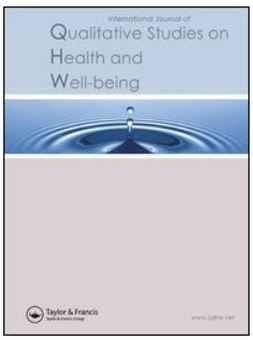

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Jonathan A Smith

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Hermeneutics, human sciences and health: linking theory and practice

JONATHAN A SMITH

Birkbeck University of London, UK

Abstract
This paper considers the relationship between hermeneutic theory and qualitative empirical research in the human sciences. I suggest that the human sciences can offer a useful crucible for thinking again about some of the ideas in hermeneutics. I then provide a small piece of data from an empirical study I conducted on identity change during the transition to motherhood and show how the data and analysis can be "re-illuminated" when thought of in terms of ideas from the hermeneutic writing of Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer. Finally, I suggest a project that would go round one particular hermeneutic circle in the different direction, using empirical research in the human sciences to further extend and develop hermeneutic theory.

Key words: *Hermeneutics, human sciences, interpretation, identity*

Introduction

In this paper, I take the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between qualitative empirical health research and theoretical writing in hermeneutics. I will do this by taking some ideas in hermeneutic theory, thinking about how they can be applied to human sciences and then employing them to look at some data from one of my empirical studies. Emerging from the paper, also, will be the suggestion for a role for contemporary human science research in itself helping develop further hermeneutic theory.

Hermeneutics, human sciences and health

While it can be argued that there is a close connection between hermeneutics and human sciences, actually the relationship is complicated. Hermeneutics has the much longer history, beginning as the theory to help the interpretation of biblical texts and then gradually extending its remit to concerns with the interpretation of a much wider range of texts. Dilthey coined the term human sciences to distinguish a form of intellectual activity, which was different from that practiced in the natural sciences. In fact, when one looks at the key writings in hermeneutics, while the range of texts that form their subject matter has expanded considerably beyond those of the bible, the primary concern is with the humanities: history, law, literature and the arts.

By contrast, I would see the primary disciplines for contemporary, self-defined, human sciences forming a quite different set—made up primarily of health and nursing, psychology and education. However more specifically, this human science is primarily formed by groups of researchers who choose to differentiate themselves from the quantitative mainstream parts of their discipline. They are concerned centrally with human lived experience and, when conducting empirical projects, favour qualitative methodologies. This project is at the heart of the annual International Human Science Research Conference.[1]

Therefore, we have an interesting situation where hermeneutics is offered as an important intellectual touchstone for contemporary human sciences research and yet the type of work that preoccupied the hermeneutic theorists appears rather different to that conducted by current human science researchers. So what does a hermeneutics written for one set of

Correspondence: Jonathan A Smith, School of Psychology, Birkbeck University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX, UK E-mail: ja.smith@bbk.ac.uk

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disciplines have to say to the new kids on the blocks, the new human sciences as practiced today?

It can be said that the work done in the new human sciences is similar to and different from that done in the older human studies or humanities. Both sets of disciplines are primarily concerned with the qualitative analysis of textual material derived from human agents. However, there are also significant differences. The humanities that offered hermeneutics its challenge consists of texts, which are usually constructed self-consciously for a public purpose and at a historical distance from the analyst. The fact that the contemporary analyst is still working with the old text also speaks to its longevity—it has stood the test of time. Thus, for example the historian today may be faced with interpreting a text written in, and recording events happening in, the middle ages. Today's literary theorist can be trying to make sense of a sonnet written self-consciously as a piece of art by Shakespeare in the 16th century.

By contrast, the human science health researcher today enlists participants in a study on their experience of a chronic health condition. The researcher talks to the participant/patient in real time. The patient attempts to convey to the researcher what it is like for them to be ill. The researcher records and transcribes the resultant conversation and then analyses the subsequent transcript.

The human science researcher is looking at a text but it seems to me that that text is rather different from that more usually looked at by the literary theorist or historian. The text is explicitly about the person's personal experience; it has not been self-consciously produced as a public document and it would not exist if it were not for the researcher's invitation. It is likely to be fleeting in terms of its life expectancy and there is a lack of historical or other distance between author and "reader" (interpreter).

