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# Hermeneutics (Ger. *Hermeneutik*)

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.12871>

**Published in print:** 20 January 2001

**Published online:** 2001

The discovery of meaning in a text by way of understanding, i.e. by an approach to a text that is empathetic rather than empirically verifiable. This approach is applicable particularly where a text appears at first sight to have no meaning, or where its meaning is remote or opaque, or where there may be another meaning or meanings than those that are immediately accessible. It has sometimes been considered as an actual practice, and sometimes as the theory, lying behind the practice of interpretation. In the later 19th century it acquired the status of a methodology for the historical and social sciences, in contrast to scientific method.

‘Texts’, in the above definition, may be restricted to written texts, or taken also to embrace spoken utterances, and may be expanded to include works of art. This expansion makes way for its application to music, whether composed or improvised. Hermeneutics came to prominence in writing about music implicitly in the 19th century and explicitly in the early 20th, and has undergone a resurgence since 1960 as part of a reaction against positivism.

Meaning assumes different forms with different types of hermeneutics. In its traditional sense it constitutes a message from a source to a recipient. In other cases it can signify the role of a work within its contemporaneous society; or the world of the composer's mind laid open to the listener (or reader of a score); or a dynamic experience that unfolds during listening; or a field of experience that reveals itself to the listener. Otherwise, it can constitute an infinite stream of latent experiences for a succession of unknowable future audiences. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, musical hermeneutics was related tangentially to Philosophy of music, and at times came close to Psychology of music; in more recent times it has bordered on Sociology of music. Examination of some of its mechanisms brings it into contact with semiology (*see Semiotics*) and structuralism (*see Structuralism, post-structuralism*) and most recently one stream of hermeneutics has fused with Reception theory. At times, it has been mutually related to the Analysis of music, at other times extraneous. Throughout its history, it has run parallel with music Criticism, sometimes being interwoven with it, sometimes separate.

## 1. Early history.

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The Greek word *hermeneutikos* (‘of, or for, interpreting’) suggests an association with the deity Hermes in his capacity as god of eloquence and of divination, hence an origin in unravelling the meaning of oracles. Among the earliest practices of hermeneutics was the critical examination of the Homeric epics and Greek myths – the foundational texts, oral and written, of Greek culture – in order to extract meaning relevant to a later, and increasingly sceptical, Greek society. A hermeneutics of the Hebrew scriptures, evident even within those scriptures, was firmly established by about 300 BCE and has continued to the present day. Christian hermeneutics of the Old Testament is an important component of the New Testament itself; and a hermeneutics of the New Testament, hence biblical hermeneutics as a whole, existed by the second century CE.

These three traditions, different by virtue of the texts they examined, and each itself subdivided into conflicting schools of thought, as well as changing over time, nonetheless had two things in common. First, they recognized a distance between text and reader. This distance was the product partly of time, of course, but more particularly of the special status of the text, which was considered to be either the direct word of God or the result of divine inspiration. The texts in all three cases were thought to have emanated from a realm higher than that of mortal man, a realm to which man had no direct recourse to obtain clarification. Secondly, the spectrum of scholastic opinions within each tradition defined two opposite approaches to a text: (1) the search for meaning literally by way of the text itself – often called the ‘grammatical’ approach; and (2) the search for meaning hidden behind the text – often called the ‘allegorical’ approach. These two common factors (text-reader distance, and the grammatical/allegorical polarity) have functioned as constants in hermeneutics through to the 20th century. A further tradition existed: juridical hermeneutics, which concerned itself with the law and justice. The body of extant law, together with precedent and legal practice, constituted a ‘text’ which, although not of divine origin, was distanced from the citizen, and needed constant examination as to both its letter and its spirit.

## 2. General hermeneutics: 19th century.

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It was not until the end of the 18th century that these traditions began to coalesce into a single ‘general hermeneutics’. Its precursors were the philologists Friedrich Ast (1778–1841) and August Wolf (1759–1824), and its principal architect was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Schleiermacher was closely associated with August and Friedrich Schlegel and other founders of the Romantic movement in Germany, and was himself the leading Protestant theologian of his day. He recognized that every text, however familiar its language, is to some extent foreign to us and that misunderstanding is almost certain. Understanding must therefore be actively sought, not just passively assumed. It becomes the task of hermeneutics to penetrate to the message of a text, which entails divining the intention of the author, and so ensure understanding on the part of the reader. The hermeneuticist – to return to origins – must adopt the role of Hermes the messenger: he must deliver the message from its source, free of distortion and correctly interpreted, to the receiver.

