

Directing us toward an experience most of us are probably familiar with, David Worth explores the cell phone as a technology for global communication. Focusing on the nature of time and space as they are articulated in the mechanism of the cellular phone, and the lived experience of those who use them, Worth draws attention to the way that the *desire* for communication, has, with the cell phone, turned into a *need* to communicate at the limits allowed by this expanding technology.

Finally, Catherine Summerhayes takes a hermeneutic approach to the understanding of film. By examining Gadamer's concept of "transformative play", Bateson's idea of play as experimental behavior and Turner's understanding of liminality, Summerhayes uses a film by Tracey Moffat - an Australian Aboriginal filmmaker - to demonstrate the way in which film can transform the lived experience of those who are drawn into a relationship with the world of filmic narratives. Specifically she shows how such an experience can work to transform one's understanding of race, culture and difference in Australian society.

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Hermeneutics

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This article clarifies the distinction between hermeneutics as a self-conscious attempt to understand understanding, and the general fact of perspectivism, meaning the inescapable situatedness of any experience. This article also covers the relevance of hermeneutics for scholarly pursuits, including several important concepts such as "method," "thrownness," "linguisticity," and the "hermeneutic circle."

Key words: Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Horizon, History, Foundationalism

The Archaic Need for Hermeneutics

The dissociation of a "discipline of hermeneutics" from the universal problem of understanding and interpreting in the very act of living, has happened in several cultures; notably among exegetes of sacred texts such as ancient Talmudic or Vedic scholars, and those even questioning the very act of writing as among ancient Taoist in China and Socrates in Greece. But as we shall see in our discussion of hermeneutics as experimentation, this dissociation is only apparent. One cannot avoid being influenced by one's choices including the choice to not participate or act, to be a "disinterested observer."

In Plato's *Cratylus*, Socrates observes that Hermes, the inventor of language and speech, is also a thief and a liar, and his son Pan is smooth and divine in his upper body but bestial in his lower body. Words, Socrates notes, are true in so far as they approach the divine but false as they remain embodied and contingent. "Hermeneutics," as a self-conscious academic discipline, is most often recognized as emerging with the Sophists and certainly with the formation of curricula via Aristotelian fragmenting reductionism. Indeed it is with the treatise *Peri hermêneias* that Aristotle uses the word in a rather narrow acceptance as the determination of the truth of an assertion. This is to be expected since he was a man, like all men, of his time and place, and the dominant Greek epistemology of the time was mimetic.

But before Aristotle's reduction to referential positivism, with its emphasis on independent

¹ Online at www.hsbc.com.

meaning and intentionality, the terms "*hermêneuein*," "*hermêneia*" and their cognates were used to designate the act of interpreting in several senses. As has been recognized by many (Heidegger, 1927 Ger/1962 Eng; Gadamer, 1960 Ger/1975 Eng; Palmer, 1968; Hoy, 1978; Bernstein, 1983) there are at least three ways the term "interpretation" is used, and all three are evident in the classical term "hermeneutics." First, interpretation is widely seen as the very process of translation from one language to another. Second, interpretation designates the embodied performance of a text such as a piece of music or a character in a play. It is in this sense that the performance of Homer in ancient Greece was done by persons called "*hermeneuts*." Performance evaluations are rampant in the modern world as individuals are compared with some ideal criteria pertaining to how they are "fulfilling their role." Third, interpretation indicates the act of textual exegesis or explanation. The notion of "text" is quite broad including dreams, prophecies, law, cinema, as well as literary works including texts beheld as "sacred."

Richard Palmer (1968) has stressed the liminal quality of hermeneutics. Taking his cue from the notion that Hermes, the messenger of the gods is the "quicksilver god" (Mercury in Latin), characterized as having sudden insights and inspirations and also being the trickster god of thieving, Palmer argues that hermeneutics involves the crossing of boundaries, most notably between confusion and understanding, as in the sudden "aha" experience; what Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) called "daybreak." In further explanation Palmer notes that:

Hermes is the god of crossroads and boundaries, where piles of rocks (*Herms*) were placed to honor him. As psychopomp, Hermes led the dead into the underworld, so he "crossed the line" between the living and the dead...Hermes is truly the "god of the gaps," of the margins, the boundaries, the *limins* of many things. (Palmer, 1999, p. 1)

In his report, in his translation/interpretation and performance of the intentions of the gods to men, Hermes makes the message relevant to those in the human context. He brings an otherwise incomprehensible, dead (useless) message to life including his subtle explanation via proper emphases, intonation, and accent.

