideal forms detached from reality. . . . The Romantic world of beautiful illusion set in" (122). It is irresistible at this point to ask what, according to Dilthey, provokes this shift in valorization from "feeling" to "form" in the classic theorem of poetic activity; but in this text we do not have an answer. Both possibilities—the Classic and the Romantic—are "simultaneous." We shall reserve an answer to this question.

Christofer Zöckler speaks to Dilthey's critique of Romanticism when he notes: "Flight into the past is the expedient which offers itself increasingly to Dilthey because of the specific [repressive] development of the German Empire. Flight is indeed the partly latent ideological transposition of the specific form of social 'praxis' of the cultivated German liberal-conservative bourgeois (*Bildungsbürger*)."<sup>40</sup> But Dilthey's critique of Romanticism certainly establishes that his "flight" into the past, such as it is—into a life centered on *understanding* the objectivations of the past—was a highly meditated and selective kind of flight, founded in fact on a certain ideal of objective truth. This ideal is called by Dilthey not only "positive" but, more, "objective to a special degree" and means to serve a philosophy of objective idealism and the Liberal ideology. For Dilthey, objective truth in history is to be found in the perspective of only that objective idealism that took root in Germany, "prepared for in the German movement, 'intimated' (*vorgefühl*) by Goethe, and meant to be realized in the present."<sup>41</sup> This point emerges from a passage about Goethe from Dilthey's early writings: "In him poetry intimated what philosophy first succeeded in representing conceptually many years later—the unity of life and the ideal; eternal identity; the realization of world-reason in history."<sup>42</sup> Schiller's idealism is subjective, agonized, and voluntative and represents a different possibility for "flight"—a possibility offered by the past and intolerable to Dilthey. "Flight" has its own scale of pragmatic implications.

Dilthey's stress on the alleged inauthenticity of Romanticism belongs to a familiar polemic, the terms of which are actually more dependent on Schiller than Dilthey realizes. Consult, for example, Schiller's critique of the Rousseauian idyll in *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. A version of this polemic was most recently conspicuous in the 1960s in a work like René Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*.<sup>43</sup> Girard, too, identifies as Romantic the captivation by "metaphysical desire," the desire for an inhuman bliss which, Girard points out, is covertly mediated by another text or another's desire, a mediation to which, however, the author (if not the hero) is blind.<sup>44</sup> This argument was

<sup>40</sup>Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 260.

<sup>41</sup>Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 223.

<sup>42</sup>Misch-Dilthey, *Der junge Dilthey*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup>René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), a translation by Yvonne Freccero of *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

<sup>44</sup>Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, pp. 294ff.

resisted and interestingly inverted by Paul de Man, who perceives the Romantic writer—Rousseau *par excellence*—as entirely lucid about the impossibility of happiness, of a life of “beauty” under any circumstances, let alone by the lights of what Girard calls “desire according to the Other.” For de Man, Romantic alienation is not the mystification of the Romantic writer but a mystification which that writer—or writer’s text—precisely identified as normative in and expectable from the social order of desire.<sup>45</sup> To this blindness, unfairly alleged, de Man adds an alleged (and associated) Romantic mystification about the value of the organic symbol.<sup>46</sup> Organicism means, for de Man, precisely the most literal version of Dilthey’s formulation of “the German aesthetic”: that there is a *Seelenzustand* that in each case produces a literary work as an agent causing and indeed reproducing itself within the form peculiar to it.<sup>47</sup> This relation, says de Man, is systematically recognized by Romantic writers not as a normative condition of poetic activity, but as an aberrant thesis. The aberration may indeed be constitutive. Although it is, in a phrase from Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*, one of those “mere phenomena of the human spirit” (“*bloße Phänomene des menschlichen Gemüts*”),<sup>48</sup> yet it is ineluctable, no matter whether the thesis be grasped as auspicious or as destructive, as promising “health” or decadence.<sup>49</sup>

