



Zurich, March 25th 2019

Call for Papers

Dear colleagues,

The Fourth Annual Conference of the *Network Hermeneutics Interpretation Theory* (NHI) will take place on 4-5 October 2019 in Zurich:

Misunderstanding On a Primal Scene of Hermeneutics

Keynotes

Lutz Danneberg (Historical Epistemology, Berlin)
Carsten Dutt (German Literature, Notre Dame)
Cornelia Richter (Protestant Theology, Bonn)

Processes of understanding can fail, sometimes even quite dramatically, and such failure is ultimately one of the primary engines of the theoretical endeavor known as hermeneutics. Along with *non*-understanding, *mis*-understanding offers a productive starting point to clarify basic issues of hermeneutics. In fact, Schleiermacher famously characterizes the art of understanding precisely by inverting the common-sense perspective: he thought it was obvious that misunderstanding is the rule, while understanding is the exception that has to be deliberately sought.

Diagnoses of misunderstanding are necessarily connected to claims to correct or better understanding: whoever identifies a failure must have a particular idea of what a success is. In principle, it does not matter whether this diagnose takes place within a given scene of understanding (from the perspective of a participant) or outside of it (from the perspective of an observer). However, as some misunderstandings are only diagnosed from outside, not everyone who misunderstands is actually aware that this is the case. The existence of a misunderstanding may well only be clear later – for example, when it is named as such by an observer and is then also corrected. (This is one striking difference between misunderstanding and nonunderstanding at all: whoever does not understand *must* be aware that this is the case.)



But misunderstanding is also instructive because it draws attention to the many alternative ways to handle problems of understanding. In general, misunderstandings are considered as something to be overcome, so that they should be avoided or corrected. But not every misunderstanding gets (explicitly) corrected or even has to be. "Harmless" misunderstandings can be left alone – which makes it all the more important to clarify what is "harmless" and what is "serious" and thus in need of correcting.

Finally, whatever intentions are involved must also be taken into account, for misunderstandings can also be consciously created and staged – by senders as well as by recipients. And while misunderstandings are also a resource for wonderful comedy, they can also perpetuate excruciating conflicts in relationships. But the staging of such misunderstandings necessarily depends in turn on self-aware understanding, based, for example, on a foundation of situational or cultural knowledge of context.

Within and beyond this whole range of problems, the following issues, among others, could be of interest:

- If understanding should be primarily seen as a gradual phenomenon (that is, as characterized by degrees and not by either-or), what are the consequences for the understanding of misunderstanding?
- What are the general conditions of possibility for misunderstanding? What logics do its processes follow? Context-specific conditions may need to be characterized, such as when boundaries between semiotic systems or between disciplines are crossed.
- How precisely is it possible to relate the two specific marked forms of misunderstanding and non-understanding? Or does this distinction need to be extended with further basic categories?
- What about the relationship between misunderstanding and *different* understanding? Do diagnoses of misunderstanding also serve to discredit legitimate cases of understanding differently?
- Are there things that *must* be misunderstood? That is, things which can only be correctly understood when they are misunderstood? That is, it might be wrong to see misunderstanding in terms of such a clearly normative classification as failure.
- What are the consequences of the historicity of knowledge (as in the exemplary case of geocentrism and heliocentrism) for a hermeneutics of misunderstanding?

Proposals (maximum 2500 keystrokes) for papers on these and similar fundamental issues should be sent by *May 20th 2019* to the following address: andreas.mauz@access.uzh.ch. We look forward to your suggestions!

We anticipate that we will be able to cover expenses for presenters at the conference. Papers that receive positive reviews will be published in the NHI book series (Hermeneutik und Interpretationstheorie, Verlag Schöningh/Brill, Paderborn).

Those interested in attending the conference or in the work of the NHI in general should contact Andreas Mauz at the above address.

Christiane Tietz, Chair NHI
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