The Significance of the Phenomenology of
Written Discourse for Hermeneutics

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Introduction

The thesis of this paper is that the struggle about validation and objectivity in text hermeneutics, which will be outlined in Section 1, can be brought to an end with the aid of a precise phenomenological analysis of the communication patterns which are characteristic for written discourse. Section 2 has the preparatory function of determining the methodological root problem of the struggle in hermeneutics. Section 3 deals with the difference between the communication patterns in oral and written discourse and some specific characteristics of the latter, which are of interest for methodological reasons. Section 4 applies the results of Section 3 to the methodological root problem, identified in Section 2. It will be shown that the claim for objectivity and validity in text hermeneutics is a justifiable claim and that all arguments against it are either based on incomplete descriptions or blur the difference between oral and written discourse in general.

The Context of the Problem

A general answer to the question "What is hermeneutics?" is difficult. In one group of books and articles "hermeneutics" is understood as one part of the philological method. The other part is philological and historical critique. In another group "hermeneutics" is considered to be a general theory of understanding and as such the object of philosophical investigations in a variety of philosophical methods: phenomenology, dialectic, transcendental reflections in

Kant's style, and the genuine type of philosophical hermeneutics which has been developed by Heidegger and his school,[1] Seen from the viewpoint of the older, methodical philological hermeneutics this new treatment of hermeneutics in the second half of the twentieth century is confusing—even embarrassing—for the following three reasons:

1. The fact that hermeneutics and critique are inseparable aspects of the philological-historical method is neglected.

2. The second canon of hermeneutics, the canon of the whole and the parts, leading into the famous "hermeneutical circle," is considered to be the more essential one.[2] The first canon, which demands that a text has to be understood from its own context and not from that of the interpreter, is not even mentioned as a basic canon, although various formulations of methodical viewpoints which have been derived from this canon are the target of criticism.[3] The order is exactly the reverse in the philological approach, where it is the first canon which provides the methodical and critical restrictions for projections about signification which develop following the second canon and where it is the first canon which connects hermeneutics with critique.

3. There is a tendency to treat various other forms of methodical and

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[1] The reader who is interested in bibliographical material can check T.M. Seebohm, "The Problem of Hermeneutics in Recent Anglo-American Literature," Parts I and II, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 10, pp. 180-197, 263-275.

[2] The most extensive bibliography and collection of historical material about the two canons are given by E. Betti, *Allgemeine Auslegungslehre als Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*, (Tübingen, 1967), p. 216 ff. Betti, following Schleiermacher, lists the critical canon as the first canon and the canon of the whole and the parts as second canon. In the survey mentioned in note 1, I listed the canon of the whole and the parts as the first, because this canon is the only one mentioned in the recent literature in English.

[3] H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: 1975), p. 356; P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, (Fort Worth, Texas), 1976, pp. 92-93.

premethodical understanding, such as psychoanalysis, ideology critique, and even phronesis under the heading "hermeneutics." Seen from the viewpoint of the philological-historical method, such extensions are either dubious or useless metaphors.

For philology and history as a research activity, philosophical hermeneutics is an exuberance without real practical value, and sometimes it is even dangerous. Both disciplines are, however, not able to provide arguments in their defense. Philosophical hermeneutics has thematized a level in the problem of understanding which is, according to conscious methodologists, presupposed by the method.[4]

The immediate subject matters of the method are documents and traces. The task is to develop an objective and correct understanding of these objects, i.e. to remove misunderstanding and not-understanding. The method presupposes that languages are known and can be learned in the fourfold aspects of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, independently from the method. The method presupposes, furthermore, that documents and traces (although not necessarily the ones which need extensive investigations) are already understood in the premethodical realm of the living tradition, i.e., that it is known what it means to understand documents, and that some documents are understood. The methodical approach presupposes the living tradition because it is the realm in which unmethodical understanding produces a steadily growing realm of misunderstood documents and documents which are no longer understood at all. It is in the process of unmethodical understanding that the possible tasks for the methodical understanding are produced.

