



**Centrum Studiów Humanistycznych
Uniwersytet Jagielloński**

Hermeneutics and the Humanities

**International Conference at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the
Humanities, Jagiellonian University, Kraków
Co-organized by Södertörn Hogskola (Sweden) and the International
Institute for Hermeneutics**

March 27-28, 2008

March 27, Thursday

Place: Collegium Maius UJ, sala im. Bobrzyńskiego

9.00-15.00

- **9.00**

Welcome Address

Prof. dr hab. Michał Paweł Markowski, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

- **9.10-10.00**

Keynote paper

**Michał Paweł Markowski
Jagiellonian University, Kraków**

In Two Moments. Toward the Hermeneutics of Non-Understanding

Since its very beginning, which means from Schleiermacher on, the modern hermeneutics has been called itself "the art of understanding". The problem, however, with its status, as Werner Hamacher rightly put it, consists in fact that it is able to take its course only insofar as a kind of non-understanding is essentially involved in it. As understanding has been defined as the way of coming to terms with the foreign and unfamiliar, or as subsuming the singular under the already established rule, non-

understanding should be considered as the disruptive intrusion of the unfamiliar into the field of knowledge, or the subjective response to what Friedrich Schlegel called incomprehensibility. Drawing on various, philosophical and literary sources, from Kant to Edgar Allan Poe, from Kafka to Adorno, I am trying to show that what I call *the hermeneutic moment* (which is based on non-understanding) supplements *the epistemological moment* in every act of understanding and should be taken into account by the humanities faced with any serious experience of reading.

- 10.00-10.30

Discussion

- 10.30-13.30

Session I: *Understanding Nature/Nature of Understanding*

Hans Ruin
Södertörn Hogskola, Sweden

The Task of Thinking in the Gestell: Hermeneutic Reflections on Heidegger's Later Thought

In his famous lecture, *The Question of Technology*, from 1953, Heidegger describes the essence of technology as *Gestell*, sometimes translated as *En-framing*. Through this concept he tries to think of a new constellation of nature and subjectivity that comes about in and through technology. *Gestell* guides the way that nature presents itself in modernity, but also how man is inclined to think about and conceptualize nature. I will discuss how this thought constitutes a development in Heidegger's own understanding of the condition of philosophical thinking in the present and how it constitutes a radicalization of his hermeneutic project in *Sein und Zeit*. The connection will be made also to the critical appraisal of the role of the humanities in the *Letter on Humanism*.

Paweł Dybel
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

The Concept of Historicity of Understanding in Gadamer's Hermeneutics

My aim is to point out the significance of Gadamer's concept of historicity of understanding for the methodology of human sciences. I try to work out the ontological implications of the notion of tradition, which occupies the central position in this concept. I differentiate between the ontic and ontological aspects of this notion and then ask the question of this Heideggerian scheme's adequacy to grasp the historical dimension of understanding in human sciences.

Andrzej Wiercinski

International Institute for Hermeneutics
University of Toronto, Canada
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

Paul Ricoeur's Indirect Path to Understanding

Ricoeur's hermeneutics as "the art of deciphering indirect meaning" originates and culminates in the thesis that human existence is itself a mode of interpretation. From his early writings (*The Symbolism of Evil*), Ricoeur discovers the semantic potential of indirect language characteristic of mythical/symbolic discourse. He elaborates the hermeneutic method for empirical and descriptive analysis of symbols and myths, which is the indirect way to understand oneself. Thinking from the symbol is the path to

understanding (“the symbol gives rise to thought” [”*le symbole donne à penser*”). Ricoeur’s hermeneutic arc summarizes the major movements that comprise the act of interpretation: an initial act of understanding, the moment of explanation, and the moment of appropriation. It is the hermeneutic arc that prevents appropriation from becoming a subjective interpretation. In highlighting critical explanation, however, the hermeneutics of suspicion needs to be balanced by the hermeneutics of sympathy on the path to retrieving the “arrows of meaning,” which will point the reader through the text to new understandings. The hermeneutic gesture of genuine openness can play a vital role in promoting the culture of friendship in a globalized and yet profoundly divided and critically differentiated human society. In the spirit of the recognition of the outsider, of the singularly irreplaceable other, hermeneutics can effectively advocate for conflicting interpretations, which do not need to lead to conflicts but rather to responsible action of the capable human beings (*l’homme capable*).

