

## 48. *Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*

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One of the achievements of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* was to make plausible the idea that hermeneutics constitutes a distinct body of thought, an intellectual tradition whose history of successes, stalemates and defeats, heroes and villains, could be recounted in a single coherent narrative (Gadamer 1993). But the popularity of this idea, both in the sense of the number of people who came to accept it and the number who came to identify with the hermeneutic tradition itself, was due as much to a number of books published in the decades following the appearance of *Truth and Method* which either re-staged the central episodes of this history by way of the reproduction of canonical texts, or defended the newly reconstructed tradition against rival contemporary ones (Bleicher 1981; Hoy 1978; Mueller-Vollmer 1986; Ormiston and Schrift 1990; Thompson 1981; Warnke 1987). Indeed, the popularising anthologies of the hermeneutic tradition typically left off where the more systematic defenses of hermeneutics typically began: namely, with the sketches for a critical theory of society then being outlined by Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. These pieces were read either as the opening up of a new, politically progressive chapter in the history of hermeneutics – as the dawning of a ‘critical hermeneutics’, no less – or as representing a fundamental challenge to hermeneutics by exposing fatal flaws in its capacity to orient genuinely critical

reflection. Either way, Habermas's and Apel's responses to *Truth and Method*, and Gadamer's subsequent rejoinders to them, made it seem obvious to many intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s that the self-understandings of philosophical hermeneutics and the critical theory of society were intimately bound up with each other.<sup>1</sup>

That connection is not so obvious today. What has changed? If we restrict ourselves to considerations internal to the self-understanding of hermeneutics and critical theory, perhaps the most striking difference is that now there are many conceptions of how hermeneutics can perform a critical function, or serve progressive political purposes, just as there are many conceptions of how a critical theory of society can integrate the basic insights of hermeneutics. Given the degree of differentiation that has taken place within the traditions of hermeneutics and critical theory over the past three decades or so, it might seem more appropriate to uncouple their self-images. On the side of hermeneutics, there are, for example, those who credit its critical function and progressive nature to its insistent opposition to 'metaphysics', to its thoroughgoing anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism (Rorty 1979; Caputo 1987; Vattimo 1988; Vattimo and Zabala 2011). For others, its critical dimension arises more from its focus on local, context-bound applications of norms (Walzer 1987). For others again, it is the framework hermeneutics provides for thinking about identity politics that supplies its radical edge (Warnke 2002).<sup>2</sup> On the critical theory side, Habermas himself came to rely less and less on the moment of hermeneutic reflection in his efforts to ground critical

theory in a theory of communicative action; a trend that has been continued by others concerned to retain the universalist features of the ethics and politics associated with the theory (Cooke 2006; Forst 2013). Others have urged a return to the orientation developed in Adorno's work, with its focus on the problematic of 'identity-thinking' and the task of overcoming it (Bernstein 1995). And the most systematic attempt at rebuilding the foundations of critical theory in recent years, the theory of recognition developed above all by Axel Honneth, is aimed precisely *against* the 'linguistic turn' taken by Habermas and Apel -- the turn, that is, inspired by their reading of Gadamer -- and at first sight seems barely related to philosophical hermeneutics at all (Honneth 1995, 2007, 2009).

In light of such considerations, the special relationship enjoyed between hermeneutics and critical theory at the time of Habermas's debate with Gadamer seems to belong to the distant past; indeed, one might wonder if they still have anything particular to say to each other. Yet the appearance of distance between potential conversation-partners itself affords an excellent opportunity for hermeneutic reflection. And in the spirit of such reflection, I shall consider in what follows how the conversation between hermeneutics and critical theory might be productively continued today. My discussion will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I shall glance back at the Gadamer-Habermas debate in order to determine more precisely how their initial conversation came to a stop. In the second part, I shall suggest that an unfortunate legacy of the debate was an overly restricted conception of the hermeneutic field, a restriction operative but not always

acknowledged in Habermas's and Gadamer's own stated views. Once this restriction is made explicit and overcome, so I argue in the remainder of the chapter, new possibilities for the simultaneous renewal of hermeneutics and critical theory open up, suggesting ways in which productive interaction between these traditions may resume.

