



## 15th Annual Canadian Hermeneutic Institute

June 5-7, 2024

Aloft Calgary University, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

### **Hermeneutics the Wide World Over: For a Theory of Interpretation Beyond the Context of Tradition**

**Professor Theodore George**

Texas A & M University

We are familiar with the basic tenet that the validity of hermeneutic research is dependent on *context*. In STEM disciplines, the validity of research is typically thought to be guaranteed by a host of norms that we sometimes gather under the auspices of the ‘scientific method.’ But, the validity of hermeneutic research, by contrast, requires that researchers pay careful attention not only to their own context but also that of their subject matter. Yet, how, precisely, are we to understand this context? What is the primary context that we need to take into account for our interpretive work?

The purpose of this lecture course is to defend a claim that challenges the classic answer to this question provided by Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that the primary context of hermeneutics, while universal, takes shape in the world as given to us through tradition. While Gadamer’s classic answer has become definitive for theories of interpretation, it nevertheless raises the specter that hermeneutic research may be complicit in projects of cultural or linguistic nationalism. This specter becomes all the more concerning when hermeneutic research takes place within the context of traditions associated with projects such as imperialism, colonialism, or ecological destruction.

The claim of this lecture course, by contrast, is that the primary context of hermeneutic research is not *the world given by a specific tradition*, but, rather, what I will call *the wide world over*. As we shall see, this term is not meant to indicate merely a composite of specific traditions found across the globe, but rather a space that traditions lie within, an interval of interpretive possibilities that remains always at issue in every situation. The validity of hermeneutic research, as I shall argue, depends on whether, and how well, it takes into account this context of the wide world over. Such research, when conducted successfully, not only resists injustice, but can help lead to discoveries that expose it.

This lecture course defends the claim that the primary context of hermeneutic research is the wide world over through the reconsideration of three central themes in Gadamer’s hermeneutics: his elucidation of hermeneutical experience as conversation, the sense of language that makes such experience possible, and the ethical sensibilities that hermeneutic research requires. Accordingly, participants will have the opportunity both to examine and critically assess central concepts in Gadamerian hermeneutics.

## **Day 1:        Wednesday, June 5, 2024**

0830 – 0900        **Registration and Welcome**

0900 – 1200        **From Conversation to Translation**

**Professor Theodore George**, Texas A&M University

In *Truth and Method* and elsewhere, Gadamer elucidates the scope, limits, and validity of hermeneutic research on the example of conversation. By this, he has in mind a conversation between two interlocutors, or, a reader and a text, about a matter of shared concern. He argues that when successful, a conversation allows us to understand ourselves, one another, and the matter of our concern through an experience of *displacement* that brings our prejudices into question. Yet, Gadamer appears to suggest that such displacement never displaces us from a tradition *tout court*. On Day 1, I argue, by contrast, that in the limit case of an interpretive experience with a person or text that communicates in a language unfamiliar to us, we are displaced from even our own tradition. In reference to an important public lecture Gadamer gave in 1989, I suggest that hermeneutic research is best understood not on the example of conversation but, rather, translation. As translative, hermeneutic research involves a displacement that wrests us from any tradition, leaving us what I will describe as *abroad in the world*.

1200 – 1330        Lunch break

### **Afternoon Presentations and Discussion**

1330 – 1410        **Davey Hamada**, University of Calgary

*Radical Knowledge Translation: Bringing Imaginative Fiction into Nursing Practice*

1410 – 1450        **Associate Professor Steve Chang**, Soochow University, Taipei

*On the Ethic of (Un)Translatability between China and the West*

1450 – 1500        **Break**

1500 – 1630        **Professor James Risser**, Seattle University

Invited Paper: *Hermeneutics as Passage*

## **Day 2: Thursday, June 6, 2024**

0900 – 1200

### **The Linguisticality of Language**

**Professor Theodore George**, Texas A&M University

Gadamer argues that hermeneutic research unfolds in language. According to Gadamer, when hermeneutic research succeeds, it is thanks to the power of language that we come to understand something as it genuinely is in its being. Gadamer identifies this power with what he terms the 'linguisticality' of language, but he nevertheless suggests that this power manifests most fully only within the context of specific linguistic traditions. On Day 2, I support the conclusion of the Day 1 lecture by arguing that, in fact, the linguisticality of language is operative not only in specific linguistic traditions, but more originally, when we find ourselves displaced from tradition, abroad in the world. To this end, the lecture will consider ideas of linguisticality found in two poets, Paul Celan and Édouard Glissant. Building on Glissant, in particular, this lecture concludes with the suggestion that the linguisticality of language is exemplified not primarily by a national language, but, instead, by *creole*.