When a people are passionately concerned about the meaning of important signs, such as the direction the geese are flying, a solar eclipse, or a hole in the ozone over the South Pole, interpretation is presumed. When conflicts over understanding, prediction, law and policy emerge, then interpretation as a problem in and of itself, *sui generis*, becomes crucial. Concerns over how an audience will react to a speech or what the ancient sacred texts mean, herald the need for a discipline to address how one can find the singularly real and true meaning. When a god can offer either eternal agony or eternal bliss, it is vital to know what his intention is. Misunderstanding can have the direst consequences imaginable (indeed unimaginable). The same is true for modern medicine in the act of diagnosis. And the anxiety of uncertainty can be only exacerbated when "god's word" is given in enigmatic aphorisms, parables, intertextual cross-references, forgotten contexts, contradictory statements, a foreign tongue, and obscure metaphor. For instance, in the *Old Testament*, if all people perished in the flood, then who did Noah's sons marry? For that matter, who did Cain and Able, the offspring of the first man and woman, marry? Soon, we all become panicking swine trampling pearls into the mud. From a vague declaration of love or a "potentially hostile troop movement," to ancient and ominous oracles or a doctor's report about a "lump," "What does it mean?" vexes us and demands solution. Classical, textual hermeneutics was an attempt to resolve the practical problems of the author's intent and to do so in an objective, systematic way that would enable any trained exegete access to the one true meaning. But as we shall see, even though that remains a fundamental problem for us all, hermeneutics in its "postmodern" guise, indeed as the initiator of postmodern thinking, has expanded beyond this practical problem. Here we find the classical hermeneutics of foundations confronted by the postmodern hermeneutics of Nietzsche and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-), a confrontation explored shortly.

What is presupposed is a human desire to find the truth of meaning and motive. But is the truth

a mere consensus or a referential truth? In traditional societies, the difference is not yet a crisis. The truth is self-identical. Notions of a socially or psychologically constructed truth, of groupthink and convergence on common fantasies, of "false" consciousness are not yet evident. Instead, in traditional societies interpretation is primarily emotional. What is true is a shared horizon and conviction with feeling. Perceived threats to community standards, the presence of an out-group member, or the homegrown radical with unconventional views for instance, calls into being hermeneutics. Traditional cultures such as the oral culture of ancient Greece tend to be collectivistic. However, the emergence of individualistic forces portend a threat to community and cooperation; a threat to the "common faith," the "common good," the very "way of life." Competitive egocentrism appears as a disruption to the collective world and so it is no mere coincidence that the first text about hermeneutics is written by the first modernist, Aristotle, at just about the time Socrates stresses the self as the most fundamental object of knowledge and is killed by his neighbors. Conflicts of interpretation, open debate and descent are not initially associated with progress or heroic truth seeking. Quite the contrary, such selfishness in collectivistic societies is seen as disruptive if not sinful. Taking and defending a position is very much the purview of the individual who, ironically, becomes the standard for testing community beliefs via direct personal experience and opinion.

For hermeneutics to exist there must first be a disturbing confrontation with relativism perceived as a threat to orderly thinking, comportment. Out of the confrontation with relativism comes the realization that perceptions of truth and beauty are in fact questionable. Interpretation must be recognized as such. And this occurs only when alternative opinions and judgments about the "same thing" are made evident through public disclosure. The conflict of interpretations foregrounds the very phenomenon of interpretation and the conflict of competing versions of reality. This disturbing turn of events in a collectivistic society is resolved or kept in check by means of either generating a hierarchy of priestly kings like Egyptian pharaohs (who combine secular and sacred power in one absolute) whose voice is unquestionable truth (literally the voice of god), or by generating a democratic ethos that facilitates a forum that can tolerate free exchange while maintaining at least a modicum of stability. The latter constitutes a sea change, for the traditionalism that collectivistic societies rely upon, their unquestioned horizon or foundation, becomes the primary target of critical analysis; "revaluation" in Nietzsche's terms.

This amounts to nothing less than decentering the self with all of one's prejudgments. For the questioner, the "*Versucher*" (Nietzsche's term which I translate as experimentalist or attempter) is sawing off the limb upon which she sits. But she can do so because she is courageous and does not fear since she suspects that there is no ground, no definite "reality" to hit. Attacking one's own prejudices, one's own tradition is the most radical "deconstructive" move which Nietzsche hailed as the necessary conditions of thinking; to be courageous and honest enough to, "boldly at any time declare [oneself] himself *against* [one's own] his previous opinion" (Nietzsche, *Die Frohliche Wissenschaft*, 1882, p. 296 [*The Gay Science*, 1972]). As he argues, there is "A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions: rather it is a matter of having the courage for an *attack* on one's convictions!!!" (Nietzsche, Musarion edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* 23 vols., 1920-1929, vol. XVI, p. 319).

This reinvigorates the Socratic critical method of apparent madness, of self-disorientation (learning), which is simply renamed by Hegelians like Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Jacques Derrida (1930-) the internal self-contradiction or deconstruction of statement/fact. But as Socrates discovered, insofar as the self has an integral microcosmic manifestation of the culture one lives, to challenge one's own most deeply held prejudices very often amounts to challenging the larger milieu. The radicality of Socrates and Nietzsche lies in this, problems are not solved but "outgrown." Nietzsche seeks not solutions but the hidden presuppositions and unquestioned assumptions that manifest this world. The critical nature of the hermeneutic process, as it is conceived of by Gadamer, lies not in revealing some final truth but in the task of discovering one's blind prejudices. At the instant that

one realizes that a previously unperceived and utterly presumed truth is possibly a faith, a window of liberation appears. Only when one realizes that one is in a trap can the search for escape, and therefore liberating growth, commence. In this sense, Nietzsche sets the stage for Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) phenomenology.