In so doing, Schleiermacher's inquiries, after a cursory reading, shuttled constantly between two pairs of opposites: between whole and part, and between subjective and objective. The latter is the ancient polarity between grammatical and allegorical recreated in the context of 19th-century thought. Rather than subscribing to one school or the other, Schleiermacher worked equally from the two poles. By ‘objective’ is meant examining the language used in the message and the grammatical structure in which it is cast; by ‘subjective’ is meant exploring the mind of the speaker/author that lies behind the message. The hermeneuticist thus works neither on the text nor on the speaker/author alone; instead, he works on the message that lies between the two, and does so by two alternating actions, the one a linguistic and grammatical examination, the other a psychological investigation. The convergence of these two actions, the fusion of the two outcomes, constitutes the understanding of the message. By this means, he developed, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘a real art of understanding instead of an “aggregate of observations”’.

The other pair of opposites reveals the organicist cast of Schleiermacher's thought. Every element of a text is itself a part of some larger whole (the whole text, the whole of the author's writings etc.) and at the same time the whole of which parts exist (the clauses of a sentence, grammatical parts of a clause,

individual words of a predicate etc.). Likewise with the exploration of the speaker/author: the mind behind the text is part of the mind behind a larger body of utterances or works, which is in turn part of the that person's whole mental life, which is part of his or her intellectual environment and so on. Since these levels are organically all of a piece, whenever the hermeneuticist encounters a problem (an *aporia*), he can safely shift up or down a level and continue the investigation, eventually working his way back to and through the impasse.

Shuttling back and forth across these pairs of opposites – subjective/objective, whole/part – is what is meant, for Schleiermacher, by the 'hermeneutic circle'. Such shuttling is essential to all communication, since 'nothing that needs interpretation can be understood at once', and understanding results only from a convergence of actions. And the end product is to understand the message better than its speaker or author understood it him or herself. This last notion has special resonance where a text is a work of art, the product of 'artistic genius'.

Schleiermacher's work survived in manuscripts dating from 1805–33 and relied on word-of-mouth transmission from his many students. One item was published in 1838. The first biography (1870, incomplete) was written by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who promoted Schleiermacher's ideas and, as a philosopher, himself made significant contributions to hermeneutics. Comte's *Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–42) came at the time of, and John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* (1843) after, Schleiermacher's death. Their affirmation of the scientific method, and belief that all knowledge is based on positive facts, provided the background for Dilthey's work. Dilthey fought to assert the existence of a 'human sciences' independent of the natural sciences and operating according to different laws. Whereas the natural scientist 'explains' (*erklärt*) his data, the human scientist – for example, the historian, the theologian, the literary critic – 'understands' (*versteht*) his. Explanation involves purely intellectual processes; understanding (*Verstand* or *Verstehen*) involves 'the combined activity of all the mental powers in apprehending'.

Understanding entails probing the context of those data, entering into the mind behind it, examining its social and cultural circumstances. For Dilthey, the data of the human scientists comprised 'life-expressions'. As he put it: We describe as 'understanding the process by which mental life comes to be known through an expression of it given to the senses'. This broadened the scope of hermeneutics beyond 'text' even in Schleiermacher's inclusive sense, extending it to include symbols and signs, gestures and actions, hence to the realms of sociology, anthropology and psychology.

At the outset of the 20th century, then, Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics had been harnessed as the methodological foundation of a new field, the 'human sciences'. Understanding, reconceived as the activity of the full range of mental powers, came about as the result of experiencing for oneself expressions of human life. This reconception involved two factors: the historical and the psychological. First, in response to the growth of history as a discipline in the 19th century, Dilthey introduced a historical awareness that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics had lacked. By this are meant several things: that individual experience happens in the passage of time and is in constant flux, but that it is recalled as a series of snapshot-like images (including written texts) that are interconnected. The totality of these 'life-expressions' makes up a kind of collective consciousness called 'objective mind'. This leads to the second factor: late in life, Schleiermacher had called the 'subjective' side of hermeneutics the 'psychological'. Dilthey intensified this notion: the interpreter belongs to his or her own moment in history, conditioned by society and culture. Understanding of history, then, comes about by the interpreter's 'injecting himself into' (*Sichhineinversetzen*) such life-expressions of the past, and making them his own experiences through 'sympathetic feeling' (*Nachfühlen*). (See also Dilthey, Wilhelm.)

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### 3. Musical hermeneutics: 19th century.

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What, then, would constitute a hermeneutics of music in the 19th century? It would be a type of writing concerned primarily not with the 'how' of music – abundantly represented in past theoretical writings by Rameau, Marpurg, Kirnberger, Gottfried Weber and others – but the 'what', not with mechanism but with meaning, not with technique but with content.

To the best of our knowledge, no author in the 19th century wrote about music under the banner of hermeneutics. There is no evidence that any such writer was familiar with the theory of hermeneutics put forward by Schleiermacher, or the extensions of that theory made by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gustav Droysen or Philip August Boeckh, nor yet with Dilthey's contribution. The one tangible exception is E.T.A. Hoffmann, who was personally acquainted with Schleiermacher from 1807, such that some of his musical writings might be seen as reflecting Schleiermacher's methodology – and who made perhaps the greatest contribution to 19th-century music criticism.