I. As my main purpose here is to identify the precise points at which Gadamer's debate with Habermas came to a halt, for now I shall leave to one side the features of Gadamer's hermeneutics that Habermas sought to integrate into critical theory and shall address directly their fundamental points of disagreement.

Habermas's critique of Gadamer boils down to two core objections, plus a third one which is a consequence of these two, which lead him to the conclusion that the critical reflection that properly belongs a critical theory of society departs decisively from hermeneutic reflection as Gadamer conceived it (Habermas 1980, 1983, 1988).

The first objection, which has since become something of a nostrum amongst scholars ill-disposed towards Gadamer's hermeneutics, is that Gadamer's hermeneutics leaves no room for genuinely *rational* reflection. This thought is provoked by Gadamer's description of the 'hermeneutic situation' and elements of his account of 'hermeneutic experience' (Gadamer 1993). In brief, the situation of the interpreter, according to Gadamer, is that of an agent oriented to reaching an understanding about a subject-matter, by way of anticipations and pre-conceptions

which Gadamer chose to call 'prejudices' (*Vorurteil*), of which the agent is never fully aware. When the interpretation goes well -- that is, when understanding is reached -- the tradition in which the interpreter and the interpreted text stand broadens and corrects itself, in an 'event' which the agent participates in but is not wholly in command of or responsible for. The interpretation carries authority only in the context of a tradition, and it is only by acknowledging such authority that the interpreter both acquires and maintains her competence and status as an interpreter. Thus excellence by way of interpretation, or put otherwise, success in the process of reaching understanding, 'is more being than consciousness' (Gadamer 1976: 38), and there is no structure more fundamental than the hermeneutic situation to which the process of reaching understanding that prevails within it can be brought to account.

There are several strands to Habermas's worry that this renders the rationality inherent in processes of reaching an understanding unintelligible, and that it effectively robs the process of reaching an understanding of its properly rational form. One of these strands has to do with Gadamer's apparent reluctance to open up the process of reaching an understanding to *scientific* reflection, as if the 'truth-event' that characterizes the hermeneutic situation was in principle, and therefore irrationally, opposed to the methodologically rigorous standpoint of 'science'. Like many of his contemporaries, and others since, Habermas detects a scent of irrationalism in the apparent disjunction between 'truth' and 'method' announced in the title of Gadamer's great work. A second strand concerns the role attributed to the concepts of tradition, authority, and prejudice. One can

acknowledge the ever-presence of pre-formed opinions, background assumptions, presumptions of authority, and so forth in attempts at reaching understanding, but the capacity to reflect on the *validity* of any pre-verbalised claim to authority is an essential feature of genuine acts of *understanding*, so Habermas argues. The capacity to interrupt the transmission of a tradition with a 'no' or a 'why?' regarding the presumption of its validity, Habermas continues, points unmistakably to the conclusion that tradition and authority are never *self-authenticating*. Tradition and authority are thus accountable to standards that lie beyond them; namely, *rational* standards. Furthermore, the concept of a rational standard, Habermas continues, is bound up with the idea of the *individual subject* taking ownership and responsibility for his or her thought. This, presumably, is the 'permanent legacy bequeathed to us by German Idealism' that Habermas invokes against Gadamer – a formidable authority indeed (Habermas 1988: 170).<sup>3</sup> By subordinating the power of judgement of the individual subject to the anonymous happening of the tradition-event, by falsely lending authority and tradition a self-authenticating power, and by dogmatically insisting on the scientific inscrutability of the hermeneutic situation, Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to make sense of the rationality of the process of reaching an understanding and in doing so betrays its own fundamental irrationalism.

Habermas's first objection could be put in terms of there being a force internal to language – the force of communicative reason at play in all genuine processes of reaching an understanding – which Gadamer's hermeneutics effectively renders

invisible. His second objection is that there are also forces outside of language, though manifest indirectly within it, that go missing in Gadamer's account. In neglecting these *supra*-linguistic forces, Habermas contends, Gadamer's hermeneutics is guilty of a naïve *linguistic idealism*. The charge, of course, is not that hermeneutics is idealist in the sense that Kant, Fichte and Hegel used that term, but in the sense that Marx gave it: namely, a doctrine or outlook that failed to make sense of, or accord due importance to, *material* reality.

