

Constance School

Glossary of Terms

Reader's response (Wirkung): is the reaction of individual, but also „collective“ readers to literary texts. Reception theory assumes that each text is an offer to the reader giving them material which has to be (individually) put together in coherent order by the readers themselves. This construction of meaning by the reader is performed at every encounter with the text. It is individual for every period and every person. The reader is also often unconscious about this activity and tends to mistake it for a quality of the text itself.

Fusion of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung): originating in the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the term refers to constant change of interpretations in time. When reading, the horizon of the reader given by the period they live in must fuse with the horizon of the text (from the past) in order to make understanding possible. Logically, however, understanding cannot be “eternal”, but always temporal.

Horizon of expectation (Erwartungshorizont): is the sum of general notions the reader carries in mind when faced with the literary text. By means of a kind of hermeneutic circle, the general horizon of expectation is continuously specified in the course of reading. At the same time, however, the Constance School denies the existence of a substance of meaning of a text this hermeneutic process could arrive at. Instead, it emphasizes the process of concretizing the meaning of the text by the reader (as a way of arriving at deeper self-knowledge or a way of getting rid of one's preconceptions or prejudices).

Implied reader (impliziter Leser): is not the real reader! Much rather, it refers to the role of the reader as managed by structures in the literary text. It attempts to capture what the text makes the reader do when reading. Thus, it does not only involve the structures in the text, but – in a broader sense – the communication patterns (Iser) between text and reader. It denotes the (largely predictable) projection of text structures in the reader's horizon of expectation

producing meaning – partly individual, partly predictable.

Indeterminacy (Unbestimmtheit), and **gap/blank** (Leerstelle), and **concretization**: the scholars of the Constance School assume that every literary text is incomplete, it is not fully determined. It consists of a few elements we might see as islands in a vast sea of meaning. The rest are gaps, or blanks, as Iser puts it. The reader has to – as they want to understand, they want meaning – concretize the links between the elements of meaning, emphasizing some possibilities and neglecting or ignoring others. Thus, meaning is produced by the reader out of indeterminate texts.