There is, however, a long lineage of writing about music between 1800 and 1900 that meets the above specification for a hermeneutics of music. Moreover, Hermann Kretzschmar, writing in 1902, retrospectively appropriated much of that lineage to hermeneutics. In 'Proposals for the Promotion of Musical Hermeneutics', the first of three essays, he identified Friedrich Rochlitz's periodical, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, founded in 1798, as a forum for musical hermeneutics, citing C.F. Zelter and E.T.A. Hoffmann as notable contributors. In journalism he also cited Weber, in programme notes Wagner, and for introducing hermeneutics into music biography Carl Winterfeld and Otto Jahn. In his third article he cited Schumann as having 'formulated ... in an eminently viable and wholly practicable way ... the procedure for a rational and productive musical hermeneutics'. From later in the 19th century he identified others who, while excessively poetic or concerned with detail, were nevertheless working towards a new hermeneutic 'doctrine of affects'. Kretzschmar left implicit that his own *Führer durch den Konzertsaal* (1887–90) provided a model of such writing.

The notion of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as the cradle of music hermeneutics is appealing in that Rochlitz hand-picked his reviewers, issued a directive to them at the time (1798) and subsequently published both that directive and a fuller statement by the Swiss writer Hans Georg Nägeli (1802). Both authors thought of the new journal as a 'literary-artistic institute' and, striking a high moral tone, sought to make it a 'tribunal of artistic judgment'. They expected all reviewers to share a common understanding on how judgment should be rationally administered. Rochlitz (1798) set up a tripartite schema for a review, covering (1) 'the sense and spirit', (2) 'the means' and (3) 'the grammar' of the work under examination. In proposing a methodology for the music critic, Nägeli (1802) outlined a 'horizon [*Gesichtskreis*] of pure objectivity' from which to determine the 'purely artistic content' of an absolute instrumental work. The horizon has four vantage-points (*Standpunkte*): (1) technical, (2) psychological, (3) historical and (4) idealistic. Of these, the first traced the ascent from 'elements and materials' to complete structures, judging by the rules of strict and free composition, to retrieve the 'technical content'. The second penetrated from the perceived effects to the 'essence' of the work to retrieve the 'psychological content', and here mutual understanding would have to give way to the reviewer's personal reaction and reflection. The third related the musical work to its time and culture, using historical data, to obtain its 'historical value'. The fourth looked for signs of 'genius, the infinite, the divine' in the completed work. The second and fourth were said to be insufficiently charted areas. Nägeli identified the fourth as the area in which 18th-century writing about music 'from Mattheson

right up to Vogler, and even some in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* had come to grief, asserting that 'some signs of genius may be accessible to theorizing understanding [*Verstand*]'. In addition, Nägeli created a procedure for 'applied music', e.g. a pedagogical work, vocal music or opera; for these, the absolute procedure is first carried out, and then a series of further criteria are applied.

The methodology constituted not a musical hermeneutics as such, but a bold comprehensive post-Kantian strategy for judgment. It involved the reviewer in traversing the musical work from different sides; in using established technical criteria, adducing historical evidence and risking unregulated personal reaction; and in performing an overarching manoeuvre from technical detail to the divining of spiritual presence. Together these uncannily foreshadowed the hermeneutic operation.

A review of the 'Eroica' Symphony published in February 1807 (three years after Schleiermacher's first published example of hermeneutic inquiry) distinguishes the 'technical and mechanical side' of the work's study from the 'aesthetic side', both needing investigation, and a 'midpoint' needing to be achieved if the symphony's 'individuality and rich content' are to be grasped. Cast thus as a critical project, this mirrors Schleiermacher's objective/subjective polarity, even hinting at the shuttling action of hermeneutic enquiry (Hyer, 1996).

E.T.A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony of 1810 – one of the most celebrated pieces of music criticism of all time – approximates to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic model in that it oscillates on two planes, between technical detail and transcendent effect, and between part and whole, until the entire four-movement work is held in view at the end (Bent, 1995). It even encounters and deals with *aporia* (e.g. why are the closing chords of the finale so oddly placed, destroying the composure of the previous moments? – in order to recall similar strokes in the first movement, and to rekindle tension at the last moment).

Schumann, in the opening issues of his new journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (1834), produced several articles that conform to the directives of Rochlitz and Nägeli remarkably closely. These include reviews of music by Heinrich Dorn, J.N. Hummel (June 1834), Ferdinand Hiller and J.C. Lobe (January 1835), and adopt a tripartite scheme. The most highly articulated is that of Hiller's 24 Etudes for piano op.15. It begins with a preliminary assessment of Hiller's historical placement, a cursory impression of the music, and a statement of critical policy that concludes (ii, 42):

In this review as little as possible will be neglected, and Hiller's work will be apprehended from many sides – from the aesthetic side just as much as from the theoretical, not forgetting the pedagogical. ... For as a teacher I think particularly in terms of three things: as it were, of flower, root and fruit; or of the poetic, the harmonic-melodic and the mechanical content; or in other words of what benefits the heart, the ear and the hand ... I choose to divide this review, like a well-ordered sermon, into three parts, and to close the whole thing with a thumbnail sketch of each etude ...