The Enlightenment struggle to debunk previous realities, to redefine them as false consciousness, myth, that enslaves the world, is a powerful inspiration to modern hermeneutics. However there is an important difference between the Enlightenment project and post-Nietzschean hermeneutics, which is: the Enlightenment critical thinkers presumed that once superstition and traditionalism was debunked, a solid truth would be revealed. Nietzsche does not make the presumption and in fact argues that such a discovery would put an end to all exploration rendering the human condition unbearable. Instead, he believes that exposing prejudices as such enables one to move on from them (not into a brick wall of facticity) into a freedom that enables experimentation and creativity. The world for Nietzsche is not to be discovered, but to be made and remade. The highest capacity of the human is to be actively creative, not reactionary. Thus Nietzsche was suspicious of the Enlightenment effort to substitute one dictatorial cosmos for another.

This is why, to Nietzsche and his followers, the world is not a problem to be solved but rather a place to be explored. The goal is not to discover *the* meaning to life but to make life meaningful. And thus he is suspicious of systems thinkers such as lazy Hegelians who start with premises and axioms and then deduce "reality" therefrom with the certainty of logic's iron clamps. Rather, Nietzsche moved the other direction, to first principles and then questions them and experiments with them. Once we discover we are in a cage, then we can begin to explore its structure, not to learn how to conform better to it (Spencerian adaptation) but to figure out how to bust out. And it is not merely the deconstruction of fetishistic statements but of the self that is questioned.

Three very important issues in hermeneutics emerge here. First, Nietzsche is doing the hermeneutics of life as lived, existentially if one prefer, and not "texts." The reduction of hermeneutics to reading is made explicit in the end of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. I only mention this to warn the student that "reading" and "text" are not used here in the "conventional" way such as critically reading a book, although this is a small part of the larger hermeneutic scope. Second, this involves risk; what Gadamer would later call the risk to one's own horizon, prejudgments, presumptions, and foundational truths. When we approach an Other, be it a work of art, a book, a political philosophy, a partner in conversation, if we are to learn anything, we must be willing to authentically risk ourselves in the dialogical process. It should be noted that since Nietzsche was staunchly against atomism, it follows that the whole of life as a composite of myriad implications, one could argue, is a "text." Change one word, one page, and the cascade will alter the whole.

The third issue arising here is that experience adds up, that wisdom "grows," and that there is no substitute for it. We, as Gadamer argues, always bring to new experiences, our previous knowledge and prejudices. We are never a "blank slate." In fact, a person cannot integrate or understand new information except as it makes sense to her existentially; meaning as an embodied consciousness that is historically, culturally, sexually, economically, and so forth situated. However, the encounter with the Other can change us and thus all previous prejudices and limitations are threatened with necessary adjustment as the new is integrated. We reevaluate previous values and convictions (truths). We change. And this dialectical process spirals on through time such that as we change from previous experience, we integrate the ever-present "new" never in the same way. I can read a book when I am 15 years old, again at 35 and again at 55 and its meaning will be different each time.

Experience is, in this way a process of never quite finishing the world. A book is not finished until it is read, and then its "finish" is never final or fixed once and for all, but provisional. Critical hermeneutics works in a circular/spiral in that it reflects on its own possibility. How is it that I read the book differently each time? Here is the realization of my limited horizon and how it (I) change. And here too appears the potential for active self-conscious creativity and also resistance. to influ-

ence. I can actively resist only when I think there is an influence present. I can become proactive and creative rather than purely reactive and conformist. This goal remains, from Socrates on, the primary function of education and of living a "life" worthy of the moniker. Plato teaches that the goal of education is not indoctrination but to instill the critical tools that will enable the pupil to think independently. A teacher seeks to set her students free; the guru seeks to keep them dependent. The last thing a loving teacher (as Plato defines love) wants in her pupils is a bunch of mimics and conformists.

This process of dialogical encounter, risk, and growth is not a one-dimensional variable analytic process whereby I must lose my "old self" in direct proportion to gaining my "new self." Unlike Neo-Spencerian assimilationists like William Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim (1997), nothing is lost in the process of integration. One need not "deculture" oneself in order to functionally "fit." Success according to these Spencerians is anathema to post-Nietzschean, indeed even conventional Enlightenment thinkers. Success and progress is manifested by those who defy assimilation and create something new like Bill Gates dropping out of Harvard to pursue a dream, Louis Armstrong defying convention in how to play the trumpet, or the Beat writers building a new road let alone taking one less traveled. In fact "unlearning," no matter how desirable it may be to control freaks like re-education masters in Communist gulags or "teaching" gays to be "straight," is demonstrated to be impossible. Rather there is a fusion of horizons and we become more complex. The "past" can be re- and transvaluated but never lost or "unlearned." Dialogue is an additive or expansive, not subtractive or steady-state, process. Equilibrium is generally not desirable because it is never achieved except at death, which in phenomenological terms means nihilism.