The criticism that hermeneutics suffers from a crippling linguistic idealism has become as familiar as the objection that it is fundamentally irrationalist, but it is worth reminding ourselves of the exact way in which Habermas initially formulated the charge. The objection rests on a series of distinctions Habermas insists must be drawn between cognitive attitudes, methods of enquiry, and object-domains (Habermas 1983). Deploying these distinctions, Habermas describes the cognitive attitude of hermeneutics as reaching understanding, using methods of interpretation that involve the adoption of the standpoint of a participant in a dialogue, the object-domain of which are the *meanings* it participates in. Much, but by no means the 'totality', of the human world can and ought to be subject to such hermeneutic reflection. For the human world is amenable to explanation as well as understanding, explanation that requires the adoption of the standpoint of an outside, neutral observer, using concepts fit for describing *material* reality *rather than* *meanings*. The crucial point Habermas insists upon is that the latter object-domain, the realm of the material, is governed by 'non-normative forces' (Habermas, 1988:

173); that consequently it is amenable to explanation in naturalistic terms, and in particular in terms of those objective forces that determine how a system is able to maintain and reproduce itself in interaction with its environment. The human species, as a whole, materially maintains and reproduces itself by way of *social labour*. The system of social labour, the functional reproduction of which is the material condition of processes of reaching understanding, in turn shapes and is shaped by systems of power that affect other social relations. Hence, in Habermas's view, social labour and power mark the limiting points of hermeneutic reflection. They do so on account of constituting a realm of 'law' or 'force' rather than 'meaning', of having an intelligibility graspable by descriptive-explanatory concepts rather than normative ones. But it is not just the *reach* of hermeneutic reflection that is affected by theoretical reflection on social labour and power; the very content of that reflection is affected too. For processes of reaching understanding in language are now revealed as sharing 'an objective context' given not just by tradition (as proposed in Gadamer's hermeneutics), but also by potentially distorting and corrupting systems of social labour and domination.<sup>4</sup>

A critical theory of society, Habermas insists, must be able to explain the material reproduction of society through social labour as well as understand its symbolic reproduction through cultural traditions. Moreover, it must be able to reflect on any given cultural tradition in a way that discloses the function the tradition serves in reproducing the distribution of power embedded in the system of social labour and other social relations. In other words, it must be alert to the



*ideological* function of tradition and be capable of undertaking a critique of ideology. In prosecuting such critique, a critical theory aims at *emancipation* from sources of domination, and in particular those that are legitimated and made to seem 'natural' by just those 'prejudices' and 'authorities' that structure the hermeneutic situation. It follows, then, that hermeneutic reflection must fall short as a model of critical reflection, since it is constitutively blind to potential sources of domination embedded in hermeneutic reflection itself. The inadequacy of hermeneutic reflection in this regard is only compounded by the first of Habermas's objections considered above, namely that it fails to subject itself, and the concepts of 'authority', 'prejudice' and 'tradition' it seeks to 'rehabilitate', to properly rational criticism. By cocooning authority and tradition from rational scrutiny, and by ignoring how they function under ideological veils, hermeneutic reflection falls short both as justification and explanation, and thereby as reflection worthy of a *critical theory* of society.

Habermas actually drew not on a case of ideology-critique, but Lorenzer's account of psychoanalysis, to illustrate how understanding and explanation, driven by a 'passion for critique', could be combined in reflection to fulfil an 'emancipatory interest' (Habermas 1972). And the implausible analogy between the situation of the critical theorist reflecting on the ideologies of a society and that of the psychoanalyst interpreting the symptoms of a patient suggested by this example was pressed home by Gadamer in his response to Habermas (Gadamer 1990). In Gadamer's view, this was one of several respects in which Habermas exaggerated the power of methodically grounded theory. It is the theorist's conceit, Gadamer reasonably