The review proper then proceeds: I, 'The poetry of the work; blossoms; spirit', II, 'Theoretical matters: relationship of melody to harmony; form and period structure' (including an elaborate formal chart); and III, 'Mechanical [=pedagogical] aspects', and concludes with a characterization of each of the 24 etudes. (The verdict is a mixed one.) In some of these reviews Schumann's fictitious characters, Florestan, Eusebius and Master Raro represent the different vantage points.

The fullest extension of the schematic review is that of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (NZM, July–August 1835). It is in two main sections, the second subdivided into ‘the four viewpoints [*Gesichtspunkte*] from which a piece of music may be considered’: I (‘Florestan’) [‘psychological treatment’]; II (‘R. Schumann’) [Introduction: statement of plan] – (1) form; (2) techniques of composition: harmony – melody – counterpoint – working-out – style – orchestration – piano arrangement; (3) idea; and (4) governing spirit. The plan is strikingly reminiscent of Nägeli's methodology, constituting a broadly hermeneutic plan that begins with a cursory impression, moves through technical and textual issues and concludes with the spirit of the work.

Franz Brendel (1811–68) carried Rochlitz's and Nägeli's programme further in a manifesto for his editorship of the NZM in 1845. He spoke of Rochlitz's lasting contribution in achieving the ‘vantage-point of psychological description’ in music criticism and recognized the current trend of ‘bringing together the different intellectual disciplines under one general viewpoint’. He urged writers to study the music that historians and editors were then restoring for developmental patterns, so as to assimilate history into contemporary life. He envisaged a ‘higher criticism’ which could ‘engage with general life, with literature and science and, in proceeding from the world of musical feeling, progress towards generally comprehensible principles of thought’, drawing parallels with the other arts. In order to achieve this grand epistemological goal, music criticism needed to absorb and transcend both the objectivity of its first phase (‘technical’: 18th century) and the subjective grasp of content of its second (‘psychological’: early 19th century), to yield a criticism for which these two sides are inseparable. This would open up a ‘broader horizon’ for an ‘autonomous general music criticism’.

In Germany, a growing tradition of non-technical, descriptive writing about music takes hold in the second half of the 19th century, most of it a response to the need to decipher meaning in Beethoven's music. Wagner's programme notes on the Ninth Symphony, the ‘Eroica’ and other works (1846, 1852–4) formed a prototype followed in similar notes for concert performance of his own works (1859–82). Ernst von Elterlein (Ernst Gottschald) belonged to Brendel's circle and was an advocate of F.T. Vischer's system of idealist aesthetics. He produced two pocket volumes, *Beethoven's Symphonien in idealen Gehalt* (1854) and *Beethoven's Clavier-Sonaten für Freunde der Tonkunst erläutert* (1856), which interprets the music through vivid, often apocalyptic naturalistic images. F.L.S. Dürenberg's descriptions of symphonies by Beethoven and others (1863) was in similar vein, as indeed were the programme notes that Sir George Grove began writing for Crystal Palace in 1856 and which culminated in the musical descriptions within his *Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies* (1896). Hans von Wolzogen's thematic guides to Wagner's operas belong to this tradition, as do the 400 *Meisterführer* of works by many composers released by H. Bechhold and later Schlesinger from 1894 onwards and Max Chop's *Erläuterungen zu Meisterwerken der Tonkunst* published by Reclam.

If these represent hermeneutics, they do so in an undisciplined form. Two authors, however, stand apart from these. Wilhelm von Lenz, in *Beethoven et ses trois styles* (1852), made a serious attempt to marry imagistic description with informed technical commentary, as part of a developmental biography of the composer's style that itself fell within a pioneering catalogue of the works. Von Lenz's aim in describing a work was to uncover the idea (*idée*) that ‘presided over’ that work. A.B. Marx, in the early criticism that he produced in his *Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1824–30), and more particularly in his study of the life and creativity of Beethoven (1859), took this same notion of ‘idea’ (*Idee*) and employed it consistently in its Hegelian application, as an inner determining, holistic force. ‘Idea’ is an initial perception on the part of the composer. It drives the creative process forward, incorporates new insights, allows for changes of plan and ultimately governs the organic development

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of a piece of music from nothing to the fully fledged work, but always with a view of the whole work in mind. In its mature form, Marx's method was no mere flight of fancy, but a systematic pursuit of evidence – from the circumstances of the composer's life, the development of mind and artistic sensibility, and the work itself in final form. He reconstructed the process of composition, seeking, like Schleiermacher, the world in between the work and the psychology of its creator. His two most fully developed examples of the method are his 1859 studies of the 'Eroica' Symphony (Burnham, 1997, pp. 157–88) and the Ninth Symphony (Bent, 1994, ii, 213–37).