The existential nature of Nietzsche's method is important because when he "experimented" he did so in the most bold and courageous sense of the term. It was not "controlled," for he did not claim to already have a good guess at the outcome. He experimented not only in differing styles of expression and certainly not with undergraduate subjects in a practically risk-free environment, systematically made predictable. Instead he REALLY experimented, doing so with his own life (the existential component). He did this in order to get as close to "the data" the "problems" themselves as he could. In this sense, he is hardly a pragmatist. And he came to have no patience with questions that did not permit of experimentation or with mere academics who risk nothing, especially their own prejudices and convictions. As for Nietzsche, "error is cowardice" (*Ecce Homo*, 1908, p. 3). His method, his experimentalism, went beyond the phenomenology and ethnographic participant observation he inspired. For his risk was REAL and the data it yielded was personal, direct; as "real" as it gets. Ultimately, the accounts of survivors are the one's we hold up as most cogent, most convincing.

When the latter path is taken, hermeneutics becomes a vital, public affair.

Communication is an effort to coordinate. Agreement regarding the meaning of messages and contexts is essential to coordination and cooperation. Here is born the disciplining of hermeneutics as an attempt to understanding understanding, explanation, and interpretation *in general*, transcendentally and independently of any and all contingent instances of explanation and understanding. Hence, the philosophy/science of understanding, and one must note by implication misunderstanding, emerges. Hermeneutics, as a discipline, has its origins in the Platonic and Aristotelian emphasis of generalized form over contingent content. For this reason, in the Twentieth Century Martin Heidegger (1889-1975), Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur (1913-), and their followers all presume phenomenology as the starting point for elucidating the essential qualities and properties of meaning, understanding, translating, and interpreting. While they did hermeneutic analyses of specific poems, philosophies, art works, ideologies, technology, and so on, their main focus was not the interpretation of specific texts but the identification of the essential processes of understanding generally.

Thus, the separation of understanding, awareness, and interpretation occurs only as a function of

instrumental reductionism, for in fact, all three are always one process of experience. As Heidegger, following Nietzsche's insights, sensed, if one "goes back" to the pre-Socratics, the problem of understanding and interpretation were not separated. The emergence of the disinterested and distanced critic, the scholar, emerges only after life becomes successful and the luxury of critique for its own sake can be sustained. Thus Ricoeur's distinction between the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of faith makes no sense in the mundane activity of the life-world.

Even the critical hermeneutic of the modern scientific project of "demythologization" presupposes what a myth is and what it means. The separation of myth from truth of course lends itself to deconstructive reversal. But before Derrida made a move, Husserl, Jean Gebser (1905-1973), Sigfried Giedion (1888-1968), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), and others had already abandoned the modern dualistic ontology, which makes "tactical reversals" possible, thus treating myth, art, poetry, ritual, not as falsity, but as a style of articulation. In this way, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) set for himself the task of rehabilitating the value of myth in the scientific world, and Gadamer did the same for art. For these scholars, myth and art articulate truths despite the fact that they do not exhibit forms amenable to verification as it is constituted by the scientific method. Hence, Gadamer's distinction between "truth" and "method" (which is the title of his *magnum opus*). Gadamer was not antiscientific. Rather, he like Derrida, is insisting that other modes of expression like art, be given discursive space and valued as articulating meaningful "truths" also.

The distinction between mythic expression and scientific expression is one of moral import and passion. While mythic expression deals with the human condition and is preoccupied with good and evil in all things, scientific expression is preoccupied exclusively with material relationships and claims to be "beyond good and evil." Neither is "wrong." They are addressing different ontologies. Having said this, it is true however, that the supposed "disinterest" of scientific pursuit and its alleged objective value-freedom is also challenged by many in the hermeneutic community. For in the process of application (pragmatics as Jurgen Habermas, 1929-, uses it), when science as technology defuses throughout the world in the process of *praxis*, the reasonableness of its uses becomes relevant. Many, such as Nietzsche and Max Weber (1864-1920), have argued that the claim to be "disinterested" and "objective" is not only naïve but practically irresponsible; for *techné* attempts like many political rhetorics (noting that technology is a power formation), to disguise itself as pure truthsaying and as an innocent tool. The attempt to inoculate itself from suspicion betrays a kind of cowardliness. It is an ancient tactic exploited by uncertain prophets to absolve themselves of interests, prejudice: mere mortal perspective. The "truth" is a voice that claims to arise from no position, no (body) (for bodies are culturally and historically situated), no subject. Under such conditions the messenger and the message are dissociated. The body becomes "possessed," as a mere channel, a type of bio-technology.

Already in animism, there is a clear distinction between those who are authorized and those who are not for "reading the signs." One could argue that "discipline" begins with such a vital distinction. Clearly, with the emergence of the sacred voice and its privilege in the form of soothsayers, vision questers, readers of the stars, bones, crystals, palms, numbers, and the like emerges the problem of interpretation. With this emerges the critical aspect of suspicion. Despite the tendency of traditional peoples to expect and accept great gaps in elocutionary force (power, and privilege between the common person and the exceptional authority) still false prophets, thus revealed, are dealt with harshly. The mob, that belied consensus of suspicion, can "turn" and destroy the purported "voice of god" but only after it has been exposed as a fraud. In the magic world where "the word" is yet "living," extremities of passion swing wildly from total worship to complete abomination.