pointed out, to presume that the healthy course of human history as a whole can be known like the conditions for the healthy course of an individual human life. Habermas took Gadamer's criticism on board and soon dropped the idea that a critical theory of society could satisfy an emancipatory interest by way of theoretically mediated reflection on the disturbed self-formative process of the human species.<sup>5</sup> But Habermas would be less ready to give up other features of his model of critical theory that Gadamer considered epistemologically and metaphysically extravagant, if not politically dangerous. Habermas's claim that authority and tradition were accountable to an independent standard of reason, for example, implied that a form of theoretical self-consciousness potentially existed in which the human life-form would become transparent to itself and manipulable according to rational standards of means-ends efficiency. Similarly, the idea that reflection, when properly critical, is oriented to emancipation *from* tradition, authority and prejudice, is not only problematically abstract in conception, but likely to end up in the service of tyranny, as traditional practices and beliefs are denigrated and dismantled in the name of universal reason. In these respects, then, the model of critique Habermas opposes to hermeneutic reflection overreaches itself and indeed regresses back to a kind of Enlightenment fundamentalism.<sup>6</sup>

But Gadamer's issue with Habermas was not just that his alternative to hermeneutics could not deliver on its promises; it was also that hermeneutic reflection was broader in scope and more fundamental in depth than Habermas gave it credit for. In reply to Habermas's first objection, namely the putative rational

deficits of hermeneutic reflection, Gadamer re-iterated that hermeneutic reflection at its best has a self-transformative, practical character, in which the *self-correction* of tradition takes place or traditions *advance* by way of a 'fusion of horizons'. The whole point of hermeneutic reflection, Gadamer insists, is self-transformation through practical *insight*; it is just that expressions like 'fusion of horizons' are needed to avoid subjectivist self-misunderstandings of what such insight consists in. Gadamer could also point to the centrality of Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) for the account of hermeneutic experience presented in *Truth and Method*. No one would suppose that the *phronemos*, the person of practical wisdom, was irrational, but the *phronemos* manages without a method or procedure for guaranteeing validity claims and thereby shows what hermeneutic reflection on its own can achieve. In reply to Habermas's second objection, the alleged linguistic idealism of hermeneutic reflection, Gadamer just shrugs it off, insisting that the material world patently lies within its reach: 'From the hermeneutical standpoint, rightly understood, it is absolutely absurd to regard the concrete factors of work and politics as outside the scope of hermeneutics' (Gadamer 1976: 31). Finally, Gadamer could plausibly claim that his model of hermeneutic reflection is perfectly consistent with psychoanalytical conceptions of therapeutic, emancipatory reflection, insofar as it conceives of such reflection as the resumption through insight of a blocked process of self-formation.

II. Of course it is one thing to avow a position, another to entitle oneself to it. And although Gadamer's responses to Habermas's objections seem quite reasonable, they are not always supported by further argument. While Gadamer replies to the 'irrationalism' objection in some detail, his denial of the 'linguistic idealism' attributed to his hermeneutics is abrupt, tantamount to a dismissal of the charge rather than a refutation of it. So, for example, his rebuke that it would be absurd to regard 'concrete factors of work and politics' as outside the scope of hermeneutic reflection is not supported by a consideration of how those phenomena *do* feature within hermeneutics. Nor is *Truth and Method* much help in this regard. This is no small matter from the standpoint of a critical theory of society. Indeed, from that standpoint, oriented crucially by Marx, the mere inattentiveness to the material reality of social labour in Gadamer's hermeneutics would itself be sufficient to warrant the charge of idealism.<sup>7</sup>