Methodologists of the nineteenth century were well aware of this situation. In their terminology it holds first that the general realm which has to be presupposed is the realm of all elocutions, i.e. interpretations in the sense of

Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. Regarding the process of understanding, in general, regardless whether methodical or not, one has to distinguish between the *elocutio* or *interpretatio* of the text about a certain subject matter and the *elocutio* or *interpretatio* given by some interpreter about the text and what the text wants to say. The latter is called *explicatio*, its most simple form would be a commentary on the text. The mediating factor between *interpretatio* (1) and *interpretatio* (3) is *interpretatio* (2), which is *translatio* in the broadest sense, i.e., including the translation from one language into the other as a special case as well as the translatio as the mediating activity which keeps a tradition alive. The whole structure,

| interpretatio (1) | interpretatio (2) | interpretatio (3) |
| elocutio (1) | translatio | elocutio qua explicatio, |

is a specific structure of communication through language which occurs if there is written speech. Written speeches as texts belong to the realm of *elocutio* (1). Speeches, referring to texts, be they written or oral, belong to the realm of *elocutio* (2). The method refers to the mediating process of *interpretatio* (2) alone, i.e. to *translatio*. Hence it presupposes the general structures of communication in written speech, which is, in turn, embedded in the general structure of as a means of communication.[5]

The new philosophical literature about hermeneutics develops its conceptions of hermeneutics as an analysis of living literal tradition in general, i.e. includes the aspects in the threefold appearance of *interpretatio*, which are not considered by the methodologists, and conflates, in the last instance, the general theory of understanding and hermeneutics with a general theory of language.

[4] A. Boeckh, *On Interpretation and Criticism*, (Norman: 1968), pp. 46, 49.
[5] Boeckh, 1.c. pp. 47-48.

Regarding methods and methodology the following positions over and against the traditional hermeneutics can be developed:

A. The main focus is the relation between the premethodical realm of a living tradition and the method. The two possible positions are:

1. The method is considered to be an achievement. The task is to provide a critical justification of its validity. This will be the position of this essay.

2. The method is considered to be a degenerated form of understanding. Understanding in a living tradition is the authentic form of understanding. The claim for validity and validating procedures maintained by the method has to be rejected.

B. Since the living tradition belongs to the lifeworld and a manifold of methods can be developed here, the philological method is not the only method of understanding. A general hermeneutics has to consider them all. Two alternatives under this viewpoint are:

1. The development of a general hermeneutics which includes all dimensions of methodical understanding in one system. The philological method has a legitimate place in this system and is methodologically prior to all others.

2. The claim is that other methods lead far beyond the philological-historical method and offer a more scientific and deeper understanding. The philological approach has to be criticized for its methodological inconsistencies.

The Need for a Phenomenology of Communication

The following approach to the type of communication which takes place in philological-historical interpretations and its presuppositions will be phenomenological in the Husserlian sense. It can be admitted that the approach of positive phenomenology has been criticized by modern philosophical hermeneutics. This critique and its possible refutation is not the concern of this

paper. What has been said about hermeneutics by authors who are more or less representative of philosophical hermeneutics can be understood, at least in part, as positive phenomenological analysis and can be criticized as such. It is necessary for present purposes, to bracket the deeper concern of philosophical hermeneutics about "being," "truth," and "authenticity." What is left can be used either as an element of positive phenomenological analysis or as descriptions which have to be corrected or completed by such an analysis.

Phenomenological investigations about methods in general thematize three constitutive aspects. *(I)* Every methodical approach is one-sidedly founded in a specific premethodical realm which already has its own procedures for making something evident. The structure of these procedures determine the possibilities of the method. (2) Every method implies one or more idealizations. To characterize a method means first of all to determine the idealizations it implies. (3) Every method leads to some abstractive reduction. Geometry can serve as an example: (a) The premethodical realm is the realm of visible objects. It is possible to distinguish in this realm different shapes of objects and to classify them as curved, straight, having angles or not. (b) We have a method at the very moment in which some of these objects are defined in terms of idealizations, e.g. "a straight line is the shortest connection between two points." Such idealizations cannot be represented in the premethodical realm in a perfect fashion, (c) Given these idealizations the discipline is constituted as the discipline of a realm which is the result of abstracting from all properties of corresponding objects, given in the premethodical realm, which cannot be explicated in terms of the idealization.

Note that (2) and (3) imply each other. Note furthermore that it is not necessary for a method that all of its objects can be constructed with the aid of the basic idealizations. In this case one has a discipline which can be axiomatized and formalized. It is sufficient for a discipline to be able to subsume the subject

matters of the premethodical realm in some way. Thus, in the general concept of experimentation, we have the probably never fulfilled idealization of the determination of all preconditions. A variety of materials can be subsumed under this ideal. The methodical idealizations of the philological-historical method are of this type, though they have nothing in common with experimentation. The methods of the natural sciences and the human sciences are different, first of all because the premethodical realm they refer to is different.