What Dilthey seems to see, however, along with de Man, stands over and above Dilthey’s polemic against a certain form of Romantic beatification of the beautiful. Dilthey perceives that such a bipolar formula associating mood with form admits of and, indeed, invites an arbitrary (*willkürlich*) and potentially endless reversal of priorities. If the causal theory carries in it the germ of an “unhealthy” overvaluation of the psychic particularity of the artist, it carries in it equally, as Dilthey reminds us, the germ of a hypostasis of form. The point is that the devotion to form does not have to arise from a rejection of the formula that sets form in the relation of effect to mood as its cause, its origin. It can arise from within the formula as the result of a seductive if arbitrary weighting of one pole of the correlation. The task of a more adequate poetics—the kind toward which Dilthey is aiming—is to undo the notion of a sheerly individual cause, a psychological entity originating, in an “organic” continuous way, an ideal verbal form; and at the same time eliminate the notion of an ideal, autonomous verbal form thinkable without the participation of an affect-charged individual psyche. The goal is not to fortify this or that position within the circle of strict cause and effect but to get out of the circle in the right way. Romantic writers like Rousseau and Hölderlin were thoroughly aware of the

<sup>45</sup>De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 18.

<sup>46</sup>Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Interpretation, Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969), esp. pp. 175–85.

<sup>47</sup>De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>48</sup>*Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Friedrich Beißner (Frankfurt: Insel, n.d.), p. 495.

<sup>49</sup>This is an implication flowing out of many of de Man’s texts, as, for example, *Blindness and Insight*, p. ix and “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” p. 188.

mutual involvement of expressivist and formalist errors; they are genuine precursors of Dilthey's notion of a "universal" text-like *Erlebnis*, and its articulation of implicit meaning; but it may be part of that voracious dependence of insight on blindness that leads Dilthey to obscure his lights.

An early passage from Dilthey's diaries (1859) shows the direction of his transcendence of Idealist aesthetics. Zöckler comments on this passage as follows (words in quotation marks are Dilthey's):

Dilthey adduces a second characteristic of idealism. [The first dimension of the "Kantian-Fichtean tradition" is "the distinct consciousness of the power over the mind of categories, forms of thought, schemata."] This second characteristic is linked to Fichte's notion that the cognitive subject is constituted by fundamental acts (*Tathandlungen*). ["The ego is activity; each thought is to be viewed as an element of this activity and not as something static. Every system is to be explained from a movement of ideas."] Idealism tends to refer the activity of individuals to these original actions. . . . It conceives of individual development on the pattern of the germ (*Keim*) "which shoots up out of itself from within" and which, from the outset, contains all determinative moments. This principle, however, is also the principle of the philological method which means to explain a text by a "genetic account of the circle of thoughts from certain inner beginnings." The activity of the individual, however, who objectifies himself, among other ways, in texts, does not "shoot up out of itself from within, but, rather, from . . . [the 'inner beginning,' the 'germ,' the 'crucial point' (*springender Punkt*)] a context of thought (*Gedankenzusammenhang*) forms according to psychological laws. It forms in attaching itself to this point (*es bildet sich ihm an*). . . . A too exclusive role has been given to development from the interior outward."<sup>50</sup>

We have here the germ of that crucial idea of *The Poetic Imagination*—the "acquired context of the life of mind" (*erworbener Zusammenhang des Seelenlebens*)—which is the concrete individual totality, the structured history of one's *Erlebnisse*, the repository of what one can know of social and historical life, the index of reality and the mediator of all particular intentions (167).

The rest of Dilthey's argument against the overvaluing of beautiful fictions is more conventional within the tradition of anti-Romantic polemic. He repeats that in the psychological aesthetics of Kant, Schiller, and the Romantics, there is no provision for stabilizing the oscillating valorization of Inner and Outer and for introducing a progressive, dialectical moment—the category, namely, of history. What is finally important in this critique is that Dilthey does not speak against formalism on behalf of a theory of expressed feeling as such, but on behalf of an altogether different account of the affective "cause" of form. Gadamer puts this account succinctly: "In the expression (or objectivation: *Ausdruck*) the matter expressed (or objectified: *das Ausgedrückte*) is present in a different manner than is the cause (*Ursache*) in the effect. It is itself present in the expression and is understood when the expression is understood."<sup>51</sup> What is

<sup>50</sup>Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 232; Misch-Dilthey, *Der junge Dilthey*, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 211.