## 4. General hermeneutics: 20th century.

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For Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), hermeneutics was still 'the methodology of the historical humanistic disciplines', as it had been for Dilthey; but by then (1927, trans. 1996), this was only a 'derivative' sense (pp.37–8, 398). Hermeneutics had now assumed a much greater role within the work of philosophy, as the hermeneutics of human existence, *Dasein* (literally: 'being-there', p.436). That is to say, the understanding and interpretation that humanist scholars conduct spring from operations that take place at the very basis of human existence in its relation to the nature of being. In Heidegger's knotty language, it is hermeneutics 'through which the proper meaning of being and the basic structures of the very being of Da-sein are *made known* to the understanding' (p.37) which a human existence has of being. The meaning implicit in that understanding comes to be articulated through interpretation. In this way, hermeneutics is charged with the initial task of philosophy, the 'analytic of existence' (p.436).

Heidegger also confirmed the essential role of the circle in the hermeneutic situation: rather than avoiding it, 'our attempt must aim at leaping into this "circle" primordially and completely, so that ... we make sure that we have a complete view of the circular being of Da-sein' (pp.315–16).

What were the consequences of this strange turn of events? what did it mean that hermeneutics, while continuing to be a methodology for history, the arts, psychology and the social sciences, had suddenly become one of the fundamental processes of philosophy? In one sense, nothing had changed. For man to distance himself from the world and view it dispassionately ('subject-in-Being': the way of technology) was still a false path: man must experience life, must engage with the world. On the other hand, the centre of focus had changed: 'author' (indeed, any other single human being) had disappeared and hermeneutics had become discovery of oneself in respect to the rest of human life.

The human mind brings preconceptions – 'prejudgments' (*Vorurteile*) – to whatever it encounters. 18th-century Enlightenment philosophy had sought to exclude these as prejudicial and to submit all things to pure reason; it also took a sceptical view of 'tradition'. Dilthey and Heidegger both explored the role of prejudgments, but it was Hans-Georg Gadamer (b1900) who made both prejudgment and tradition central to his hermeneutics. Gadamer argued that in the human sciences the object of research never exists in isolation. In historical research, that object exists always within the passage of history. He saw a new type of historical consciousness, marked by self-criticism, as having emerged not with the great 19th-century German historians (such as Droysen and Mommsen), but after World War I (1960, trans. 1975, pp.290, 293; italics original): The self-criticism of historical consciousness leads finally to recognizing historical movement not only in events but also in understanding itself. *Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be validated by



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hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method. ... [T]he circle of understanding is not a 'methodological' circle but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding.

Gadamer rejected three aspects of the notion that the interpreter injects himself into the mind of the author (Schleiermacher, Dilthey). First, the focus on the author's psychology, on biography and on divination, was misdirected: the real meaning of a text depends not on the author but on the historical world from which that text speaks to us. Secondly, the subordination of the interpreter's mind to that of the author was unacceptable because it replicates the objectivism of Enlightenment and Romantic hermeneutics. Thirdly, even 'injection', or 'transposition', of the interpreter into the author's world was itself insufficient; instead, Gadamer employed the concept of 'horizon' (borrowed from the philosopher Husserl), 'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (p.302). But to think of two horizons – the author's and the interpreter's – would be mere abstraction: 'the horizon of the past – is always in motion', as is also that of the interpreter.

Hermeneutic activity consists of the fusion of those two ever-changing horizons into a single one: it 'involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other' (p.305). Fusion, projecting a single historical horizon, involves constantly assessing one's own prejudgments, acknowledging one's connection to tradition and combining these with the horizon from which the original text was produced. This process is what Gadamer called 'consciousness of being affected by history' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*). Intangible though this may seem, we can be reassured that the hermeneutic experience remains one of 'questioning and understanding' the text (pp.374–5): interpretation remains a dialogue, in which, as fusion occurs, both our understanding and the meaning of the text change. The hermeneutic circle continues to operate, now not between subjective and objective (Schleiermacher), but between the text's 'strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object, and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*'

What in Gadamer's hermeneutics was 'prejudgment' took on a different cast in the work of Jürgen Habermas (b 1929), a member of the Frankfurt School, who engaged Gadamer in public debate from 1967. Habermas explored the possibility that understanding might depend not on context, not on a consensus of the tradition within which a given utterance occurred, but instead on a force exerted upon it that resulted in 'systematically distorted communication'. He argued that, while Gadamer's hermeneutics assumed human communication to be rational, in reality it is subject to distortion and deception. Habermas gave two instances: the operation of the unconscious mind as revealed by Freud; and the working of ideology within a society. Neither is localized: both are pervasive in human society. He argued that these two forces cannot be left to the psycho- and political analyst respectively; that hermeneutics itself must take on the task of interpreting such distorted communication, and that its result will be 'emancipation'.