In any case the issue goes deeper than that. Consider again Habermas's proposal for overcoming hermeneutic idealism. The basic idea is that whatever 'meanings' human beings find in things, whatever they reach understanding about and transmit through cultures and traditions, they must also maintain and reproduce the material basis of their existence, a process for which social labour is responsible. The mechanisms by which this function is met, Habermas supposes, are analytically independent of the processes by which cultural traditions are maintained and reproduced. The system responsible for this function – to use the vocabulary Habermas was later to draw upon for shoring up the materialist

credentials of his critical theory of society – has a logic of its own, a logic which can be reconstructed without appeal to the kind of norms on which cultures and traditions depend. For purposes of analysis and social explanation, Habermas's maintains, it is thus incumbent on the critical theorist to adopt the standpoint of the observer of a *norm-free* sphere; only in this way will the unfolding of history as it is conditioned by the requirements of material reproduction come to light. And the idea that those requirements decisively condition the unfolding of history is the primary, and in Habermas's view incontrovertible, insight of *historical materialism*. By positing social labour as a distinct determinant of the 'objective context' of social action – distinct, that is, from language – a critical theory of society is thus able to absorb the emancipatory potential of hermeneutic reflection without forfeiting Marx's fundamental insight about the material basis of historical change.

But the idea that social labour is 'norm-free', that it constitutes a sphere or system intelligible independently of the meanings it expresses, is very far removed from the *lived reality* of work. The activity of working – be it the making of bread, the manufacture of bricks, the teaching of children, or anything else required for the material reproduction of society - is saturated with norms about how it ought to be done. These norms relate not just to the quality of the product of the activity (enabling distinctions to be drawn between well-made and badly made products, or well or badly provided services), but also to what is acceptable by way of interaction with other workers, what is acceptable within a profession, an organization, and so on. That the activity of working is redolent with norms and 'meanings' should be

obvious to anyone who reflects upon the matter with an unprejudiced mind. How, then, could work come to be construed by Habermas as 'norm-free'? What is the source of this idea?

It is none other than Gadamer himself, along with Arendt. More specifically, Habermas owes the idea to Aristotle's distinction between productive action (*poiesis*) and moral action (*praxis*) and the associated distinction between technique (*techne*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*) presented in the central section of *Truth and Method* on the hermeneutic relevance of Aristotle and as adapted by Arendt in the distinction she draws between labour, work and action in *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958).<sup>8</sup> Habermas follows Gadamer (and Arendt) in conceiving productive action as *instrumental* action, rational solely to the extent that it is efficient as the means to an end (the product made, or indirectly, material self-preservation), which is external to the subjectivity or 'self' of the actor, and which accordingly lacks any normative (in the sense of moral) content. Furthermore, this contrast between the techniques of work, the excellences of which are shown in efficient production, and moral insight, which at its best delivers practical self-knowledge and even practical self-transformation, is crucial to Gadamer's *general* conception of hermeneutics. For it is on this basis that 'truth' is distinguished from 'method' in the sense invoked by the title of Gadamer's masterpiece. The central claim advanced in that text, and throughout Gadamer's metaphilosophical writings on hermeneutics, is that there is no 'technique' or 'art' to hermeneutic reflection, no teachable or learnable skill

involved in it, no rules that can be automatically applied for the sake of reaching its goal, the disclosure of 'truth'.

But if the concrete world of work is conceived in this way, namely as the realm of *poiesis* or instrumental action governed by the requirements of *techne* or technically efficient production, then one might wonder how exactly Gadamer envisages it as falling within the scope of hermeneutics. And it is precisely because Habermas *shares* this conception of work that he can legitimately raise the objection of linguistic idealism against Gadamer's claim regarding the universality of hermeneutic reflection. For unless there is some *other* form of reflection available -- a form, that is, outside the scope of hermeneutics -- then the world of work does seem to disappear, however absurd this conclusion must seem to any sane mind.

The suspicion that there may be more to the charge of linguistic idealism than Gadamer is prepared to concede is reinforced by a further consideration. This is that for all the reassurance Gadamer gives that the 'concrete factors of work and politics' are within the hermeneutic purview, he does not give many actual examples of how they fit the hermeneutic situation. There is no doubt that the paradigm case of the hermeneutic situation for Gadamer, the case to which his description of the hermeneutic situation is best suited, is that of the interpreter of classical texts. Likewise, the primary context in which hermeneutic reflection is called for is the transmission and renewal of cultural tradition through reading and writing. That activities of working, of making useful things or providing useful services, are not themselves contextualized within a hermeneutic situation -- that they are for the

most part simply presumed not to share in that structure -- suggests that Gadamer's description of the hermeneutic situation may indeed be idealistically skewed.