therefore expressed is neither something Inner nor something Outer. “The aesthetic faculty,” writes Dilthey, “raises the relation of Inner and Outer experienced in us to living energy and disseminates (*verbreitet*) it over that nature, too, which is dead to thought” (117). One could insert such a problematic into *Being and Time*. Then, in Heideggerian language, it is “Being-in-the-world” that is thus disseminated or, simply, as in Habermas, “the world”: “as soon as ‘human conditions are experienced (*erlebt*)’ [Dilthey], it is not human being but rather the world, in which the historical-social life of man is expressed (*sich äußert*), which is the object of concern.”<sup>52</sup>

To the extent that Dilthey still preserves a regressive causal logic (of *Ursache/Wirkung*) and hypostatizes “state of mind” as a source, the “cause” producing the form of the literary work is essentially feeling—yet, Dilthey stresses, intelligible, historically intelligent feeling, feeling saturated with value and discriminated life. Or put perhaps more rigorously, aesthetic feeling in Dilthey is bent first on value; thereafter, more insistently, and with important general implications for the historical sciences, it is bent on meaning. (This is a key contribution of Makkreel’s study. “Dilthey,” writes Makkreel, “increasingly regarded aesthetic feeling hermeneutically for the meaning it embodies.”)<sup>53</sup> But Dilthey is forever en route to abandoning the notion of a distinct psychic origin. This is shown, first, negatively, in the leavings of the laboring concept. Dilthey gives shifting and contradictory accounts, he valorizes arbitrarily different psychic entities—will, feeling, mood, value—as the prime element of the state-of-mind that “originates” literature. His positive account of the notion of the “cause” of literature is one more faithful to the movement of his thought. Whatever is designated a cause, as a distinct psychic origin, has to share the character of the “individual representation,” which is nonself-identical, “metamorphic.” According to Dilthey:

By the metamorphosis of individual representations I mean that the individual representation, the image, is not a constant atom of the life of mind, but rather a process emerging under changing conditions. The distribution of affective excitation in the individual image brings about heightened intensity, . . . displacement of parts. Thus representations do not change from without . . . ; rather, they are agents, processes. . . The acquired context of the life of mind functions as a regulating apparatus with respect to this metamorphosis.<sup>54</sup>

The “cause” is an agent in reciprocal play, the active element in a structure. The acquired context of psychic life, moreover, is itself an historical agent. “If

<sup>52</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), trans. as *Knowledge and Human Interests* by Jeremy J. Schapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

<sup>53</sup>Makkreel, *Dilthey*, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup>The passage comes from a letter written by Dilthey to Count Yorck in July 1886. *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm Dilthey und dem Grafen Paul Yorck von Wartenburg, 1877–1897*, ed. S. von der Schulenberg (Halle: Niemeyer, 1923), p. 58. The passage is cited in Müller-Voller, *Phenomenological Theory*, p. 136.

now," writes Dilthey, "the task were given to us of conceptualizing states-of-mind which bring about the forms and are represented within them, only a psychology that showed us how to recognize the historical nature of man could help" (123).

In Dilthey, historical life figures forth, is itself, the structure and context of *Erlebnisse*. *Erlebnis* individuates, generates individuality: "Every individual *Erlebnis* occurs in relation to a self" (VII, 195). Literature, then, as the medium of the objectivations of self, transcends contingent sensibility, is accessible, finally, only to an "historical psychology" able to decipher the life-content (*Lebensgehalt*) of the individual expression; this means being particularly alert to the social character, the governing "social function of literature" (236).

In profiling, at the conclusion of his essay, the social character of "individuality," Dilthey returns to his starting point: the cultural crisis that has made Germany inhospitable to individual poetic activity.

The character of an historical epoch, Dilthey stresses, leaves its stamp upon its literature quite as much as "on the business of state and the conduct of war" (230). As a literary text Dilthey's own essay is no exception. To a degree he has sought consciously to bring into his essay the widest possible awareness of the spirit of modernity. This spirit is itself the heightened consciousness of historicity. But there are ways in which Dilthey's consciousness of his own history does not coincide with or exhaust that history as it operates upon his work. The main element of this unconscious history is the magnification of the term of "power," of "might," that makes his work an aesthetics of force. His work is saturated with the midcentury Liberal ideology—"optimistic and peaceable and at the same time martial, rhetorical and violent."<sup>55</sup>

Dilthey is specifically aware of the radically changed political reality of modern Europe. The political seat of German classicism was "idyllic Weimar"; the seat of post-Revolutionary European consciousness is London and Paris. London and Paris are the sources of unsettling new realities, a super-consciousness "in whose soul a new kind of poetry is circulating" (104). These cities have had their epic writers in Dickens and in Balzac and his heirs, but now "since we Germans have a capital, a new task has fallen to the German novel" (240).