- **13.30-14.30**

Discussion

- **14.30-16.00**

Lunch Break

- **16.00-18.00**

Session II (informal)

Presentation of the book by Marcia Schuback, *Lovtal till intet. Essäer om filosofisk hermeneutik* in Polish translation, published as the first volume of the series “Hermeneia” of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities.

Michał Paweł Markowski, *Praesens Participium, or Merci to Marcia*

Leonard Neuger and Marcia Schuback in Conversation

Irina Sandomirskaja (Södertörn Hogskola, Sweden), *A Commentary upon Schuback’s Book*

- **19.00**

Cello Concert

Akademia Muzyczna, sala koncertowa “Florianka”, ul. Basztowa 8

“Interpreting Music”: An Open Concert for the Faculty of Polish Studies

Interpreter: Peter Schuback (Stockholm), cello

Introduction: Michał Paweł Markowski

Program:

A. Gabrielli, *Ricercare*

I. Stravinski, *The Firebird* (adaptation for solo cello)

P. Schuback, *Lettere di Don Giovanni*

Intermission

L. v. Beethoven, *Symphony nr 9* (adaptation for solo cello)

K Penderecki, *Capriccio for Siegfried Palm*

M. Ravel, *La Valse* (adaptation for solo cello)

Dinner

March, 28, Friday

Place: room 207, Grodzka 64

- **9.00-12.00**

Session III: *The Inventive Humanities*

**Leonard Neuger
Stockholm University**

What does Chekhov's Siren Whisper to Us?: The Inevitability of the "Impossible" Creation of the Humanities

The focus of my considerations of hermeneutics and the approach of the humanities will be the short story or humorous tale by Anton Chekhov entitled "The Siren" (1887). My interpretation of the story examines the question of interpretation, or a series of interpretations, as a basis for understanding, but also as a kind of humanistic project. A considerable part of the text is taken up by the portrayal of a dinner, which means that the interpretation ought to treat it as an evocation of desire, as being concerned with hunger (evoked by the act of relating or representing), with the fictionalization and aestheticization of hunger, that is with the phantasm of consuming food.

Does an analysis of pleasure, the point where the spiritual, linguistic and bodily coincide, or any attempt to understand this aspect of the world, define the horizon within which the story can be understood? In part, yes, because it is deaf to three questions posed by the story. The first question concerns the eponymous Siren. A provisional answer must be to refer the question to Homer's *Odyssey*.

The second question concerns the time and space of Chekhov's being in-between, that is of that space and time where human desire "takes hold". Within the horizon of this question lies the unsolvable problem of the ending: do the judges flee from their desire, or do they, on the contrary, run out of the room in order to satisfy it?

Finally, the third question concerns the story's humour, not only and not mainly as the linguistic "furnishing" of the text, but as a way of being in the world, as a method of reading and interpreting conscious of its own ridiculousness. Is such hermeneutics/humanities possible at all? If I understand Chekhov correctly, then he presents us with the inevitability of the "impossible" creation of humanities.

Adam Lipszyc
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

Remembrance as Lamentation: Scholem, Benjamin, Sebald

In his diaries, Gershom Scholem develops a theory of lament/lamentation conceived as a borderline form of language on the verge of silence and self-destruction. Lamentation is a melancholy language devoid of any meaning and reference, which has its roots in the act of mourning after a lost object and may be seen as a rudimentary form of mastering despair. In general, as Scholem claims, "every authentic discourse on the past is in fact a lamentation". Theologically speaking, lamentation accounts for our condition of separation from God and for the absence of anything sacred in the world. Yet, as Scholem claims, by its very nature, it involves the Messianic hope of final redemption.