The remarks in section 1 have determined the premethodical realm of hermeneutics as a method in a vague manner. It is the living tradition. It can be expected, furthermore, that the methodical idealization will be embedded in the two basic methodological canons. The second canon, however, taken alone, is not a promising candidate. Two reasons can be given for this assumption. (1) The second canon was recognized as a principle of interpretation before the philological-historical method was developed. (2) The second canon is accepted as the principle of authentic understanding by those who have doubts in the very possibility of objective and methodical validation of interpretations.

Following the vague guidelines given by the traditional formulations of the first canon, it can be said that they all aim at the possibility of separating the context of a text from the context of the interpreter, an entity which has its own identity. This identity, in the degrees ia which it can be fixed, is the same for all possible interpreters of the text. The canon here can be called the critical canon, because any projection about the signification of a text or a part of it can be critically checked and refuted if it is inconsistent with the context of the text, if it is, in the broadest sense, anachronistic. Thus the philologist can point out, e.g., that it is false to assume that a writer of the Attic period refers with "idiot" to a stupid man, because in his context "idiot" refers to a man who does not participate in the political life. Furthermore, philological critique, the counterpart of philological

hermeneutics, is based on the first canon, i.e. that the context of the text is an entity which has an identity of its own. According to the classical formulation of Boeckh, the critical question in general, i.e. on all levels of hermeneutics, is about a relation which something has to something else in its context, not in the context of the interpreter.[6]

The weakness of traditional hermeneutics lies in its formulations of the first canon. They are vague and misleading. The canon will be an easy prey for its critics if the context of a text is thought to be determined by "the contemporary addressees of the text" or "the original intention of the author." I disregard the different criticisms of these formulations which have been offered by Gadamer and Ricoeur, among others. I offer another, strictly methodological criticism. Such formulations presuppose (a) a knowledge about contemporary addressees and (b) a knowledge about the author's intention-

How can such a knowledge be given? Obviously only by texts and traces which in turn need interpretation. The formulations beg the question. They refer to knowledge which can be presupposed only if the canon can lead us to alien contexts as identifiable entities, separated from our context. What is necessary is a phenomenological analysis of the premethodical realm of living tradition where the idealization, implied in the canon, is performed. Characteristic for living tradition is that it implies written discourse. It is hence the analysis of the specific structure of communication in written discourse which has to reveal the possibility of the idealization of the method. It is the thesis of this paper that modern hermeneutics has either glossed over the differences between oral and written discourse or delivered an analysis of both which is incomplete, not sufficient to justify the - idealization implied in the method. What is essential are the different possibilities to achieve understanding and work away misunderstanding and not-understanding

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[6] Cf. Boeckh, 1.c. pp. 121 ff.

in oral and written discourse. They are grounded, in the last instance, in something as trivial as the descriptive difference of the sign matter.

Understanding, Misunderstanding, Nonunderstanding
in Oral and Written Discourse

The following characteristics of oral discourse are chosen because they are significant for the difference between oral and written discourse. The descriptions are of increasing complexity and presuppose each other in the order in which they are presented.

1. Because of its sign matter, oral discourse presupposes a common, time-space field of the participants. This holds for visible gestures as well, which may accompany oral discourse or, in the extreme case, substitute for oral discourse.

2. Past discourse in oral communication cannot be given as the same again. Furthermore, there is no possibility to decide with intersubjective evidence whether a repeated past discourse is really a duplicate of that discourse. What has been said in the past is (a) stored in the subjective memory of the partners and (b) this memory refers to different aspects of the discourse: One partner remembers what he has said, the other what he has heard.

3. Oral discourse is directed towards future agreement or disagreement. Both have to be understood in the broadest sense. A proposition is uttered waiting for agreement or disagreement in the narrower sense. Agreement in the case of a command is the performance of an action, and, in case of a question, an answer. Disagreement is by no means the end of communication in oral discourse. Communication stops only if one partner does not respond at all. Since he will *be* open for further messages (physical attacks to win back his attention and response included) as long as he remains in the common time-space field, he has to leave this field if he wants to stop communication once and for all.