The hallmark of that literature responsive to the super-consciousness of these cities is its expression of a "struggle" (240) against "anarchy" (104).

From all ages and from all peoples, a motley crowd of forms presses in upon us and seems to dissolve every distinction among poetic genres and every rule. Especially from the East a primordial, formless literature inundates us. In this anarchy the artist is abandoned by the rule. the critic is thrown back onto his personal feeling as the only remaining standard for determining value. The public dominates, the masses . . . make and break the name of the artist (104).

<sup>55</sup>Golo Mann, *History of Germany*, p. 251.

In Dilthey's equation of "mass culture" and anarchy, there is more than a trace of the standard position of the German bourgeoisie after 1871. Whereas in the reactionary period following the broken revolution of 1848 the bourgeoisie saw its enemy in the feudal classes, after 1871 it considers the masses of workers the chief threat against peace and order.<sup>56</sup> Dilthey does not escape projecting onto the masses a specter of that "dark, brutal, dreadful" instability he perceived everywhere.<sup>57</sup>

The present-day democratic spirit—insistent and everywhere pervasive—penetrates art as it does "everything else around us" (105). The modern writer cannot reanimate the aesthetic of an earlier century, when "natures who reckoned with what they *are*" [emphasis mine] could express their certitude in "a typifying (*repräsentative*) art ennobling subsistent beauty. Now our ideal lies not in the form but in the force which speaks to us in forms and movements" (105). In "forms and movements," aesthetic and political categories have become indistinguishable. The great artist must "wrestle" and "struggle" to know and shape this force.

A state beset by cultural anarchy is in crisis. Dilthey's text speaks in the rhetoric of violence that characterizes texts written in a time of crisis, a "time" habitual to Germany for all of Dilthey's life if we are to believe Droysen:

Our spiritual life is deteriorating rapidly; its dignity, its idealism, its intellectual integrity are vanishing. The exact sciences grow in popularity; establishments flourish whose pupils will one day form the independent upper middle class as farmers, industrialists, merchants, technicians, and so on; their education and outlook will concentrate wholly on material issues. At the same time the universities are declining. At present all is instability, chaos, ferment, and disorder. The old values are finished, debased, rotten, beyond salvation, and the new ones are as yet unformed, aimless, confused, merely destructive. . . We live in one of the great crises that lead from one epoch of history to the next. . .<sup>58</sup>

Droysen's essay was written in 1854; the sentiment underlies *The Poetic Imagination*. But there is in Dilthey's language a characteristically more fluid involvement of a figurative political rhetoric in a philosophical vocabulary. It be-

<sup>56</sup>See Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 228.

<sup>57</sup>"The analysis today of human existence fills us all with the feeling of fragility, of the might of the dark drive, of suffering from obscurities (*Dunkelheiten*) and illusions, the finitude in everything that is life, even where the loftiest forms of communal life arise from that life . . ." (VII, 150). "And is there not connected with everything brutal, dreadful, destructive that is contained in the will to power . . . the consciousness of community, of belonging, the joyous participation in the power of the political whole, experiences which belong to the highest human values?" (VII, 170). Cited in Zöckler, *Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, p. 71. Dilthey's stress on the dreadful side of life prompts Gadamer to define Dilthey's intellectual-historical project as the effort, through knowledge, to gain "protection and security, despite the unfathomability of life" (p. 226).