Many paths lead further from this rather underdeveloped theory of young Scholem. One of them leads towards a confrontation between his theory and the psychoanalytic understanding of mourning. Another one leads towards Walter Benjamin's understanding of lament, allegory and history. Yet another use of Scholem's idea may be seen if we try to turn it into a heuristic model for reading literature; perhaps at least some forms of literary language that try to deal with some past trauma may be seen as lamentations in Scholem's sense.

In the present study I propose to follow only some of these paths. First, I sketch the main tenets of Scholem's theory. Then, I point to its continuation in Benjamin's thought. Finally, I analyze a convergence between this cluster of ideas and W.G. Sebald's literary project, especially as it is realized in *The Rings of Saturn*. On the theoretical level, the analysis is to show a radical contrast between two languages of remembering: the language of lamentation and the hermeneutic model of linguistic appropriation/recollection which emerges from the writings of H.G. Gadamer.

- **12.00-13.30**

Lunch Break

- **13.30-18.00**

Session IV: *The Hermeneutical Imagination*

Marcia Schuback,
Södertörn Hogskola, Sweden

Imaginative Hermeneutics and the Humanities

I aim to discuss the role of imagination in hermeneutics and its relation to a hermeneutics of imagination. Based on the relation between hermeneutics and imagination, I will try to investigate the relevance of an imaginative hermeneutics for the humanities today.

Boyd Blundell
Loyola University New Orleans, USA

Naive Sophistication: Hermeneutics and the New Humanities

Paul Ricoeur claims, "Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again". The centrepiece of Ricoeur's "critical supplementation" to Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition is the move from liguallity (*Sprachlichkeit*) to textuality (*Schriftlichkeit*), which emphasizes the positive role for distanciation. The role is filled by the semiological approach of structuralism, which removes both the author and the intended audience completely from the analysis of texts, working with the smallest possible unit (the sign) positioned within the largest possible field (language itself). Ricoeur's subsequent move to metaphor pushes semiotics to its limits, and ultimately pushes beyond those limits, and thus provides the paradigm for how semiotics is to be used, i.e., as a detour. It is this movement through the hermeneutic arc that

prepares the way for Ricoeur's theory of Narrative Identity, and provides a model for engaging both texts and students in the Humanities.

Sean J. McGrath

Humboldt Fellow, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada

The Hermeneutics of the Symbol: The Impact of Psychoanalysis on the Humanities

Psychoanalysis, having begun its life as an empirical scientific practice, now thrives as a hermeneutics of expression and symbol in the study of the humanities. This development has a number of causes: on the one hand, the rise of empirical clinical psychology and the interpretive nature of psychoanalytical results, and on the other, the illuminating power of psychoanalytical interpretations of literature and mythology. Psychoanalysis was more or less kicked out of the academy by positivists in the middle of the Twentieth Century on account of its lack of empirical rigor; as a profession it is now almost entirely supported by private research institutions with a quasi-academic status (such as the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich or the École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris). Popper argues famously that psychoanalysis is a pristine example of a pseudo-science because its conclusions are unfalsifiable. However, the academic discreditation of psychoanalysis in psychology is only half of the story. In other academic departments, such as Theology, Religious Studies, and Comparative Literature, psychoanalysis is more than a respected contributor; it has become an accepted and in some circles necessary resource. The rise of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic method for the study of literature, religion, mythology, film, and pop culture has risen in inverse proportion to its decline as an empirical science. In his *Freud and Philosophy*, Paul Ricoeur argues that psychoanalysis originally laboured under a criterion of validity foreign to it, one borrowed from the natural sciences, when its method from its beginnings in dream interpretation was always hermeneutic. Freud's object of study is only on the surface, forces and psychological energies, for the access to these psychological realities is by Freud's own admission only through language and the hermeneutics of symbol. I will examine psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of symbol in the study of the humanities by concentrating on Ricoeur's reading of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, while gesturing to the works of Jung and Lacan and their reception by writers, philosophers, and literary critics.

- **19.00**

Farewell Dinner