I am here of course making a contrast between typical cases. Some of the documents examined by some researchers in the humanities will be personal documents not intended for public display. Sometimes a literary critic will analyse a poem written by a contemporary. Some human science researchers analyse literary texts. And so on. Thus, distinctions are fuzzy rather than hard and fast. However, I think the general thrust of the contrast holds true.

I think there is considerable scope for developing, and extending hermeneutic theory to help its application to the activities of researchers in the human sciences I am referring to above. Actually, some of the potential for this development already lies in some of the writings of the key theorists themselves. Thus, it is extremely interesting to look again at some of the primary texts in hermeneutics and see how they speak to qualitative research studies in psychology, health and education rather than to history and aesthetics and law.

Therefore, in the next part of the paper, I will examine some ideas in the hermeneutics writings in relation to human science research. Afterwards I will pick these ideas up and think of them in relation to some of my own empirical work.

Let us begin with an intellectual tussle that occurred between two major hermeneutic writers, Schleiermacher and Gadamer, over the nature of the hermeneutic process.

A conversation between Schleiermacher and Gadamer

Schleiermacher (1998) suggested that reading a text involved a dual process, a parallel concern with language and with the author, with what he described as "grammatical interpretation" and "psychological interpretation":

> As every utterance has a dual relationship, to the totality of language and to the whole thought of its originator, then all understanding also consists of the two moments, of understanding the utterance as derived from language, and as a fact in the thinker ... Every person is on the one hand a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their discourse can only be understood via the totality of language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their discourse is only one act of this spirit of connection with the other acts. (pp. 8–9)

For Schleiermacher, interpretation is not a matter of following mechanical rules. Rather it is a craft or art involving the combination of a range of skills, including intuition. Part of the aim of the interpretative process is to understand the writer as well as the text and Schleiermacher suggested that if one has engaged in a detailed comprehensive holistic analysis, one can end up with "an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself".

Gadamer (1990) is critical of what he describes as Schleiermacher's psychologizing, arguing that when reading a text we are not concerned with the intention of the author but with the meaning content in the material itself:

> Understanding means primarily to understand the content of what is being said and only secondarily to isolate and understand another's meaning as such (p. 294).

Gadamer is also sceptical of the possibility of recreating the intention of the author because of the historical gap. Thus, interpretation is a dialogue between past and present:

> The essential nature of the historical spirit consists not in the restoration of the past but in thoughtful meditation with contemporary life (pp. 168–169).

The aim should not be to relive the past but rather learn anew from it in the light of the present.

I think Gadamer is astute, for example, when thinking about the response to a piece of art or a literary text. So when I read or attend a performance of a play by Shakespeare, the meaning or "truth" of the piece does not primarily lie in the playwright's intention but rather in the impact of the themes of the play on me living at this point in time. Shakespeare is classically renewed and recreated every time it is performed and its essential meaning cannot be determined in an intention of the author.

However, when it comes to the analysis of texts derived from participants in current human science research projects, to me Schleiermacher suddenly sounds contemporary. He is attempting a holistic analysis of the interpretative process. The text is determined both by the linguistic community the writer is socialized into but also by the individual work the individual does with the language. Thus, Schleiermacher bridges the essentialist and discursive divide, which bedevils so much writing in the social sciences.

Moreover, I have to say I feel in agreement with Schleiermacher that when I read a transcript from a patient with a chronic health condition, I am trying to make sense of the words used but I am also trying to make sense of the person who has said those words. In this case we tend to assume that what the participant says is at least in part a reflection of what he/she thinks about the topic we have raised and which is also of existential moment to the person.

Admittedly, that relationship is not entirely straightforward, e.g. there may be difficulties and resistances in expression, but nonetheless, there is a relationship. Thus, here the separation between what the author intended and what the work means may make less sense. A part of the truth or meaning of a statement is contained in, and consonant with, what the person is intending to tell me about the experience they are undergoing.