<sup>58</sup>Cited in Golo Mann, *History of Germany*, p. 209. The sense of crisis among intellectuals of the 1870s and 1880s is due in part to the exacerbation of the chronic feeling of an absence of origins in the German nation-state. What acts, what tradition, before Bismarck could be pointed to as genuine precursors of the Empire?

speaks Dilthey's mediating spirit, his mood of hope, his offer of a constructive program. The thesis of the ultimately practical character of historical understanding in Dilthey is an articulation of hope in the political field. "It is one of the live tasks of contemporary philosophy," he writes, "to reconstitute the healthy relation between aesthetic thinking and art"—an art, remember, of force, of "gripping effects and upheavals" (104). The interplay of political and philosophical rhetoric defines the field of Dilthey's struggle. The task of a poetics centers the general and urgent enterprise of the *Geisteswissenschaften* as the integration of cultural and political practice.<sup>59</sup>

The active and contemplative components of the artistic struggle do not exist simply divided between art and thought about art. The historical spirit of movement and conflict pervades the historically aware consciousness in the very instant of its seizing hold of this spirit—penetrates this consciousness in all its manifestations. Thus for all forms, the harmonious subject/object relation conjured up by the contemplative ideal exists only as the goal of a struggle, an action. Writes Dilthey:

There is no human being and no thing which could exist for me only as an object and not as a help or a hindrance, the goal of a striving or an involvement of the will, something of importance, making a claim on my consideration and inner closeness or else inspiring resistance, distance and strangeness. The life-connection, whether restricted to a given moment or long-lasting, turns these human beings and objects for me into bearers of happiness, an expansion of my existence, a heightening of my power; or in this connection they restrict the free-play of my existence, they exercise pressure on me, they diminish my power (VII, 131).<sup>60</sup>

The destiny of struggle belongs even to the empirical scientific consciousness with which the new aesthetics wishes to ally itself, a perturbed consciousness whose rush into pseudo-objectivity threatens to increase division and estrangement. "The spirit of scientific investigation goes into action vis-à-vis every object, penetrates every kind of intellectual operation and excites the need to catch a genuine glimpse of reality through every sort of husk or mask" (105). What Dilthey just adumbrates is the degree to which science is itself in the grip of a particularly stark form of that *Variabilität* (108), which he paraphrases as the "historical nature of man."<sup>61</sup> His own text, as a "scientific" tract, testifies to this perturbation mainly through its rhetoric: it is at once iconic with, the vehi-

<sup>59</sup>An effort that, as Zöckler notes, "occurred in connection with [Dilthey's] development of a homogeneous historical-political theory, in which all divergent moments are grasped in their relation to the process of origination and the law of motion of the nation organized by the state and in this manner are centered" (*Dilthey und die Hermeneutik*, pp. 239–40).

<sup>60</sup>Cited in Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, p. 192.

<sup>61</sup>This point about science in Dilthey has to be nuanced; science is valorized as the discipline of social thought. Dilthey sees the period following the French Revolution as marked by the increased "importance of the social sciences vis-à-vis the natural sciences" (I, 4). Hence Dilthey's systematic "repudiation of the positivistic orientation toward the epistemological model of the natural sciences [read, Comte]." In Lieber, "Geschichte und Gesellschaft," p. 706.

cle of, the violence against which it speaks. Dilthey's epistemological theory of the necessarily *active* imaginative reconstitution (*Nachbildung*, *Nacherleben*) of the human object—seeking to overcome difference and deferring—represents an attempt at once to acknowledge and to sublimate this restlessness.

But Dilthey speaks against violence, and for its antithesis: for cohesiveness, conciliation, for the preservation of tradition.<sup>62</sup> His task will be to bend importunate, restless, divisive science into the service of an intellectual-historical enterprise with normative functions. Speaking of external, empirical methods, Dilthey writes:

The autonomous value of literature, the function which it has in society, can never be demonstrated by those empirical methods [i.e., those without historical awareness]. If mind intended to confront its own creations only as something objectively empirical, a self-estrangement of mind vis-à-vis its own creations would set in (125–26).

Cognitive estrangement exacerbates the historical process by which critical mind feels itself “thrown back onto its personal feeling” (104), by which the practicing artist feels himself isolated from traditional norms, yet captive of a “misology”—the artist's hatred of reflection on art (105–06).

The function of aesthetic speculation has traditionally been conservative. “In every productive period of literature aesthetic reflection on the goal and technique of particular forms of artistic practice essentially supported the development of a firm style and a coherent tradition” (106). “Art persistently required a schooling of artists . . . through aesthetic reflection.” The great style of German Classical literature was sustained by the exercise of the “royal power” of the Weimar poets Goethe and Schiller, “not without the terrorism of the *Xenien*,” their polemics in hexameter against the likes of Kotzebue, Iffland, and Nicolai. But this “royal power” is nowhere manifest now, and a better image for the struggle of aesthetic wills without cultural and political tradition is the definitive suppression of Kotzebue, not by diatribe but by the knife of a Democrat assassin.