4. The reason for the undecidability of certain expressions reflecting past speech acts is the specific temporality of oral discourse. Thus

"I have not said this at all. What I said was...."

uttered by the proponent, P, must be accepted by the opponent, O, or else the topic of the dialogue will be dropped and the new topic of the discussion will be the undecidable question what P said. If O chooses the latter direction, P can take advantage of the undecidability with the declaration that his subjective memory has failed. Such a declaration has the same effect as the decision of O to accept what P said and to admit the possibility that his memory has failed immediately after the utterance of P. The declaration is of the type:

"If I really said that, then I did not mean it. What I wanted to say was ..."

Such an utterance has to be accepted by O if he wants to discuss the subject matter with P at all. If O rejects it, he rejects the credibility of P as a partner in the dialogue and may as well leave the room.

The utterance "I did not mean it this way. What I meant was ..." is undecidable in an even higher degree. P remembers what he said and meant, O remembers what he heard and I understood. If O does not accept such an utterance, he implies that P lies and wants to distort communication, an assumption which itself distorts communication about the subject matter. Again P or 0 or both may as well leave the common time-space field.

5. The utterance "I did not mean it this way" of P is the indication of the discovery of misunderstanding. Misunderstanding can only be discovered by P as a misunderstanding of O. On the other hand, nonunderstanding of O can only be discovered by O himself. It is communicated to P by uttering

"What do you mean by ..."

The discovery of a misunderstanding by P in O implies, however, that there was a nonunderstanding of 0, which was not discovered by O. In some past phase

of the dialogue, O, determined by his own system of significations, substituted his understanding of a phrase of P for what was meant by P but was not understood by O. Working away misunderstanding means, therefore in the last instance, working away nonunderstanding. This will be always the task of the proponent. The efforts he must make will (1) transcend what he has uttered and (2) seek elements in the signification system of the opponent which can serve as building blocks of an explanation of what he meant.

6. The last resort of working away nonunderstanding for the proponent are the referents of speech in the common time-space field, including the possibility that he can take O with him to show him something or to involve him into an action. Even if one does not share the thesis that there is a realm of a prelinguistic understanding—though I am inclined to accept it—it must be admitted that common nonlinguistic entities are in the common time-space field of partners in an oral communication.

What is said in (3) to (5) can be illustrated by some models.

Model 1

P: Christianity is superstition.

O: That is nonsense and I am not going to discuss it, especially because P apparently likes to hurt other person's religious feelings.

This final fragment corresponds to (3). What O claims in general is that P is not a viable interlocutor for the subject matter, a result, which occurs as the final consequence of the dead end phases of model 2, 3 and 4.

Model 2

P: Christianity is superstition (as understood by O)

O: That is nonsense.

P: I have not said it is superstition, I said it is a superstructure.

Dead end phase (1):

O: You said it, I heard it.

P: I have not said it.

Dead end phase (2):

O: You said it, I heard it.

P: May be, but this was not what I meant. I wanted to say it is a superstructure.

O: I don't believe you!

It will turn out that the onesided consideration, in which the proponent and the opponent do not change roles, is completely sufficient for a large part of written communication. Leaving out the question whether the opposition "proponent - opponent" can be applied to them, text and reader or interpreter cannot switch roles. Reading and writing co-represent a structure which is in principle different from the one which is characteristic for oral discourse. This can be shown following the list of characteristics given for oral discourse above point by point.

1. Written discourse, because of its sign matter, does not presuppose a common time-space field if it is used as a channel of communication. On the contrary, it is able to bridge gaps between different time-space fields. This is characteristic for written speech, which uses visual signs, and holds as well for all modern means of communication which fulfill in addition to (1) what is said in (2).

2. Written discourse can be identified as identically the same, again following the same criteria which allow us to identify visible and tangible things as the same. Though there may be doubts from case to case, whether it is the same document, there are criteria of an intersubjective validation of the identity, not subjective memory only. Since this is the case, a written message can be

duplicated and reproduced. Whether and how far the reproduction corresponds to the original can be checked intersubjectively (1) plus (2) yield the possibility that a written message can reach an indefinite number of foreign time-space fields.

3. Written discourse is not directed at the immediate future waiting for response, but towards many future contexts, which are all separated from the context, i.e. time-space field, in which the message is written.