Again sounding modern, Schleiermacher indicates that what enables us to make sense of another person through what would today be called "intersubjectivity":

> . . . depends on the fact that every person, besides being an individual themself, has a receptivity for all other people. But this itself seems only to rest on the fact that everyone carries a minimum of everyone else within themself, and divination is consequently excited by comparison with oneself (pp. 92–93).

Therefore, the participant, like me, is a unique individual worthy of an idiographic, holistic analysis. At the same time, however, there is the possibility of bridging the divide between selves because we are all at the same time part of a larger whole, a collectivity that allows the possibility of mutual understanding.

The hermeneutic circle: part and whole

The hermeneutic circle is perhaps the most resonant idea in hermeneutic theory and argues for the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a whole series of levels. To understand the part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the part. While this has been criticized from a logical perspective because of its inherent circularity, analytically in terms of describing the process of interpretation it seems potent. As suggested, the part and the whole that can be considered in the relationship are multifarious, among the possibilities:

The part	*The whole*
The single word	The sentence in which the word is embedded
The single extract	The complete text
The particular text	The complete oeuvre
The single episode	The complete life

Clearly part of the attractiveness of the hermeneutic circle is that is speaks to a non-linear style of analysis, and to the possibility of constantly digging deeper with ones interpretation. Of course, one has to balance this with a large dose of pragmatism; the final interpretation may never be reached as the circle could theoretically go on forever. Thus, the skill is in deciding when to come out of the circle and commit oneself to speaking or writing, to deciding that one has an interpretation that is good enough.

Another hermeneutic circle: the dynamic between researcher and participant

The hermeneutic circle above describes the relationship between different aspects of the object the interpreter is interpreting. An equally important circle, though less comprehensively discussed in the classic texts, describes the relationship between the interpreter and that object of interpretation.

I start where I am at one point on the circle, caught up in my concerns, influenced by my preconceptions, shaped by my experience and expertise. In moving from this position, I attempt to either bracket or at least acknowledge my preconceptions before I go round to an encounter with a research participant at the other side of the circle. Whatever my previous concerns or positions, I have moved from a point where I am the focus to one where the participant is the focus as I attend closely to the participant's story, facilitate the participant uncovering his/her experience. This requires an intense attentiveness to and engagement with the participant as he/she speaks. Of course, this is only a simplified version of what is a complex dynamic process and this is not the place to spell out those complexities. For example, see Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom (2001) for more on the qualities of openness required here.

Having concluded the conversation, I continue the journey round the circle back to where I started. So I return home to analyze the material I collected from the perspective I started from, influenced by my prior conceptions and experience. However, I am also irretrievably changed because of the encounter with the new, my participant and his/her account. Then I engage in movement round a virtual mini-circle where, in my home location, I mentally take on again a conversation with my participant, as I rehear his/her story, ask questions of it, try to make sense of it. Indeed the various actions inherent in the hermeneutic circle between part and whole, as outlined in the previous section, take place in this cognitive space at home base.

Moreover, I may later even choose to go round the research relationship circle again, to literally revisit the participant and engage in another conversation with them about my interpretation—to have a literal interpretative dialogue about my virtual interpretative dialogue.

Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1990) were both particularly concerned with one aspect of this process, the role of presuppositions in interpretation. Let us start with Heidegger:

> Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us (pp. 191–192).

Thus, the reader, analyst or listener brings their fore-conception to the encounter and cannot help but look at the new stimulus in the light of their own prior experience. Heidegger's account has been drawn on to invoke a particular stance to the researcher's position in human inquiry where one articulates one's preconceptions or starting position at the beginning of a paper and this will, therefore, allow the reader to understand the interpretative account which follows.

However look at what Heidegger goes on to say:

> Our first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves (p. 195).

The fore structure is always there but it in fact is in danger of presenting an obstacle to interpretation. Therefore, priority should be given to the new object rather than to ones preconceptions. In addition, note the sequence. Here the suggestion seems to be that one makes sense of these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. In other words while fore-structure may ontologically precede encounter with "the things", understanding may work the other way, from "the thing" to the fore-structure. When encountering a text, I do not necessarily know which part of my fore-structure is relevant. Having engaged with the text, I may be in a better position to know what my fore-structure is.