Paul Ricoeur (b 1913) entered this debate in the late 1960s, seeking a middle position between those of Gadamer and Habermas. He accepted, with Gadamer, the notion of 'classic' texts that survive major cultural changes and acquire their own authority, an authority that is not that of the author – they decontextualize themselves. He was at the same time drawn to Habermas's interest in hermeneutics' liberating function, which is achieved through a process of self-reflection or critique (1970–79, trans. 1981, pp.59ff, 78ff). Via a course between Gadamer and Habermas, Ricoeur (whose thought is



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influenced by the work of Saussure, Pierce and Lévi-Strauss) sought to rehabilitate hermeneutics from the role Heidegger had assigned to it (the 'analytic of existence') to the world of text – what Ricoeur called 'the return route from ontology to epistemology' (p.88).

There are four components to this return. First are: (a) treating the distance between text and author – distanciation – as a positive attribute that grants it autonomy, and permits it to recontextualize itself with each new reading; (b) ridding hermeneutics of the explanation/understanding dichotomy and replacing it by reconstruction within a dialogue between reader and work; (c) allowing the world of the work to 'open up' to an unlimited series of new readings, such that, instead of discovering that world behind the text, hermeneutics unfolds it in front of the text. These lead to (d) a situation in which: 'To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds' (pp.94, 140ff).

## 5. Musical hermeneutics: 20th century.

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'Proposals for the Promotion of Musical Hermeneutics': the first ever use of this defining phrase was by Hermann Kretzschmar in the titles of two articles published in 1902 and 1905 (cited in §3 above; a third followed in 1906). This was a rallying cry for a conceptual syllabus, a training in identifying the mental/spiritual content of a piece of music, designed for listeners, performers and composers. It was to begin with a 'preparatory training in musical aesthetics' (an allusion to Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Aesthetik* of 1804). Kretzschmar invokes here the 'original meaning of the word "aesthetics", namely 'the doctrine of feelings and perceptions, in particular sensuous and artistic ones' (*Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ii, 179–80). This 'preparatory training' comprised two stages, 'aesthetics of motive' and 'aesthetics of theme', a secure grasp of which constitutes 'the foundation of all hermeneutics' (p.189) but in fact extends to include a knowledge of basic formal procedures, namely cadence and variation. The final stage, the 'aesthetics of composition' (*Satzästhetik*), constitutes musical hermeneutics proper, i.e. the study of entire compositions, whereby 'the play of thoughts and feelings is clarified and a grasp of the whole is made possible' (p.283). Kretzschmar's motivic and thematic foundation is a 'rehabilitation' of the Baroque doctrine of affects to which the collaboration of psychologists is 'altogether indispensable' (p.293). This rehabilitation is an indictment of the formal aestheticians of the 19th century, above all Hanslick ('The content of music is tonally moving forms', 1854, trans. 1986, p.29), for having failed musicians in their need to understand music, and the point is driven home by Kretzschmar's recommendation that abstract instrumental music is the best material on which to begin the course of study.

Kretzschmar's student, Arnold Schering (1877–1941), spurned psychological explanations of works and offered instead 'interpretations' (*Deutungen*) in the form of painstaking 'reconstructions' of how a work had taken shape in its composer's mind. He worked primarily with the music of J.S. Bach and Beethoven. From clues given by the latter's acquaintances, and by the matching of rhythmic patterns to prominent phrases of text, he identified literary works that Beethoven was thought to have read and that had provided the imaginative stimulus for instrumental compositions (1934, 1936). In this way he interpreted all the symphonies, most of the string quartets, 16 of the piano sonatas, seven violin sonatas and several other works. In the vocal works of Bach, he claimed to deduce the composer's intentional meanings through the forms of musical symbolism that Albert Schweitzer had recently uncovered (1925, 1928).

Interest in musical hermeneutics rekindled in the 1960s and 70s after several decades during which musicologists in Europe and America, in the prevailing spirit of positivism, had held it in disrepute. In Germany, the renewal centred on Carl Dahlhaus, who included in his *Foundations of Music History* (1977, trans. 1983) an examination of the rift that developed after 1920 between a type of analysis based on internal and verifiable evidence alone and a type that admitted evidence external to the work. He later examined the hermeneutics of E.T.A. Hoffmann as a set of dichotomies traceable back to the antithesis of *prima* and *seconda pratica*, and extending through to Kretzschmar (Dahlhaus, 1978, trans. 1989). Dahlhaus was the focal figure in a symposium on musical hermeneutics held in Frankfurt in 1973, contributors to which included Werner Braun, Karl Gustav Fellerer and Tibor Kneif (1975). The symposium recognized the methods of Kretzschmar and Schering as unsatisfactory, brought into consideration the work of Gadamer and the writings of Adorno, and sought to open a path to a less restricted concept of hermeneutics, offering attempts at interpretations of works by Mahler and Liszt.