4. What has been written, in distinction to what has been said, can be immediately decided. One needs witnesses in court and their subjective memory to get some evidence of what has been said or promised. The written document is, in the contrary, able to speak for itself.

5. No written message, no text, is able to discover that it was misunderstood and to utter "I did not mean it this way." Every library would be a terribly noisy place if this would be the case. No text, furthermore, is able to continue itself, if a reader utters: I do not understand.

6. Since there is no common time-space field there are no immediate referents for the sender and the receiver of a written message. Hence this medium is no longer given as a last resort for difficulties in understanding.

The Living Tradition and the First Canon

Since written discourse can replace oral discourse it is natural to consider living tradition as some extended dialogue in which the text functions as a proponent, the reader as an opponent, both struggling for truth. The lists above, however, show that such an attempt is misleading. What a living tradition is should be considered first on the side of the act of writing, i.e., sending a message, and not so much receiving it. What one knows about the intentions accompanying the act of writing is exactly what one knows about the sender of a written message or an author of a text if one has the text and no other information.

A written message is sent to contexts which are not the context of the writer. He knows that the receiver will get the message in some future, disconnected from its own. I.e., it is through writing and then reading that we not only have an environment but a world. If it is a general slogan, that language determines the limits of our world, it should be added that the limits of a language which is only spoken are narrower than the limits of a written language. A message can be directed to a certain person or a group of persons in such a way that the author can expect that they might send him some reply or else come and see him. Though it might be difficult to determine what a contemporary addressee is regarding a text, everybody who writes knows that in general a contemporary addressee is the one who might send him a reply, even if it is not the addressee one had in mind, e.g. the answer of a husband who intercepted a letter from his wife's lover. A message can be directed, however, to a future, which transcends the world of contemporary addressees and every message, written without this intention, can be received in such futures. A lawgiver addresses all persons in the future of his state, a poet all those who love poetry, etc. The author does not and cannot expect any replies from his addressees, nor does he expect that he will be able to answer their questions. What he expects are reactions of receivers in the future directed towards their contemporaries in oral and written discourse, or even in the same way to the open future as the text he produced. The lawgiver expects the judges to judge according to the law, he expects that their decisions in court will be promulgated and he expects that commentaries directed to the application of the law under changing circumstances in the future will be written. A parallel web of expectations can be discovered for every literary genre of a living tradition, poetry, science, philosophy. The process can be iterated. Somebody can produce a text, which is itself a future oriented reaction to a text, which in turn was already a reaction to a text. Since, as every writer in a living tradition knows, this can be done at the same

time by a contemporary author, it follows that everybody standing in a living literary tradition knows it as a web of texts referring to each other in a temporal order. There is no hindrance to considering all the texts available in a living tradition at a certain moment, i.e., just now, under this viewpoint, adding only what one knows about oneself as a reader.

The crucial situation to start with is the one of a direct contemporary addressee of some message, a letter. What is known in receiving the letter is that it was written by someone in a past not accessible to me, who is now in a present, which is not accessible to me either, and that my reply will reach him in a future, for which this, my writing, is not an accessible past and which will probably not be accessible for my future. It is left to the reader to w,ork this situation out for the case of a wife receiving a letter from her husband, who is in great danger on an expedition or in a war. The main point is, that every written document represents us a "past in anonymity which is not ours." That holds even from a document we cannot read. We have only to know or assume that it is a text. What has to be added is only that if the text we read refers to another text, then it represents to us the same temporal relationship we have regarding this text as a relation this text has to the text mentioned in it.

The aspect of reading as well as writing reveals the same general structure which texts connect with texts in a living tradition. Reading a text, Tl, which is the message of the original sender and then a text, T2, which can count in some sense as a reply to Tl, a commentary, a criticism or even a copy of Tl, provided it is a manuscript, then the reader can realize that T2 is in the same relation to Tl as he is to Tl and T2. There are further possibilities. A text T3 can be discovered, related in the same way to T2 and Tl, but as well a text T4, which might relate to Tl, T3, but not to T2, or to T2, however not to Tl and T3. Furthermore a text may be a reply to different texts, themselves not ordered as messages and replies but speaking to a

similar subject matter, i.e. there would be a text, Tn, responding to $Tn\text{-}l^i$ to $Tn\text{-}1^k$. The general theorem, obtainable from this consideration is, that to every text, T, there belongs a possibly empty set of texts ordered in the form of a branching tree or, to use the philological term a *stemma*.