Gadamer's analysis of the relation between the fore-structure and the new object echoes Heidegger:

> It is necessary to keep one's gazes fixed on the things throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself. A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text ... Working out this fore-projection which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there (1990, p. 267).

Rather than putting ones preconceptions upfront before doing interpretation, one may only get to know what the preconceptions (or at least some of them) are once the interpretation is underway. One may only come to know what ones assumptions are when engaging closely with the object in front of one.

However, this is itself a dynamic process:

> Every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it

> becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation (p. 267).

Therefore, in practice, one may only begin to see some of one's fore-understandings as one endeavours to make sense of what this person is saying. However, that awareness of the fore-understandings may itself be fleeting as the process of interpretation changes the fore-understandings to new ones.

The appearing

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) articulates the case for a hermeneutic phenomenology, derived from an etymological definition of the word phenomenology itself. He argues the word is made up of two parts derived from the Greek "phenomenon" and "logos". Phenomenon can be translated as "show" or "appear". However, this immediately gets into a question of interpretation! To say phenomenology is about the appearance of something suggests a number of different possibilities, e.g. (1) the thing at the surface as opposed to something deeper beneath the surface; (2) another thing that resembles but which is different from this thing; (3) something attending, as in a person arriving at a function.

Heiddeger carefully dissects the various meanings that can appertain to appearance in order to show how he interprets the "appearance" of phenomenology. In the active, verb form particularly, to say something appears suggests it is entering a new state, as it is coming forth, presenting itself to us, in contrast to a previous state where it was not present. This is how Heiddeger reads phenomenology that is, therefore, concerned with the thing as it shows itself, as it is brought to light:

> Manifestly it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all; it is something that lies hidden in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself but at the same time it is something that belongs to what this shows itself and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground (p. 59).

Heidegger's phenomenology is concerned with examining something usually latent as it emerges from underneath into the light. However, it is also interested in examining the manifest thing that appears at the surface as this is integrally connected with the deeper latent form—which it is, therefore, both part of and apart from.

Logos can be variously translated as e.g.: discourse, reason, judgement and so is even harder to pin down precisely. However, it seems fair to say that while phenomenon seems primarily perceptual, logos is primarily analytical. Therefore, the aim of this type of phenomenology is to examine the thing itself as it appears to show itself but analytic work/reason may be required to facilitate and to help grasp the showing. The phenomenon appears but the phenomenologist can help make sense of the appearing. This microanalysis of the terms involved therefore takes Heidegger down the hermeneutic road, as Moran (2000) points out:

> Phenomenology is seeking after a meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity's mode of appearing. In that case the proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of a text and for this reason Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics. How things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied. The things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing (p. 229).

Dynamics

The metaphors of movement invoked in much of the discussion of hermeneutics (circling, appearing etc) work so well for me because they point to interpretation as a dynamic rather than a linear or static process. They also suggest the energizing potentiality of qualitative analysis. Yes, hermeneutic activity is demanding, keeps you on your toes; but with the right material and the right spirit, it can also be exhilarating. Duke (1977) speaks to some of this:

> It is the motion in hermeneutics which in the final analysis makes it an art. Focusing upon a text the interpreter is suspended between its universal and particular aspects. Hermeneutics requires agility, an ability to weave from grammatical to psychological side and from comparative to divinatory method. Furthermore interpretation involves constant movement back and forth, for it is always open to revision and supplementation. Since the life of the language and the life of the person form an infinite horizon, perfect understanding is an ideal which is ever approximated but never attained (p. 6).

I think that this is a beautiful and pithy passage. The only thing I would take issue with or problematize is the notion that this "makes it an art". I do not disagree with that but would say that, for me, the

qualities invoked can also be described as making it a "science"!

In practice: identity, pregnancy and transition to motherhood

I will now look at some of my empirical work through the lens of the hermeneutic ideas discussed above. This is itself an interesting dialogue between old and new. When thinking through these theoretical ideas they brought to mind again some data I had collected and analysed previously. That data were from a project on identity change during the transition to motherhood (Smith, 1994, 1999). So, in a sense, that old work of mine came to life again, shone again with a new brightness, as a result of reading the hermeneutic ideas. Interesting then that the *old* old (hermeneutics) reinvigorated the *new* old (my research project).