Philology figures in turn as the conservative Liberal wing of the Ministry of Aesthetics. “Its merit,” writes Dilthey, “is to have made intelligible for the first time the coherence of the literature of a people both within itself and with respect to the life of the national spirit” (108). Penetrated by the historical consciousness, it now finds itself confronted only with historically conditioned and defined poetic practices. In this sense it is no more privileged than the general consciousness of a society entered “into an historical age,” faced with a

<sup>62</sup>René Wellek notes with ill-concealed distaste Dilthey's normative aesthetics of equilibrium. “Every work of art which seeks to evoke permanent satisfaction must conclude with a situation of equilibrium or with a pleasurable state, in any case with a reconciling final state, even if this state is only in an idea which lifts us above life” (VI, 162–63). Cited on p. 122. This would be, for Peschken, the aesthetic reflex of a world-view courting conciliation everywhere, lamentably (for Peschken) in the political order. But see *supra*, the discussion of Dilthey's inaugural lecture.

profusion of dead shapes from the past ("we are surrounded by the entire past") and the shapeless energies and violent effects of the present.

The struggle of all forms of consciousness is for general law within a profusion of possibilities. It is precisely the troubled relation of historically-limited and hence contingent forms with "the general laws of poetry which leads philology necessarily to the principles of poetics" (108).

The historical consciousness grasps the historicity of the life of the mind, the psychological consciousness asks: "Can we know how processes founded on the nature of man and hence operative everywhere produce these various groups of poetry, divided by peoples and ages? How is the self-sameness of our human essence, expressing itself in the uniformities (inhering in systems of culture) bound up with its variability, its historical character?" (108).

It is not my task to reproduce in detail Dilthey's "solution," his full contribution to an historical-psychological poetics. The reader who does not know German will find it in the books of Müller-Vollmer and Makkreel. What I have wanted to stress is the political and historical context of Dilthey's effort at a solution, his effort to find access and hold fast to a coherent human substance in an age of levelling, violence, and disruptive science. He conceives his effort as a reciprocal illumination of psychology and history—a psychology of the "variable" literary object; a history of the permanent crisis of the spirit perpetuating the struggle of individuals for form.

Dilthey's effort, finally, is plainest in the rhetoric with which he identifies the matrix of poetic activity—the "acquired context of the life of mind" (*erworbener Zusammenhang des Seelenlebens*). This category speaks of the individual mind: "The acquired picture of reality in it regulates *our* understanding of the impression just occupying *our* consciousness; the acquired mode of weighing value distinctions in it determines the feeling of the moment; the acquired system of purposes of *our* will in it . . . governs the passions of the moment" (168; emphasis added).

This category is diachronic: it speaks of tradition. "Sensations leave traces behind; in [the order of] feeling and desire habits develop; gradually there arises in the unfolding life of mind, between the sensation and the motion, *an acquired context* of the life of mind" (167). As a diachronic category it covers, moreover, more than the individual history. At least in the case of the genius, "the acquired context of the life of mind . . . is determined by the coordination of the constituent elements of an [historical] period, and it therefore represents this coordination" (231).

The acquired context of the life of mind has, finally, the character of a synchronic system: "The *context or cohesion of events*: this is the most comprehensive state of things (*Tatbestand*) which befalls our mental experience" (167–68). This "state of things" includes the social world. We recall: "Society is our world. With the power of our entire being we experience sympathetically

the interplay of social conditions, . . . the states and forces . . . constituting the social system" (I, 36–37). Dilthey stresses the systematic character of the social world: "The coordination of the facts which constitute an [historical] period produces *reciprocal effects* and *affinities*, as a consequence of which this *coordination can be compared with a system*" (230).