Foundationalism and Hermeneutics

The foundation of understanding might be said to be the "meaning event," or the nexus of interpreter/text, which is a fusional process whereby the horizons (the articulated limitations, preunder-

standings, or prejudices) of the text and the "reader" meet. While this sounds dualistic, it is not. It is more properly an integral process whereby the reader's understanding of the text is premised upon the reader's preunderstanding or limitations and the structure of the text. Thus, a text of differential equations has one meaning for a first grader and another for a graduate student in mathematics. It has one meaning for the "same" student before and after they have taken a class in differential equations and studied the book. "The text," which is the compilation of what it means, is not a fixed self-contained object or meaning. It is relational product. Husserl's phenomenology stressed the relational and temporal aspect of awareness and following his lead, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Habermas all agree that texts are conversational products that change over time. A text can be any specifiable object of awareness from a dream, a historical era, a movie, a sunset, a hunch, a feeling like nostalgia, a memory, anything that is specifiable to awareness. For Husserl it is the "thing-itself" as a phenomenon present to awareness.

Heidegger was writing his famous *Being and Time* at the same time that he was assisting Husserl by editing (and borrowing from) Husserl's book *Internal Time-Consciousness*. Husserl's book indicates a profound tension between the property of some phenomena to persist or endure through time, like the rules of geometry, and the fact that consciousness of time is flux. Later Derrida, following Heidegger's lead, accentuated morphology with his concept of difference and trace. Thus it may on cursory reading appear that the early Husserl, with his emphasis on essence, is championing the Platonic notion of eternal forms while Derrida is emphasizing the Heraklitian appreciation of flux. However, to the more studied observer, Husserl does not naively reiterate the debate over permanence (Truth) and flux (contingent error) deciding to take the side of permanent essence. As Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) noted, Husserl, with his move to the things-themselves and the life-world of mundane activity, plunges one back into the realm of pragmatic flux. Husserl does not equate permanence with the object, and flux with the subject. Rather he recognizes both as given in the life of consciousness. We are aware of (what we believe to be) essential facts and contingent facts. In fact, Husserl's project was, critical in that he attempted to not reduce to essences observations, but to challenge unquestioned presuppositions that structure our interpretations of the world. This critical process of self-reflexion, *changes* the meaning of the world. He wanted to challenge the belief that our prejudices are beyond question...natural.

Husserl identified mundane faith in how things are as a hypothesis which he called the "theory of the natural attitude." As a theory, it begged to be tested. He therefore proposed an unnatural phenomenological approach to experience. In this way, he is influenced by Nietzsche's method, which Walter Kaufmann calls a "style of decadence" (flying in the face of bourgeois reality) used reflexively to overcome the decadence of "the anarchy of atoms." As noted, Nietzsche's method was experimental. He tested and created by means of aphoristic statements, which he injected into the mix of ideas to "see what might happen." This style would later inspire Derrida's "grafts." Nietzsche rejected systematic thinking, which excluded itself, dishonestly and hypocritically, from its own first principles (axioms and premises). For instance, can the critique of metaphysics and philosophy by empiricism be sustained when reflexively applied to empiricism? No. Empiricism is not an empirical thing. It absurdly defines itself as not being able to exist. If reduced to biochemical reactions, the philosophy of empiricism is lost as we stare at brain tissue and blood. It makes no sense to ask what color empiricism is or how much it weighs. Therefore, it cannot sustain its own premises.

Through experiment and the attempt to ruthlessly interrogate one's own prejudices and preunderstandings one does not solve problems but rather "outgrow them." What one finds throughout the modern era is the radical and relentless questioning of prejudice and traditional truths.

Of pre-eminent interest to the philosopher, however, is the problem of how even the most ruthless questioning can rid us of the necessity of letting "concepts, opinions, things past, and books step between" ourselves "and things." At this point Husserl's phenomenology and contemporary

Existenzphilosophie are at one with Nietzsche, and we should not consider his call to philosophers to by-pass concepts and opinions, things past and books, as a mere personal idiosyncrasy but rather as a significant program... (Kaufmann, 1974, pp. 84-85).

For Nietzsche, the idea that one could purify oneself of oneself, eradicate all of one's uniqueness (what some positivists like Gudykunst and Kim, call "defilements") and achieve "immaculate perception," that is gain direct access to the real, was a penultimate delusion. For Nietzsche knowledge is possible only insofar as one has a unique perspective. Knowledge as we know it, is, and here is an irony not lost on Husserl, essentially perspectival. But this is not to say that it is "subjective" but rather that it is a privileged version of experience currently held that is a sort of epiphenomenon, a product of people's conversations with each other and with the world. Always there is a faith that debaters about truth and facts are sharing the same text, are discussing the "same" thing. For instance, what is the truth about a star? Is it a white dwarf, a supernova, a neutron star, the star of Bethlehem, et cetera? Are we even talking about the same point of light in the sky or the same religious icon?

Understanding is an event, a verb not a fixed object-position. Gadamer insists that one remain open, that one "risk" one's horizons to the influence of the Other, be it a book, an enemy, a thought. We come to each encounter with a set of prejudgements. In the process of encounter, our prejudices are challenged or reinforced. In either case, we are changed. Gadamer would seem to disagree with Plato. While Plato discusses the influence of a speech as being one that moves us toward good or toward evil or which fails to move us, Gadamer would suggest that no text could fail to have an influence unless we are dead. The complexity of the intertextuality of the world makes it so that even texts we are utterly unaware of may have influenced others we are aware of so that the influence, though indirect, still enters the world of our awareness. For instance I may love a turn of phrase or a certain style of music only to discover later that my favorite composer or author was echoing a previous artist whom they admired. Thus, even in my ignorance, I can still be influenced by text I have no direct knowledge of.