Some authors, representing modern philosophical hermeneutics, have noticed that a text can be read in different contexts by different interpreters and have pointed out that the reason for this property of written messages is the sign matter. Furthermore they indicated that it is this property of written language which constitutes a world for us, a world of communication which reaches from one time-space field into others. The description is, however, incomplete and the conclusions drawn from it regarding the first canon are wrong.[7] Two further properties, which are derivable from the sign matter and the spatio-temporal pattern of communication made possible by it have to be added in order to explain the basis of the methodical idealization of the first canon.

1. A text can be represented in many contexts of different interpreters and many texts are available in the context of each interpreter.

2. Regarding these many texts every interpreter can discover that some of these texts refer to some other texts in the same relation in which he stands to them and would refer to them if he would produce a text which has the character of a reply.

That means, however, that one can distinguish for each text a past horizon, represented by texts which are explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the text, and a future horizon, represented by texts which refer to this text. For instance, reading a text of Kant, the First Critique, it is possible, without understanding very much, to

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[7] Ricoeur, 1.c. pp. 28 ff, 34-35. "Thanks to writing, man and only man has a world and not just a situation. ... It frees reference from the limits of situational reference."

notice, that he refers to texts written by Hume, Leibniz, Locke, Wolff, Berkeley and Descartes. They all belong to the past horizon, which is structured, because, e.g. Leibniz refers to Locke, but not to Hume, Hume refers to Berkeley and Locke, Locke to Descartes, etc. A complete reconstruction delivers a stemma. On the other hand there are texts, like texts from Fichte, Hegel, Natorp and others which refer to the First Critique. The basic idealization of the first canon is the sharp distinction between the past and the future horizon of a text and a corresponding definition of "context of the text." The context of a text is the realm of all texts of its past horizon, i.e. all texts the text refers to, explicitly and implicitly. No historical knowledge about the author is necessary nor any psychological assumption. What is presupposed is a knowledge of the spatio-temporal pattern of communication through written discourse, known to the interpreter as somebody who stands himself in this pattern. He associates this structure with every text a priori and this is sufficient for the constitution of the concept "author" and the identification of an author for the purposes of the first canon.

The transference of the spatio-temporal communication pattern of written discourse leads to a second concept of context of a text. These have not been distinguished in traditional hermeneutics. Writing a text I know, regarding the future horizon, that there will be possible replies, either oral in my future time-space field, or written messages out of other time-space fields, which can reach me in some future time-space field. Written discourse waits for answers of this sort. The second idealization of the first canon, which delivers the concept of the contemporary addressee, refers to a certain segment in the future horizon of the text. It is the segment, in which correspondence dialogues are possible. Their basic pattern is a text, Tl, a text, T2, referring to Tl and a text, T3, answering T2 and referring to Tl as a text written in the past by the author of T3. This pattern is a pattern known as belonging to the spatio-temporal communication pattern of

written discourse. It is as well known there that answers one expects are not given and that answers one does not expect are given. In releasing the message we cannot determine which other time—space fields from which a reply is possible will receive it. It is the transference of this pattern to every text which constitutes the context of an "author", and his "contemporary addressees." Again, no historical knowledge is necessary for the constitution of this idealized frame, which is the frame of a world of contemporaries. Historical knowledge, derived from texts, can be filled in, as well as concept of context qua past horizon of a text can be filled in.

The methodical significance of the idealizations, leading to the concept of context, are based in the corresponding abstractive reduction. The need for a method, based in the reduction, creeps up in the development of the living tradition itself and is based again in the specific pattern of communication of written discourse. Already in a correspondence dialogue one possibility of working away misunderstanding and nonunderstanding is no longer given. It is (6), the reference to objects in a common time-space field of the interlocuters, which is missing. What is gained, however, is the possibility to decide the question of what has been said immediately and intersubjectively. What is written can be given as the same again in different contexts. The situation changes radically if one leaves the world of the context of contemporary addressees, i.e. considers the reactions to texts which can no longer be answered. If one sticks to the model of the dialogue alone, the result will be that the means to work away misunderstanding and nonunderstanding are completely distorted:

1. Proponent and opponent cannot switch roles. The text is the proponent, the reader the opponent.

2. The proponent has neither the possibility to give the signal "misunderstood" nor the possibility of correcting misunderstanding.