The psychological "context" of the individual is therefore principally a social and historical index of reality. Precisely at this juncture, writes Dilthey,

we can connect the historical with the psychological. We developed a psychological concept of the acquired context of the life of mind and related it to the activity of the writer. In the great man this acquired context represents, in the right, refined way, the existing structure of the coordinated facts [equally, "the historical spirit of the age," hence]: principles, value-distinctions and purposes. The genius then influences the processes which take place in consciousness. In this way the literary work becomes the mirror of the age. Here the mystery is solved of how an age can become objective to itself and to us in the stories, actions and characters of its writers. The acquired context of the life of mind in a great man is causally conditioned and therefore represents the coordination of the elements of the life, the thought, the striving of an age.

[The essential coherence of a literary work] is always the breath of an historical age (231).

Dilthey's call for a German genius who will produce the new German epic is, therefore, a call for the articulation (*Koordination*) of the facts of his age. Without such an act his age is not an historical period but a crisis. If we stress the social, synchronic, systematic character of that reality "represented in the genius," Dilthey is at the same time calling for a context of political institutions capable of regulating the facts (which are *forces*) of the new age. In the essay "Poetic Imagination and Madness," Dilthey terms the acquired context of the life of mind a giant "apparatus for order, restraint and regulation" (95). In this rhetoric psychology, poetics, and politics are inseparable.

In envisioning the new German epic, Dilthey is envisioning a psyche vast and orderly enough to represent the violent new reality; *and* he is projecting, as an allegory of a psychic ideal of coherence, a political ideal of coherence, which, in the present life of Germany, is altogether absent. That articulation of *Erlebnisse*, that "fusion of Inner and Outer," expressed by the genius in the literary work, is not a politically neutral substance but is categorically structured according to the norms of an (absent) political ideal. Moreover, through the objectivations of genius, the acquired context of the life of mind literally enters the social world—becomes the instituted presence of a social-historical tradition hitherto absent. We grasp that the psychological category of "the acquired context of the life of mind" is conceived under the aegis of a time-bound political consciousness confronting Empire and anarchy without the intervention of a national-social tradition, without a mediating, consciously shaping context of political institutions. Renan's famous letter to Strauss in 1870 noted "the frightening thing about the German victory: Germany showed

only force—blank, effective force—with no auspicious message.”<sup>63</sup> Dilthey does not bring that message. But his psychological poetics of creative individuals testifies to the intensity with which he felt its absence.

*Paradoxes, Some Paralipomena, and Conclusions*

(1) Dilthey intends to pacify by cultural knowledge and creation the violent crisis of his age, a predicament generated by an omnipresent “will to power” (VII, 170), but the reader will be troubled by Dilthey’s reliance for healing cultural activity on the element of individual power, “the mighty, heroic personality” (239).

(2) The admiration for personal force penetrates Dilthey’s own text as the violence and arbitrariness with which (when it adheres to the notion of “mood-caused” literary form) it assigns priority alternately to such terms as imagination, feeling, mood, and will. In an age of violent will, the dialectic in a philosophy of self-assertion itself proceeds by the arbitrary assertion of priorities. The critic Heinen suffered this perception. In his work, which concludes with the impossibility of writing coherently about Dilthey, he states: “No matter what one takes hold of as a starting point, as a beginning in Dilthey’s philosophy, Dilthey always refers to its *a priori* connection with something else without which it could not exist.”<sup>64</sup>

(3) The shift from an aesthetics of spectatorship (as in the Kantian tradition) to an aesthetics of production belongs to the valorization of personal force.

(4) In the “acquired context of the life of mind,” Dilthey’s basic vision is of a powerful repository of forces “ordering, restraining and regulating” the immediate life indwelling the superior large individual. Outside him: the social reality—chaos and anarchy. The task is to introduce into chaos this agent of order. This is what happens (ideally) when the work of art is projected actively into the social world: the acquired context of the life of mind becomes an instituted presence of national-social traditions.

(5) Evidently, Dilthey’s glorification of the figure of the great and powerful individual has ambivalent implications: it can be read as inviting the strong leader (Lukacs) or as passionately encouraging the cultivation of human talent pure and simple. This ambivalence shifts through the whole of Dilthey’s essay, generating parallel ambiguities: the act of poetic creation is a radical “metamorphosis” of life and also a typifying of what is already at hand in the real. The exemplary new literature would speak of an heroic German essence; it would also speak the language of social realism. An (empty) politics of extravagant individuality shelters in the reality of social liberalism. In Lieber’s words, “The individuality of any sort of human or historical structure is, according to Dilthey, nothing more than a ‘singular’ variation of the general

<sup>63</sup>Golo Mann, *History of Germany*, p. 387.

