
Guest Editorial:

Journal of Applied Hermeneutics
ISSN: 1927-4416
April 16, 2024
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DOI: 10.55016/ojs/jah.v2024i2024.79214

How Can We Know When the Hermeneutics of Suspicion Becomes Suspect?

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Introductory Caveat

. . . that I feel slightly responsible in a very small way for the current scattershotness. as if I have failed to show the strong and deep and profound arcs of reliance and kinships and hard work that underwrite my own work...I've become too offhanded, and the giddy surface charm of my own writing –the trick itself --has taken too much hold.

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“This image, sent to us by Techdirt reader [techinabox](https://www.techdirt.com/user/techinabox/techinabox) shows that not much has changed over the last 100 years.”

(Tim Cushing, 2014, from an online article entitled “Technology Doesn't Make Us Less Social; It Just Changes the Way We Socialize,” n.p.)

It is now 10 years on from Tim Cushing’s post above, nowhere near the time gap shown in the two photos sent by Techdirt. Interesting, compelling, how they – the photo and Cushing’s article -- are readable now in a way that isn’t quite how they was readable in 2014, and how this shadow cannot be leapt over. This is *precisely* both the odd and utterly commonplace reality that hermeneutics placed at the center of our being human.

It makes slightly suspect my own contemporary confidences and worries, seeing my eldest grandson with phone in hand, just over two years old, hearing his parents' hesitations and attempts to measure out such things well.

Construction equipment videos.

But meanwhile, the road down from their place is being dug up as I write. This sort of lovely, simply, almost sentimental spellbind, too, is part of this world and its myriad lives.



The life world tempts into complacency and “isn’t he cute” platitudes and talk of “ah, well, boys, eh?” and other forms of cooing banality.

We cannot know in advance whether the hermeneutics of suspicion (Gadamer, 1984) regarding the numbing complacencies of the life-world has itself become suspect. It always must work itself out against the case it encounters. And what gets worked out is both what is going on in the case *and* the nature and limits, presumptions, and prejudices of my own ability to case it out.

And this working out will be read and re-read and have to be worked out all over again as time works its ways.

I suggest that a bloodline of the hermeneutics of suspicion has bled into our contemporary circumstances wherein fakery is proven fake, where opine or feeling becomes enough, where doubt has become a plaything to tease away any sense of something perhaps pertaining. We can, of course, be suspicious of anyone who says that Pine Martens are not real, that eclipses are a political ploy, that forecasts of drought on the prairies are government's attempt to control something-or-other. It has become clownishly simple. I remember a familiar colleague at conferences would blurt "well, let's deconstruct *that*," as if that were some trump card (I use this terminology on purpose), and his work were now done. Meanwhile, the widely broadcast and nauseatingly unexamined talk of silos and bubbles already betrays that contemporary suspicion cocoons itself right back into precisely the comforts of the unsuspected.

Is this the hermeneutics of suspicion simply run amok? Or come, perhaps, to some odd, unintended fruition? The whirlwinds of fragmented and siloed scattershots are all around us, now, and they have a tragic parallel to the scattershotness of matters ecological. Of suspicions of mining the Eastern Slopes. Of species shifts outside my window and on my walks with my grandsons...to plant peas under the shifting skies and winds.

We are fragile things and easily fraught. We are susceptible to inflammations that presume that there is no work that can be done to lessen our burdens, to comfort us, to...that it is caveats all the way up and down the spine, and that, therefore, all we can do is revel and go ahead and be the next one with matches, snarking at every turn, feeling energized and alive at the very act of lividness.

Or turn away and hide away. When you sidle up against a trickster, remember that you can easily be outplayed, spent, and exhausted and scattered at the edges of titillation itself.

I'll ask the unanswerable. What is suspicion *for*? What good is it? Should you suspect me for suggesting that it is not an end in itself?

A little email scree:

. . .sad personal matter. terrible consequence of post-modern post-truth, meant to free us from the regnant presumptions of grand narratives, but releasing us into nothing more than impotent personal narratives which are, as you said, algorithmically manipulatable by a *terribly* grand, unspoken narrative force, that all is dark and hidden and any hint of Occam's razor is suspect. It *feels* liberating. I check my own books on Amazon and then go to an American political statistics site that is *instantly* full of ads for my books.

Meanwhile, a small tale. Gail mentioned how, with our son, she had learned all the names of all the dinosaurs. But now it has come to nothing. Now she has to learn about skid steers and forklifts and excavators and so on. Cooing smiles and affections all 'round, unsuspect.

I can hear the rattling of critical-post-theory-narrative swords in the distance, coming this way.

References

Gadamer, H.-G. (1984). The hermeneutics of suspicion. *Man and World*, 17(3/4), 313-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01250456>