Two writers contributed to the rekindling of interest on the American musicological scene from the 1960s on: Joseph Kerman and Leo Treitler. Kerman called trenchantly – notably in a 1965 polemic and a subsequent critique of the state of musicology (1985) – for a return to a humane ‘criticism’, a medium exemplified in his own books on the Elizabethan madrigal, opera and Beethoven's string quartets. Not quite itself a manifesto for a new hermeneutics of music, his polemic was instrumental in opening the way to several new kinds of discourse about music that relate at least tangentially to hermeneutics. More measured in tone was a series of articles by Treitler, beginning in 1966, maintaining that ‘the meaning of a text is not fixed within its boundaries but is ever contingent upon the interests and the circumstances of the community of readers or listeners’ (1989).

In ‘Schubert's Promissory Note’ (1982), Edward T. Cone maintained that relationships between music and external ideas and things can only fully be explained if they take into account relationships within the music. Showing how, in a Schubert *Moment musical*, a note the consequences of which are unrealized early in the piece – punningly, a ‘promissory note’ – and unfold only later, can affect the entire structure, he posited human experience analogous to that tonal process and then mapped this experience on to biographical data to speculate on a concrete situation in the composer's life at the time of the piece (Schubert's realization of the implications of syphilis). Ten years earlier, Cone had delivered a series of lectures, later to become his book *The Composer's Voice* (1974), which proved seminal in American thought about music and did much to initiate a line of inquiry adapting literary techniques of narrativity (deployed by Vladimir Propp, André Jolles, A.-J. Greimas, Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov and others) to music (see Narratology, narrativity). Among writers pursuing this line cogently in the 1980s and 90s were Anthony Newcomb, Carolyn Abbate and Fred Maus.

The first in the English-speaking world to offer a theoretical formulation of the way in which musical hermeneutics operates, and a practical means of proceedings, was Lawrence Kramer (1990, chap.1); Kretzschmar had attempted neither of these things. Kramer was influenced by Gadamer and also by Nietzsche, Freud and an eclectic array of late 20th-century philosophers and writers on literature and music. His starting-point was Kant's assertion that, although moving the mind perhaps even more than poetry, while it lasts, music ‘does not leave a residue of thought-content behind for the mind to reflect on’ in retrospect. It is this notion that Kramer challenged, along with an inheritance from Hanslick, fortified by a battery of 20th-century analytic techniques that treat music as pure form and syntax. He recognized that meaning in music was not of the sort about which claims of truth or falsehood can be made. He saw music not as a species of ‘language’, but rather as a form of activity within society: a cultural practice. He maintained nonetheless that meanings do inhere in music, meanings ‘definite

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enough to support critical interpretations comparable in depth, exactness, and density of connection to interpretations of literary texts'. However, those meanings have to be worked for, since music 'resists fully disclosing itself'. Invoking Derrida and J.L. Austin, he presented a theory of 'expressive acts' in music – acts that may recur under different circumstances in the course of a piece, those circumstances exerting their own distinct 'forces' on those acts. Interpretation comprises precisely recognizing and reflecting on those acts and forces.

The means to articulate this secretive meaning in music is through 'hermeneutic windows'. Such windows are entry points from the surface world of the music into a world of hidden meaning, and are mostly to be found at anomalies in the music's continuity, especially at moments of under- or over-determination, of 'surplus' and 'deficit', as he later called them. (The narratologist somewhat similarly looks for discontinuities in discourse, prising them open to reveal different voices at work.) Kramer identified three types of window, successively more difficult to detect: (1) textual inclusions – titles, epigraphs, on-score annotations etc.; (2) citational inclusions – musical quotations or allusions, links to visual images etc.; and (3) structural tropes, the most powerful presumably because the most intrinsic – this is where 'expressive acts' come into play. Kramer suggested a way for the interpreter or critic to detect these windows. Meaning does not necessarily come singly. Several meanings may exist at a given window; moreover, the meanings of different windows overlap and interlace with one another ('cultural practice is multiply determined'), such that a hermeneutic interpretation will typically have to contend with several strands at a time.

The work should not be thought of as the centre of a universe, or as merely relating to the cultural and historical environment in which it was formed. On the contrary, it is an active part of a network of interrelations of which no one 'site' is the centre: 'Meaning ... circulates everywhere'. Hermeneutic interpretation in consequence, is by its nature incapable of being systematized or disciplined. It pursues what it finds; it cannot be verified or falsified. Kramer exemplified the operation of his hermeneutic method on piano works by Beethoven and Chopin, Liszt's *Faust Symphony* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. He subsequently (1995) harnessed it to issues in musical Postmodernism and of subjectivity and sexuality in the songs of Schubert (1998), where hermeneutics was brought into contact with psychoanalytic theories of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan.