Horizon

Horizon includes everything that is known from a particular vantage point. It is not fixed but it is limited and limiting of our interpretations and understanding. Experience is never definitive. Rather, as a process it has a dialectical structure, which is open to challenge (*Offenheit fuer Erfahrung* [openness to/of experience]). Horizon is a living process, not a fixed physical thing. It is Socratic, and insofar as the life of consciousness is horizontal, then we can say that all of life is Socratic. Every moment is a moment of interpretation and challenge, what Ricoeur calls "contestation."

Because experience is dialogical it is *neither subjective nor objective*. In fact neither a purely subjective nor objective interpretation is attainable. As Husserl argued, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Furthermore, according to Nietzsche interpretation is a creative, not merely reproductive, process. Since experience is the dialectical interaction of a "subject" with others, it is dialogical.

Following Nietzsche's lead, Gadamer attacks the romantic notion of subjectivism, insisting on a historical-communal ontology. According to Nietzsche (1882/1974) language is the source of mind and therefore, the human mind is fundamentally a social phenomenon (some argue epiphenomena). As he put it, "...consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication... [especially for a relatively weak and "endangered species" like early Man] consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings... consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book Five, Section 354, 1974 edition, p. 298-299). Just as light called into existence the eye, so too survival needs called into question the transcendental efficiency of language. Thus, the

"genius of the species" is as much a need as a capacity, especially in the form of commands. And in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) Nietzsche argues that language is a "rude fetishism," and so too is reason which comes with the birth of language as does the ego from which follows the idealistic concept of "being" ("Reason" in Philosophy, part 5). Here we find the inspiration for the "linguistic turn" so popular among Neo-Heideggerians, but without the romantic baggage of "being" *sui generis*.

In the Twentieth Century, biologists would argue that the physical brain too (as compared with consciousness, is a "social brain," meaning that a human being needs social interaction (and not merely language but touch, eye contact, smell...) for its brain to develop. As Clifford Geertz (1923-), expanding on Konrad Lorenz' (1903-1989) debunking of "feral fantasies" puts it, "Man's nervous system does not merely enable him to acquire culture, it positively demands that he do so if it is going to function at all... *Homo sapiens* brain, having arisen with the framework of human culture, would not be viable outside of it" (1973, p. 68). Similar to Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) concept of the "linguisticity of *Dasein*" (human being-in-the-world), Michel Foucault (1926-1984) argues that "language speaks Man" rather than the other way around. This is too simplistic however. Neither "speaks" the other. Communication is neither an objective nor a subjective process. It is an integral dialogical process.

This author argues that such metaphysical reductionism, in the case of Heidegger's, Foucault's, and Noam Chomsky's (1928-) Cartesian linguism (the much vaunted "linguistic turn" away from subjectivism), is a consequence of the Neo-Hegelian, Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) attempt to create an objective, trans-temporal or synchronic version of language. The result is the embedding of Cartesian metaphysics into linguistics in the form of *la langue* (the objective language system), versus *la parole* (individually contingent or existential speech acts). This approach fails to appreciate the dialectical character of human life and even the structure of the physical brain. Chomsky, in his effort to find an irreducible ground that will avoid linguistic relativism, argues that the human brain has "deep structures" that are inherent to it and which identically pre-structure the language system and consciousness of all humans. This may or may not be true. It remains at this point pure metaphysical speculation like the fantasies of imagining what a human without culture (Lorenz' "feral fantasies") would be like.

Another problem with reducing all awareness to the structure of a language system, a perennially popular metaphysical claim repeated from Isocrates to Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and his assistant Benjamin Whorf (1847-1941), is that communication is not restricted to grammatical (logical) language. Despite the claims of positivists like Karl Popper (1902-1994) who argues that only testable propositions have any meaning, humans regularly ask questions, exclaim astonishment and make untestable claims such as "war is bad," or "I am happy." Ironically, Sapir and Whorf and Popper all agree that language is all. But they completely disagree on the resultant relativism of linguistic reductionism, which results when faced with thousands of languages and their differing modes of semantic generation (*semiosis*).

The point remains however, that humanity is increasingly self-made, though not reducible to spoken or written language. *Homo sapiens* do not passively react or adapt to environments. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty argued, there is a fundamental reversibility to the experience. The novel effects me and I interpret it. Effective influence is unavoidable. There is, as Roland Barthes (1915-1980) says, in response to both Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature*, and the entire structuralist project, no such thing as "degree zero" writing (or reading for that matter) (Barthes, 1953 Fr/1967 Eng). One cannot read a text or inhabit an environment without having some impact: leaving traces. Even the most adaptable and passively malleable creature still constitutes a part of its environment. Adaptation is thus, a creative process, and this is so even when a person strives to merely accurately reproduce or "convey" a message or theme as any scriptwriter faced with the task of transforming a novel into a film or anyone trying to pass on a message can attest.