The study explored women's experience of pregnancy and transition to motherhood and the impact of the transition on the woman's self and identity. One context for the research was that most existing research was quantitative and medicalized, emphasizing problems associated with pregnancy. In contrast to this, I wished to conduct a study concerned with the lived experience of what is for most women a positive transition.

My study was qualitative and longitudinal, I saw each woman four times, in early, mid and late pregnancy and once about five months after the birth of her child. I collected a range of pieces of data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at each visit. In between, they kept a diary on the process and they wrote some other personal accounts at various times. For each woman I had approximately 20 data points. The data was analysed within case before moving to a cross-case analysis.

Angela

Here I will show a small part of the data from one woman. At the time of the study, Angela is aged 25 and works as a bank clerk (details have been changed to protect her confidentiality). To allow you to get some sense of the experience of getting to know Angela that I had when reading her material, Table I shows a sequence of material from her diary. The sequence begins with some short extracts and this is followed by two almost complete extracts.

Levels of interpretation

There is some early general talk about her baby and then considerable engagement with events happening for the other couple and she reflects on this in relation to her own pregnancy. Now let us do some closer hermeneutics and link it to the ideas presented earlier in the paper. The local analysis of the material presented here was that which I produced at the time. The hermeneutics helps me understand how the analytic process worked.

As I was reading the beginning of the last extract, "the baby is lovely", something happened to me. The phrase stood out, stuck with me. Actually, it seems to be quite ordinary, benign but almost clichéd. So why did it affect me? Let us look more closely.

Grammatical and psychological interpretation

The phrase has anaphoric ambiguity. Whose baby is lovely? Angela's or the neighbour's? It may seem that the obvious reading is that "the baby is lovely" is referring to her neighbour's baby but there is actually evidence pointing both ways.

Neighbour's

This reading would pick up on the excitement expressed in the previous entry around the birth of the neighbour's child and suggest Angela is talking about having seen that recently born baby.

Angela's

A sequence of references to *the baby* through the diary entries forms a set, so that when we read, "the baby is lovely", *the* already signals Angela's. In contrast, her neighbour's baby is referred to in close proximity as *her baby* twice. Therefore, a code emerges the = Angela's, her = the neighbour's. Further, in an extract a little earlier, Angela saw her

Table I. Extracts from Angela's diary

I feel very different toward the baby now. (20 weeks)
I have not had a scan yet, so I feel a little apprehensive as to whether the baby is developing properly. (22 weeks)
We can now see the baby moving. (26 weeks)
The neighbour over the road had her baby this morning. Her husband came to see us at lunch time to tell us. . . . I can't wait to see the baby. I even feel slightly envious that she has had her baby and I have got to wait another 12 weeks. (28 weeks)
The baby is lovely. I saw her on Monday and Sara came home from hospital on Thursday. They are coping very well and are loving every minute of it. It is amazing how many people who live around us have been to see the baby and given gifts. I really feel maternal when I hold the baby. It is so strange to feel this constant happiness and excitement everybody around me has noticed the difference. They all say that I am more laid back and agreeable than I used to be. (29 weeks)

baby on a scan and so it is now plausible that she refers again to its appearance.

Therefore, I would say there is, in this case, plausible evidence for either reading. One might say that what I was doing when I was doing this initial analysis represents a form of Schleiermacher's grammatical interpretation and while the grammatical interpretation points to the ambiguity and let us spell it out, it does not really help us do the disambiguating.

Therefore, it is helpful to turn to a psychological interpretation and I see this, as did Schleiermacher, as being complementary, not in opposition. Psychologically, we can talk about some identity slippage happening during Angela's pregnancy, as she is absorbed both by her own and her friend's pregnancy:

- Angela feels she shares something experientially with her pregnant neighbour.
- The expression of pleasure of the other couple parallels her own with her husband.
- Perhaps this propensity for psychological convergence provides important psychosocial preparation for Angela, as she becomes a mother.
- In addition, it may be that the ambiguity signifies or captures in some way that convergence- Angela is actually thinking about both babies at the same time.