3. The signal "not understood" is not received by the proponent and again he

will not provide explanations working away not understanding.

4. In the oral dialogue, the opponent is not able to discover himself misunderstanding.

5. In the case of nonunderstanding, he is forced to provide his own explanations, which will be based on his signification system, i.e. he has to do with consciousness what he did without it in an oral dialogue producing misunderstanding in many cases.

Such a process leads, in a living tradition, to accumulation of nonunderstanding. The guess about signification produces misunderstanding and misunderstanding leads to further non-understanding and inconsistencies. The hope to reach a phase of agreement or disagreement which both would be instances of the application of the text in the context of the reader without signification is disappointed. The text will be dismissed as not applicable, meaningless. There is a steadily growing realm of texts which drop out. Cultural revolutions, changes in the structure of the language, can accelerate this process. We are not interested in disputes with people who are not able to explicate properly what they mean in a dialogue. We will stop communication with them as useless. Partners in oral communication, however, can always be forced back in communication on vital questions. This holds, to a certain degree, for contemporary addressees. Contemporaries are those who can or could enter a common time-space-field in which written discourse can be replaced by oral discourse. On the other hand it is easy to dismiss a text. No cooperation with it is necessary, because the text of a living tradition which transcends the community of the contemporaries of the present represents a time-space field to which there is no immediate access.

The transition from not-understanding to the dismissal of a text occurs quickly for the careless reader. The careless reader is the one who relates to texts

with the same expectations he has towards a partner in an oral dialogue and will, therefore, be soon disappointed. He is careless because he does not realize the possibilities offered by the sign matter of written communication. A text is a message which can be given as the same again. That means, that the reader, who is making a guess in case of a nonunderstanding, checks this guess as a hypothesis with the aid of other parts of the text, which can be given again, for consistency. The whole of the text serves in this sense as a resource which can give us at least in some cases answers concerning our nonunderstanding. The careful reader is willing to abstract in such cases from the explications which are natural for his context of signification but create inconsistencies in the text. The idealizations of the first canon allows us to widen the realm in which hypotheses, filling in gaps of nonunderstanding, can be checked and falsified or validated considerably. Regarding questions of grammar and lexicography, the context will be formed by the texts which are contemporary to the text in the sense of the definition given above. Regarding questions of specific systems of meaning and reference the context is the set of texts which belong to the past horizon of the text. Any interpretation which is either taken from the context of the interpreter of some text outside the context of the text counts (a) as a mere hypothesis, if neither confirming instances nor counterinstances can be found in the context, (b) as falsified if counterinstances can be found in the text and/or context, and (c) is confirmed in the degree in which confirming instances can be found. The study of the context reveals in addition misunderstanding. Misunderstanding is discovered if a hypothesis which does not hit counterinstances in a text or a large part of the text and even seems to be confirmed by some instances is confronted with counterinstances in the broader context. Just as in an oral dialogue, the discovery of misunderstanding indicates that something has not been understood. Since texts can be given as the same again, a search can be started to find out where exactly

the misunderstanding and the corresponding not-understanding is located. A new hypothesis can be introduced and checked with the aid of the determined context of the text.

The abstractive reduction is the reduction from all texts and interpretations which do not belong to the context of the text as valid interpretations. This does not imply that they are invalid. They are neither valid nor invalid, they are hypotheses. Further methodological investigations would have to specify the application of the first canon to different layers of interpretation and different fields. They cannot be discussed in this framework. One further remark is, however, necessary. The abstractive reduction has to be applied to every text, i.e. to the texts in the context of a text as well as to those which have the text in their context. In making these transitions, the method constitutes history and historical signification. Developments of signification and interpretation can be identified.

A phenomenological analysis of the spatio-temporal character of the pattern of communication in written discourse which occurs as such in every living tradition can show, first, that criticisms of the first canon based on observations of language in general are in principle misleading, because they disregard the specific abilities of written discourse to cope with problems of misunderstanding and not-understanding and assume without justification that the merging of horizons, which is necessary in the case of an oral discourse, occurs in the same way regarding written discourse. The phenomenological analysis can show, furthermore, that the methical idealization implied in the first canon can be developed out of the structure of the pattern of communication in a living tradition without making any psychological guesses or presupposing historical knowledge in a circular fashion. All criticisms of the foundations of the philological historical method raised by the new hermeneutics have to be rejected on the basis of the phenomenological analysis given.