What sets *Homo sapiens* apart is that they make environments adapt to their desires and wishes, and then they become accustomed to those very environments they have constructed in a dialectical process. That is to say that the environments humans create become normalized, even naturalized to them, and thus the human environment (including but not restricted to the *lingua franca*) constitutes much of one's horizon of restricted prejudgments. This is the fundamental fetish not only of language but also of culture. The effort to expose the "blindness" of certain prejudices and of aspects of horizon, to reveal their fetishistic nature, is the ultimate and liberating goal of self-knowledge, of hermeneutics.

Consistent structure (predictable order) is elevated to a transcendental normative status because it saves humans effort and energy. It then demands defense from "arbitrary" disruption including deconstruction. Structure feels comforting to humans. The various efforts to create automated translating machines and sciences of interpretation are attempts to fix, to establish, once and for all (and therefore maintain), the right meaning of things. But the arbitrary play of meanings is precisely where contestation, communication and thinking live.

The desire to fix interpretations so that the effort of thinking and debate will cease is what Nietzsche calls a "collapse of the will." All such issues are purely hermeneutical, which prompted Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) to argue that humans should be called *Homo symbolicum* (1944). In short, the self, rather than being a "black box" interiority, is better conceived of as an opening onto the world and as a world maker. Interpretation is ubiquitous and creative, not merely representational.

Conclusion: Historical Considerations

Hermeneutics as a *self-conscious discipline* is the most ancient core of dissociated, that is analytical, pursuit. However, it is also the case that its historical origins stretch back even before the emergence of the analytical self, or writing, into times and places where shamanic concerns over the proper understanding of incantation, prophecy, spells, omens, signs, and rituals were emergent.

The less empirical (meaning the self-evident state of sensational here and now) and more abstract thought and speech becomes, the more the problem of interpretation, and therefore hermeneutics, is evident. One could say that as dissociation, as a fundamental aspect of conceptualization increases, the embodied identity of sense separates and loses its emotional conviction and fidelity. As the human mind expands (historically or biographically) and becomes more complex, escaping the immediate present to ponder virtual worlds of spirits, a past and a future, and so forth, the less "self-evident" the world becomes. In the history of humanity, it is evident that the sense of the world, including the self, came to be seen as something that can be changed, educated, civilized. But this liberating realization then raises the question of direction. Personal recollection and collective history, and personal prediction and collective planning open up to conflicts of interests, interpretations and debate. Everyone can agree that it (the world) need not be this way, that we can be proactive, but then which way shall it become? Here is born rhetoric which is the instrument of willful struggle over where we should go, how we should get there, and also who is supposed to go.

Because human awareness, especially as it becomes exteriorized in the fetish of writing, is not limited to the so-called positive facticity of the immediate here and now, ambiguity becomes a fundamental quality of being human and human being. But, of course, disagreements over even the meanings of "facts" "at hand" is obvious in the world at large including in the most controlled of scientific environments.

Prediction and clairvoyance are always shadowed by the issue of referential correctness. But intent and referential accuracy are only a small part of the problem of multiple interpretations. In fact, what is necessary for multiple or inconsistent interpretations to be a problem as such, is a shift toward using information for instrumental purposes, that is for ulterior needs. Thus, only when power in the form of a single course of action, policy or law is presumed does inconsistency become

salient. In the mythic world of storytelling for its own sake, variance in telling and interpreting is not a crucial problem. Myths change a bit with each retelling. But as the sacred becomes split from the profane, variance becomes less and less tolerable. Things are written down for general distribution and application. Codified law emerges. An effort at precision and fixation commences and continues to this day with ever smaller measurements of variance from mathematical reasoning to the distinction of murder "one," "two," and "three" and enumerated forms of manslaughter, to ever more subdivided space (matter) and time into minute bits below the threshold of human awareness.

When communication takes a turn toward instrumentality, as it did in ancient Greece during the 5th century B.C.E., then we see a sudden emphasis on precision of expression in oral interpretation and debate, and the emergence of philosophy and sophistry as separate, reflective undertakings. Thus, hermeneutics is part and parcel of the essence of the modern Western tradition with its objectifying tendency and progressive optimism, and the ancient shift to reason including its transcendental consistency and distancing from the contingent cases it defines. However, as we have seen, hermeneutics also lost its naïveté. In this process we have the birth of the postmodern. Some, like the scholars of the Frankfurt Institute and later Lyotard would argue that modernity, with all of its massive pogroms, genocides, and ambitions of global conquest and homogenization has proven very convincingly to be hardly "rational." As Bruno Latour puts it, "we have never been modern." No doubt Russell, Sean MacBride, Albert Einstein, Elie Wiesel, and others would agree but then they might also suggest that becoming Vulcans (ala *Star Trek*) may not be so *desirable* either. Hume, Kant, Rousseau; many who helped to give birth to Enlightenment modernity also had a healthy respect for the limits of reason. What they really longed for is for people to be creative and to be nice to each other. They are humanists first, logicians second. They believe in beauty.

Rules that serve to judge the propriety of proper writing and reading and action (interpreting) become crucial as Western urban culture leads to a democratized and bureaucratized social ordination. Insofar as academic learning is the core of modern urban culture, and insofar as hermeneutics is the first such discipline, hermeneutics (and one might add sophistry) is an essential aspect of what came to be seen by the ancient Greeks, Jews, Hindus and others as "civilization." The problem of transcending ordination demands the fixing of the cannon and its maintenance and defense against "capricious" interpretations (meaning ones that threaten privilege).