My reading of what is going on is that the ambiguity inherent in the phrase "the baby is lovely" actually reflects some opening up of identity boundaries. Increasingly caught up in the pregnancy project of both herself and her neighbour, her attention shifts rapidly between the two sites. Therefore, the ambiguity makes sense because Angela is in fact referring to both babies.

I think this is, therefore, a good illustration of Schleiermacher's point. There is something important going on here linguistically *and* psychologically. They complement each other and they should not be separated out. When analyzing the language, I am also analyzing the person. My analysis of the person helps make sense of my analysis of the language.

Part and whole

We can parse the process again, in terms of the hermeneutic circle. So taking the single extract "the baby is lovely" again, here we have a part. We interpret it in relation to a series of concentric circles, which offer the whole, or rather a series of wholes:

- The single diary extract
- The sequence of diary extracts
- Other things we know of Angela

Thus reading the sentence within its extract gives us more information. Then looking at the sentence within the larger sequence of diary extracts informs our reading. Finally, we can draw on other knowledge we have acquired about Angela during the project which helps illuminate this particular sentence. For example, it is informative that when interviewed at three months pregnant Angela described herself as rather cold towards pregnancy and babies. This adds force to the reading that contact with the pregnant neighbour has helped her engagement with the mothering identity. The series of wholes illuminate the part and help the meaning to shine forth from it. Ambiguity in the part helps us see something going on in the whole—a sort of identity slippage in Angela.

Going round the circle again: extending the conversation

I went back to Angela five months after the birth, to talk about her account of pregnancy. This was not "member validation" but rather an extension of the interpretative process through dialogically "digging more deeply" (Mulkay, 1985, p. 76). Most interpretative dialogues are virtual, in our heads, even in Gadamer, the lover of conversation. Here is a literal version: a conversation about a conversation.

First Angela was reminded of what she had written, without my giving her any of my own analytic interpretations. Angela responded:

> Every time I thought 'I don't know what I'm going to do', I could go over there and that could be my baby for ten minutes, that's how I felt, that if I picked her up she was mine for a little while, and it helped me to come to terms with what it was really like. . . . I then realized that yeah, it must be an ordeal to go through for that to be able to result, and so I could understand things better and then I began to unwind.

This confirms that contact with friend/baby helps her cope with difficulties of pregnancy. There is fluid ownership of the child. It can become hers and this helps with the process.

I then read out my own provisional interpretation, along the lines presented above and I asked Angela for her reaction:

> Now you've read it out, anyone would assume I was talking about my own . . . I didn't think of it as being anyone else's when I picked it up. They were completely out of the picture . . . It was just a baby that could so easily have been mine . . . I felt an

instant attraction to the baby and I think that I could have done that to any baby.

So here, we have a claim from Angela herself that is even stronger than the one I was making. Not only is ownership fluid, it is almost as though any child is for her. Therefore, "the baby is lovely" is a universal referent—all babies are lovely and all babies are hers.

This is clearly a major rite of passage for Angela given her previous indifferent or detached attitude. It also seems to represent a clear example of the symbiotic nature of identity roles. Preparation for becoming a mother is aided by contact with a woman more advanced in pregnancy. Holding this other newborn baby acts as a rehearsal for her own mothering. So strong is the connection, it is as though this other child and any other becomes her own, and this is neatly captured in the ambiguities of the diary.

This was powerful as a research process. I had produced an analysis that might seem contentious. Going back to the woman herself, my analysis actually becomes somewhat conservative when set against the woman's own.

The fleeting fore-understanding

Now let us look at what was happening in the project in terms of fore-understandings, as discussed by Heidegger and Gadamer.

When I began the project, I had an interest in identity and so became curious about how pregnancy might affect identity. In order to keep the project open, I had a loosely structured interview/diary guide. During the course of the project, the women talked a lot about their relationships with significant others—partner, mother, pregnant friends. Therefore, they brought this into the project. This is to such an extent that in the end I theorized the material in terms of the relational self: women use relations with key others to help prepare for becoming a new person, a mother (Smith, 1999).