Certainly, the material contexts in which acts of interpretation take place do not feature at all prominently in Gadamer's hermeneutics.

If the previous remarks are sound, then Gadamer's hermeneutics does stand in need of 'materialist' correction. But the correction proposed by Habermas arrives, as it were, too late. For Habermas's historical-materialist alternative to hermeneutics presupposes the very conceptual repertoire that gives rise to Gadamer's problematic linguistic idealism in the first place: namely, the categories of *poiesis* and *praxis* and their associated forms of rationality. The way to overcome hermeneutic idealism is not to complement a communication-theoretic account of meaning-transmission with a system-theoretic account of material reproduction, as Habermas's version of historical materialism intends to do. Rather, the problem must be tackled at its conceptual source: namely, *the separation of meaning and materiality embedded in the distinction between poiesis and praxis*.

Another way of making this point would be to say that the idealist (in the sense of insufficiently materialist) appearance of hermeneutics is best corrected from within. And a decisive step that could be taken in that direction would be to take seriously the thought that the human encounter with material reality, which is most pressing, most insistent, and least forgiving in working activity, typically bears the features of a hermeneutic situation. To take seriously this thought would be to take a sustained look at work as the locus of 'hermeneutical problems', which as Ricoeur



once put it, are problems 'about concealed meaning' (Ricoeur 1991: 38). The concealed meanings which hermeneutic reflection on work would seek to uncover would include the personally indexed knowledge expressed in work situations that is invisible to outsiders; the values that shape the ethos of professions and trade organizations which are integrated more or less self-consciously into the self-conceptions of their members; the singular power of judgment that must come into play whenever the demands of a task depart from the prescribed rules for performing it; contributions to the performance of tasks which defy standardization, categorization, and transparent means of measurement; social relations of trust and cooperation with others; and so forth. In other words, it would seek to uncover the concealed *praxis of poiesis*. But the hermeneutics of work, so conceived, would not just be a hermeneutics of 'belonging'; a reminder and retrieval of the moral, more than merely instrumental, meaning of work. It would also attend to the hidden suffering experienced at work; to barely articulable experiences of failure and humiliation; to the pre-verbal, inchoate sense of being duped by the false promises of employers; to the gut-level feeling of dissatisfaction with a culture of individual performance and achievement. In short, it would also be a hermeneutics of 'suspicion', alert to the systematically distorted communication that corrupts the modern work situation, to the ideological self-understanding that surrounds it, and ready to undertake a critique of that ideology.

The critical hermeneutics envisaged here would return both hermeneutics and critical theory to their roots in phenomenology and philosophical anthropology.

Both the hermeneutic and critical theory traditions take their departure, after all, from falsely dualistic conceptions of human reality that 'hold us captive' in spite of their falsity. The dominance of these conceptions, which infiltrate much modern philosophy and which reflect actual oppositions or 'contradictions' in the modern world, is such that we continually need to be reminded of the fundamental wholeness of the human being and the irreducible meaning-content of lived experience. While neither Gadamer nor Habermas ultimately lose sight of this task, their shared focus on reaching an understanding in language has the unfortunate consequence of neglecting the ways in which meaning is experienced in material, non-linguistic form. This is a serious defect in their formulations of hermeneutics and critical theory, because the fact of human embodiment, and the consequent vulnerability of the human life form, makes the material (and not just linguistic) expression of meaning quite basic from a phenomenological and anthropological point of view. In the critical theory tradition, Axel Honneth has done much to correct the phenomenological impoverishment and anthropological one-sidedness of Habermas's critical theory. To that extent, he has re-aligned critical theory with the phenomenological and anthropological stands of hermeneutics, without, as I observed at the beginning of the chapter, explicitly aligning his theory with philosophical hermeneutics as such.<sup>9</sup> In the hermeneutic tradition itself, the return to phenomenological and anthropological themes and foundations has been less prominent. While Ricoeur did once outline a bold programme of synthesis of phenomenology and philosophical anthropology, the critical animus of which

became evident in his influential commentary on the Gadamer-Habermas debate, neither he nor anyone else was really able to pull it off. What progress there has been along these lines, it seems to me, has come principally from critically oriented hermeneuticists within the human sciences, for example in the ethnography and social anthropology of capitalism and the psychodynamics of work (Huspek 1991, Sennett 2008, Dejours 2012).<sup>10</sup>