1200 – 1330

Lunch break

## **Afternoon Presentations and Discussion**

1330 – 1410

**Lin Li Xiao**, Pepperdine University

*The Person of Experience as a Confronter of the History of Effects*

1410 – 1450

**David Whitley**, York Region CISM Team

*Paramedic Hermeneutics on a paradoxical cliff: The Grace of Tragic Wisdom in the Struggle to Sustain a Patient-centered Practice*

1450 – 1500

**Break**

1500 – 1600

**Professor Tom Grimwood**, University of Cumbria, UK

Invited Paper: *Hermeneutic Travels: Or, The Problem With "It's not the destination that matters, it's the journey"*

## **Day 3: Friday, June 7, 2024**

0900 – 1200

### **The Person of Experience, Reconsidered**

**Professor Theodore George**, Texas A&M University

The purpose of the Day 3 lecture is to consider ethical implications of the claim that the

primary context of hermeneutic research is the wide world over. While Gadamer rejects the possibility of normative principles that would guide hermeneutic research, he argues that one normative aspiration of such research is embodied in what he calls the *person of experience*. Gadamer characterizes the person of experience as a tragic figure who has become radically undogmatic by suffering many and varied interpretive experiences. In this lecture, I argue that we only become genuinely undogmatic through interpretive experience achieved while displaced from tradition, abroad in the world. In view of this reconsideration of the ethical implications of hermeneutic research, the lecture will conclude with a reconsideration of the relation between hermeneutic research and other approaches such as critical theory or decolonial theory.

1200 – 1330      Lunch break

### **Afternoon Presentations and Discussion**

1330 – 1410      **Katherine Stelfox**, University of Calgary  
*A Suspicion of Testimony and the Tradition of Institutional Contexts: An Exploration of Translative Practice for Conducting Ethically Responsible Research*

1410 – 1440      **Concluding Conversations**

### **Suggested Readings**

#### **Day 1. From Conversation to Translation**

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2013), Part Two, 4.3, “Analysis of historically effected consciousness,” 350–386.

Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2013), trans. rvsd. Weinshemer and Marshall, Part Three, 5.1 “Language as the medium of hermeneutical experience,” 401–423.

Gadamer, “The Diversity of Languages and the Understanding of the World,” trans. Cynthia Nielson and David Liakos.

*Also consider,*

Derrida, Jacques, “Des tours de Babel (sélections),” in *Theories of Translation* (U. Chicago, 2003), ed. Schulte and Biguenet, 218–228.

Figal, Günter, *Objectivity* (SUNY press, 2010), Ch. 3 “The World as Hermeneutical Space,” 121–154.

George, Theodore, “Are We a Conversation? Hermeneutics, Exteriority, and Transmittability,” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2017): 331–350.

George, Theodore, *The Responsibility to Understand* (Edinburgh, 2020), Ch. 2 “The Capacity for Displacement,” 47–70.

## **Day 2. On the Linguisticity of Language**

Celan, Paul, “Speech-Grille (Sprachgitter),” “In the Grooves (In die Rillen),” “To stand (Stehen)” “Ash-aureole (Ashenglorie),” in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (Norton, 2001).

Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2013), Part Three, 5.2 (C), “The universal aspect of hermeneutics,” 490–506.

Gadamer, “The universality of the hermeneutic problem,” in *The Gadamer Reader*, 72–89.

Glissant, Édouard, “Creolizations,” in *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 89–121.

*Also consider,*

Celan, “Meridian. Speech on the occasion of the award of the Georg Büchner Prize,” in *Selected Poems and Prose*, 401–413.

Glissant, Édouard, “An Exploded Discourse,” in *Caribbean Discourses* (Caraf, 1999), 159–220.

## **Day 3. The Person of Experience, Revisited**

Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2013), Part Two, 4.3(B), “The concept of experience and the essence of hermeneutic experience,” 255–370.

Gadamer, “On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address,” in *On Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, 15–23.

*Also consider,*

Dostal, Robert, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: Between Phenomenology and Dialectic* (Northwestern, 2022), Ch. 2 “Humanism and Politics” 55–86.

Mason, Wyatt, “The first woman to translate the *Odyssey* into English,” in *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 2, 2017