That in a sense can be described as the natural history of the analysis. More locally, during the course of the analysis I realized that my existing notion of identity had been, in one sense, individualistic. Partly influenced by the contemporary philosophy literature I saw pregnancy as representing a metamorphosis, where one identity becomes two. Nevertheless, I had not seen this operating in the wider context—a nexus of cross cutting relationships which influence the process. Therefore, my interview schedule had not had questions about social relations with others. I had been so preoccupied with the woman's relation with herself!

However, importantly, I would not have been able to articulate this fore-understanding before talking to the women. Therefore, illustrating Heidegger and Gadamer's point, here is an example of where a fore-understanding lay pretty deep, dormant, implicit. Confronting the new, the strange, the other, this new data forced a collision of fore-understanding and material not fitting with it and, as a result of the conflict, the fore-understanding dramatically came alive, became apparent.

However, the very confrontation and the process of recognition changed the fore-understanding, maybe irreversibly. Suddenly I could see my pre-conception and see, starkly, that it did not fit what was happening now and how the women were talking and thinking. Therefore, this experience changed my fore-understanding. I now had a new fore-understanding, which included a much more social picture of identity development.

Therefore, an interesting question is, at what point would it have actually been possible to pin point that more individualistic fore-understanding, articulate it as one actually held by me at the time? It could not have been before the project—I was not aware of it. It could not have been after the project—I no longer had it. Indeed, it disappeared almost as soon as it was recognized, replaced by a new one, informed by the new experience. The opportunity for me to have said "Oh yes my fore-understanding of identity is quite individualistic" was actually incredibly fleeting.

The appearing

Finally, I think we also have in this piece of analysis a nice instance of Heidegger's "appearing". "The baby is lovely" is at the surface, is the manifest, the appearance. Notionally it is rather a saccharine, thin, clichéd remark but when I read it, I felt something, felt that something else was going on. This led me to dig deeper. As a result of the process of interpretation, through doing the thinking, digging, connecting, then the latent meaning appears and connects with the manifest. We have come to see that the statement that seemed quite thin is actually powerful, pivotal and incredibly illuminating. Indeed, one can say that the "meaning" of the phrase is in the appearance and in the appearing.

Conclusion

I hope I have provided an illustration of how contemporary human sciences and health research connects with and can usefully draw on hermeneutics and sometimes in a way which can help enliven the hermeneutic literature as well. Thus, for example, by changing the site of attention from the

humanities to the human sciences, I have suggested that the ideas of Schleiermacher, which were contested by Gadamer suddenly, sound fresh, contemporary and useful. The hermeneutic ideas and my research project themselves form a hermeneutic circle. The theory helped me to see more clearly what was happening in my research project, and my research project helped me to see more clearly what was going on in the theory. I hope readers too have felt they could join in that circle for a while.

I am left feeling there is still a gap, however: When I try to make sense of this person saying this thing, what is actually happening? Interpretation is a mystery, invokes a sense of wonder and I'm not sure the hermeneutic theory has got near to explaining or saying all there is to say about that mysterious process. Partly because the type of encounter envisaged by hermeneutics was different, when it comes to explaining what is happening when one person tries to make sense of what another person is saying, I would suggest there is still a great deal that remains unknown.

Therefore, I would offer a suggestion for going the other way round this particular hermeneutic circle. I think there would be considerable value in a programme of qualitative empirical human science research focused on the interpretation process. So what sort of questions do I have in mind for this research project? Think about my reaction to Angela writing, "the baby is lovely". What triggers my response to that phrase? How can we describe what my response is? What guides the interpretative search? The analysis would attempt to document, explore and make sense of this sort of process. Therefore, what I am proposing is a different type of project linking hermeneutics and the human sciences. So far, the direction has tended to be using the hermeneutics to make sense of the human sciences. Here is the possibility of working the other way—using the human sciences to help make sense of, and extend, the hermeneutics.

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Note

1. I am being careful to delineate a definition for the human sciences as I am considering them here because the term is not always used in the same way.

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