A hermeneutics that takes from Gadamer the notions of prejudgment ('consciousness of being affected by history') and dialogue with the text, and from Ricoeur those of textual autonomy and distanciation, together with the two writers' mutual rejection of the recovery of an author's intentions, is employed by Gary Tomlinson in his study of *Music in Renaissance Magic* (1993). The focus of this inquiry is the Florentine humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1430–99), in particular his magical practice of singing Orphic hymns to improvised lyre accompaniment, of which there exist contemporary descriptions but no written artefacts. Sceptical modern thought is apt to dismiss a historical trace of this sort, incapable as it is of being reconstructed, and also antipathetic to the modern scientific outlook. In examining how these songs might have worked, Tomlinson constructed a rich and multi-stranded discourse on the role of magic in Renaissance life and the place of music within magical practice; into this discourse he wove the tenets of Neoplatonism, the views of a succession of thinkers who engaged with the occult, the fusion of the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres with modal ethos to produce an astrological musical practice, contemporary understanding of the body, the spirit and the soul, the relative importance of aural and visual communication, and the experience of demonic possession and the temporary escape of the soul from the body.

Hermeneutics as deployed here can, however, only expose the unbridgeable gap between the modern thinker and magical practice in late 15th-century Italy. In an attempt to span that gap, Tomlinson invoked the notion of the 'archaeology' of thought, as developed by Michel Foucault (1966, 1969). Foucault's conception is of penetrating beneath the surface record of history (documents, records, artefacts) so as to reach 'layers' at which things happen ever more slowly, and thus to uncover the unconscious meanings concealed beneath the conscious ones and, ultimately, the slow, grand intellectual movement of man's thought across the centuries. By his in-tandem use of hermeneutics and archaeology, Tomlinson strove to enter 'the space between people like Ficino and us' and to feel the 'irreducible difference' between them and us, while never being able to 'cross over to his side'.

In Germany, re-engagement with hermeneutics began only slightly earlier than in America, but in a more focussed way. Scholars in the field, in any case more numerous, tended to work in research groups, often around a central figure, and held 'conversations' and symposia, often publishing collectively rather than independently. Building on the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, a group of researchers centred around Constantin Floros in Hamburg sought to revitalize the extraction of content from music. Floros's three-volume work on Mahler (1977) exemplifies this school; the subtitles of volumes 1 and 2 reveal their connections to Kretzschmar and Schering: 'the spiritual world of Gustav Mahler, presented systematically', and 'Mahler and 19th-century symphonism in a new meaning: towards the establishment of a contemporary musical exegesis'. In these volumes, formal analysis and style criticism are only preliminary stages leading to an exegesis of Mahler's intentions (by means of letters, remarks, reports, scores etc.) and of his musical symbolism (bird calls, night music, cowbells etc.), which aims to open up the world of his mind/spirit (*Geist*) to the reader and listener. Another group, including Roland Harweg and Tibor Kneif, questioned whether music was capable of being 'understood' at all, instancing situations in which it produces an aesthetic effect upon its listeners without being understood (Reinecke and Faltin, 1973). A further group centred on Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht at Freiburg, who takes a radical view of understanding as an infinite process in which the only fixed point is the 'I' of the inquirer (1995).

The University of Konstanz group of literary theorists, centred around Hans Robert Jauss, developed 'Reception theory' (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) and promulgated its ideas through its journal *Poetik und Hermeneutik* (1964-). Reception theory disputes the notion that the meaning of a work of art is set for all time once it is released to the public, and can thus be understood purely by reconstructing contemporaneous conventions and beliefs. Against this latter 'essentialism' (which contributes to the dignification of some works as 'canonical' masterpieces), the theory contends that a work has a historical life which merely begins at its appearance – a life in which it interacts with its audience, influences society and comes into relationship with new works that are created after it. Instead of a fixed understanding of a work in its own time, Jauss substituted the idea (adapted from Gadamer) of a 'horizon of expectations'. A research group associated with the Salzburg Institute for Musical Hermeneutics, including Siegfried Mauser, Gernot Gruber and Wolfgang Gratzner, sought to apply Jauss's literature-based theory to works of music, the performance-based and non-representational nature of which presents significant obstacles. Their emphasis on understanding as process rather than as static phenomenon tends to shift the focus away from the work as notated score towards performance, and its study towards listening and hence to listener reaction and the realm of perception. A crucial term is *Aktualisierung*, 'making actual' or 'bringing into the present moment', thus the process whereby a listener brings a work into conjunction with his or her own experience and sees it against the background of society, past and present.

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