<sup>64</sup>Heinen, *Die Konstitution der Ästhetik*, p. 10.

structure.”<sup>65</sup> Rodi, however, counters this sort of comment, founded on texts of the middle period (e.g., “Ideas on a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology” [“Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie”]) with “a favorite thought of Dilthey’s: to see the act of grasping the singular in history as dependent on a certain divinatory gift which at bottom he conceded only to poets. . . . His definition of the poet-seer: ‘By “seer” I understand the poet to the extent that he represents in a manner ungraspable to us—one that does not proceed according to the leading-strings of logic—man, individuation, the context that we call life—a context woven out of circumstances, human relations, individual depth, destiny.’”<sup>66</sup>

(6) For Lukacs, Dilthey contributed to the creation of *Lebensphilosophie* as the ideology of the imperialistic bourgeoisie: as antisocialistic historical relativism, nihilism, intuitionism, irrationalism, phantasy, and mythification. Consider, on the other hand, Golo Mann’s formulation of the German character in the years just after 1870:

Germany produced industrial progress, military trumpet blasts and politics. If one looks at the picture from a distance without examining individual figures, one gains a fatally mixed impression: hard-boiled *Realpolitik* and oppressive piety, ostentatious theatrical poses, self-righteous nationalism combined with internal discord, and finally materialism, overwhelmed by the success of the natural sciences, but yet prepared suddenly to change into cheap mysticism.<sup>67</sup>

In no way does a single element of Dilthey’s “ideology” in *The Poetic Imagination* justify or further a single of these tendencies: and yet it is this latter constellation that arises from the ideology of the imperialistic bourgeoisie!

(7) The text of *The Poetic Imagination* enshrines the values of unity, harmony, and coherence in its view of the literary work. (a) “Living pulsations” in the creative will of the author survive without diminution in the work, they “saturate” the work (VI, 125). (b) The creative act is thoroughly penetrated by the acquired context of the life of mind, which is itself a “representation” of reality: the work of genius is an immediate expression of reality. Dilthey stipulates no distinction between culture and life. (c) This reality is communicated to the interior of the consumer-subject and is fully appropriated (Dilthey stresses the likeness, too, between the act of production and the act of reception). Would not the political implications of such notions sanctify the status quo and give comfort to the national ideal of uniformity by force—“blank effective force”?

On the other hand the literary work speaks to the category of the self. Gadamer paraphrases Dilthey this way: “Historical consciousness is not so much self-effacement as a heightened possession of self.”<sup>68</sup> For Dilthey it is the

<sup>65</sup>Lieber, “Geschichte und Gesellschaft,” p. 726.

<sup>66</sup>Briefwechsel Dilthey/Yorck, p. 183, cited in Rodi, “Lebensphilosophie,” 608.

<sup>67</sup>Golo Mann, *History of Germany*, p. 387.

<sup>68</sup>Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 221.

"highest function" of literature "to represent the dignity of the *person* in the midst of its determination" (238). *The Poetic Imagination* redefines philology as the science of the laws producing genuises. Literary activity requires a cultivation of tact that must collide with the crudely levelling thrust of the "machine factory" (I, 3) of imperial Germany. Dilthey seeks to animate a past centering on the monumental individuality of Goethe: he makes German Idealism a *political* ideal. A perspective stressing the imaginative creativity of psychological individuals is implicitly socially emancipative.

(8) What we remember of Dilthey is not his psychological aesthetics. (His insight into the mechanisms of the imagination called "association" and "fusion" and their potential correlation with the tropes of metonymy and metaphor are keen and fruitful, but they have been absorbed into Freud.) In general his poetics of continuity will not be attractive in our own critical climate, in which the formal elaboration of the literary work is grasped as a sequence of *negations*, as a beginning and not the issue of an origin. What precisely does survive in *The Poetic Imagination* is the embattled political tonality, the sense of a mind genuinely attempting to come to terms through cultural effort with an oppressive and fallen social world.