Such efforts are needed if hermeneutics is to exorcize one and for all the spectre of linguistic idealism. But would they help to dispel the appearance of irrationalism that also haunts hermeneutics? Would they remain faithful to the interest in emancipation which, for critical theory, cannot be satisfied except through a correction of the deficits in rationality, or 'pathologies of reason', that permeate modern society? (Honneth 2009). These are fundamental questions for a critical, non-idealist (in the sense of sufficiently materialist) hermeneutics to address, though I have not been able to address them here. But let me conclude with the thought that a hermeneutics aiming at the retrieval of materially expressed meaning-contents and the material mediation of the hermeneutic situation has *prima facie* good democratic credentials, and it is, after all, the rationality implicit in the concept of democracy that critical theorists, Habermasian or otherwise, want to see more of. For *everyone* has some stake in the free expression and proper recognition of their practical intelligence -- which we should recall is always an amalgam of *techne* and *phronesis* -- and hence in the material contexts in which that intelligence is exercised. As Habermas wryly observed, 'Hermeneutics is not reserved for the noble and the

unconventional' (Habermas 1983: 269): it is for all rational animals in their messy, material diversity.

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- <sup>1</sup> The Gadamer-Habermas-Apel debate has received massive commentary from hermeneutic, critical theory, and other perspectives. This can be gleaned from the bibliographies in Holub 1991 and How 1995.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Marder explores further possibilities along these lines in his contribution to this volume.
- <sup>3</sup> Habermas's complaint about Gadamer betraying the rationalist legacy of German Idealism has since become commonplace. See for example Pippin 2002 and Gjesdal 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> To quote Habermas in full: '*The objective context in terms of which alone social systems can be understood is constituted conjointly by language, labour, and domination*' (Habermas 1988: 174). The emphasis is Habermas's and indicates the central importance he attached to this point in his review of *Truth and Method* as a whole.
- <sup>5</sup> As Habermas would reflect thirty years later, 'Such a form of argumentation belongs unambiguously to the past' (as cited in Honneth 2009: 20).
- <sup>6</sup> 'Enlightenment fundamentalism', a deliberately paradoxical term coined by Ernest Gellner, acknowledges the ultimately dogmatic basis to its opposition to dogma, and provides a useful counterpoint to all varieties of hermeneutics. See Smith 1997.
- <sup>7</sup> Gadamer did sometimes assert the anthropological co-centrality of work (alongside language) (eg. Gadamer 1981: 75); he refers to 'traditions' of tool use and craftsmanship (Gadamer 1976: 99); and he was capable of biting criticism of the

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division of labour in modern societies (eg. Gadamer 1998). But these are occasional remarks and, more to the point, they are at odds with other features of his hermeneutics, as I go onto explain. For more extended analysis, see Smith 2011.

<sup>8</sup> 'The study of H. Arendt's important investigation [*The Human Condition*] and of H. G. Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* ...have called my attention to the fundamental significance of the Aristotelian distinction between *techne* and *praxis*' (Habermas 1974: 286, note 4).

<sup>9</sup> The importance of philosophical anthropology for Honneth is evident from his first writings (eg. Honneth and Joas 1988). The underlying affinity between his recognition-theoretic recasting of critical theory and phenomenology, but also a certain ambivalence towards Gadamer's hermeneutics, comes to the surface in some of his more recent work, for example his account of reification (Honneth 2003, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> I should mention that a compelling philosophical case for moving beyond the critical paradigms presented by both Gadamer and Habermas, for the reason that they are deformed by the dichotomy between *poiesis* and *praxis*, was put some time ago by Gyorgy Markus (Markus, 1982). Alas, Markus left the task of developing of a superior paradigm to us.