Hence, the problem of interpretation is co-present with every act of understanding and obedience of rule and law as well as revolutionary creativity. Such fundamental concerns as what is the proper path, the intent of the commandment, the right and true teaching, forces analytic conflict to the fore. Hermeneutics, as a *discipline* and concern is an urban and imperial phenomenon. This is why hermeneutics coincides with the appearance of written sacred and secular law.

However, with regards to claims made by Nietzsche in the Nineteenth Century, and Heidegger in the Twentieth Century, hermeneutics came to be seen as a universal process of living consciousness and not just the learned exercise of exegetes who controlled what "counted" as knowledge. What Heidegger, and increasingly psychologists note is that even the "passive synthesis" and cognitive weighting of merely being conscious always involves a perspective, a prejudgment: an interpretation.

In this sense, interpretation is not the conscious effort of an exegete to explain or elaborate on an extant text. Instead, interpretation, including pattern recognition, is a fundamental part of being aware. This includes our ability to tell one object from another, to recognize cases as members of categories such as a loaf of bread being food but a rock not, and other basic abilities to function within a world of countless sensations and unpredicted novelty. As experts in artificial intelligence such as Akira Watanabe in his ugly duckling theorem recognize, to a dead or closed system such as a computer program (or the disinterested universe for that matter) all things are equally different. Seven geese and one duck in a row are equally different without the presence of cognitive activity. Cognitive weighting is a form of distortion. Patterns exist only for conscious beings, but then we

often reify them. Cognitive "chunking," which is how George Miller describes sensical perception of never before seen and enumerable stimuli (which is all of them because no two are the same) occurs according to "goal hierarchies" which are products of volition; what scholars in hermeneutics call prejudgments. And we can learn to chunk or weight stimuli differently. This we call education. Such difference in learning how to see the world is essential not only to cultural variance but also to individual variance.

Passive synthesis and sense making *prior to any conscious effort at reflection*, enables all predictions and statements, from declarations such as "Brick," or "that was an act of war," to guessing when one should plant or from where in the thicket the game will emerge, to the likely outcome in a controlled experiment. All hypothetical statements from hunches to scientifically formulated explanations involve judgments, reasoned or not, based on presumed knowledge of the past. This is how hermeneutics is an essential aspect of all hypothetical sciences. Beyond this, all scientific "truths" are always tentative, dependent on the most recent and rigorous findings. Textbooks become obsolete in the sciences faster than in any other discipline. Here we see the meaning of an "educated guess," and the historicity of all learning and knowing, and its dialectical process as each currently fashionable version of "the truth" is tested and modified.

Tested that is if and only if a free forum supporting critical inquiry is not distorted by various extraneous forces including the inertia of tradition, personal allegiances, or the politics of dogma or regional ontology. The point is that everything from the ability to recognize a word from other sounds to the hypothetical sciences is fully hermeneutical, which is to say, they constitute a process of learning, which is precisely why the developers of artificial intelligence (so-called "thinking machines") are keenly interested in classical hermeneutics.

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Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Communication

■ Amos Nascimento

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The work of the German philosopher Karl-Otto Apel represents an important contribution to the study of culture and communication by means of phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches. By turning to these two important philosophical methods characteristic of the twentieth century, Apel has performed a transformation of Immanuel Kant's philosophy and at the same time developed interesting studies on language, communication and culture. This double aspect can be clearly seen as he combines the emphases on the *a priori* and on the transcendental dimension of Kant's philosophy with the methodological approaches of what he defined as transcendental hermeneutics based on phenomenology. However, he has not limited himself to hermeneutics, for he correctly saw that this method is not enough to grasp the larger context of human interactions and forms of communication on a global level. Thus, he complemented transcendental hermeneutics with transcendental pragmatics and transcendental semiotics. As a result, we can observe an internal development in his thought: he goes from the phenomenological principle of an "a priori of body", through the hermeneutic "a priori of language" to the semiotic "a priori of the community of communication" which are constitutive to his transformation of Kant's philosophy.

Key words: ranscendental hermeneutics; a priori; body; language; communication community

Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Communication in Karl-Otto Apel's Philosophy

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Guest Editor

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Contents

Philosophy and Method in Communication: An Introduction to the Special Issue <i>Charlton McIlwain</i>	97
Hermeneutics <i>Eric Kramer</i>	103
Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Communication in Karl-Otto Apel's Philosophy <i>Amos Nascimento</i>	115
Hermeneutic Circles, Horizons, Arcs, and the Chronotope: Modeling the Generation of Meaning in Literary Studies <i>Tara Collington</i>	125
Hermeneutics and Politics: The Case of Hans-Georg Gadamer <i>Rares Piloiu</i>	135
Consciousness in Transition <i>Algis Mickunas</i>	145
The English Project: Function and Error in Media Research <i>Stephanie Hemylyryck-Donald & Ingrid Richardson</i>	155
Atomization and Communication Anxiety: Modernity and the Mobile Telephone <i>David Worth</i>	167
Film As Transformative Play in the Art of Tracey Moffatt <i>Catherine Summerhayes</i>	177