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Manifesto of the group *Erklärende Hermeneutik/Explanatory Hermeneutics*

Founding members

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The group *Erklärende Hermeneutik/Explanatory Hermeneutics* is composed of scholars of different disciplines whose common concern is an empirical orientation within hermeneutics. The name of the group emphasizes one element of this objective in particular, and that is the thesis that scientific explanation can also take the form of interpretation.

In our opinion *all* interpretive disciplines (i.e. e.g. literary criticism, philosophy, history, science of art, archaeology, depth psychology) have been afflicted by a crisis which is described in more detail in the manifesto. What we want to achieve is that all those who, firstly, are discontent with the situation in the interpretive disciplines and, secondly, strive to do interpretation according to the criteria of the empirical sciences join forces in a strong opposition movement in the framework of the group *Erklärende Hermeneutik / Explanatory Hermeneutics* in order to precipitate a reorientation in the disciplines concerned.

The manifesto expresses the founding members' shared *basic convictions*. We would like to explicitly point out that the individual members develop their own theoretical approaches beyond these convictions and might also be critical of their peers' more specific assumptions.

11 Theses on the Crisis in Literary Criticism and how to Overcome it

Crisis in Literary Criticism

1. Literary Criticism is in a deep methodological crisis now persisting for several decades. Typically, literary scholars do not address clear or well-defined problems when interpreting texts, nor do they attempt to make their research meet standards of methodological criticism. Hence, they come up with arbitrary and arcane interpretations couched in opaque terminology. However, most scholars in literary criticism do not recognize this crisis as such.
2. This crisis has emerged because many literary critics do not distinguish between positively distinct aims of interpretation. They ignore, above all, the distinction between a cognitive mode of text interpretation and an appropriating approach. While the cognitive mode aims at the empirically testable description and explanation of text properties, the appropriating mode aims at the assimilation of the text to the practical and emotional needs of the recipient. Cognitive interpretation addresses questions such as "What are the properties of the text?" and "How can we explain specific properties of the text?". Appropriating interpretation, on the other hand, concentrates on questions such as "Which significance has this text for me?" or "What purpose can it serve?". These questions do not allow intersubjective answers independent of the personal needs of the recipient of the text, and, therefore, cannot be submitted to critical empirical testing.

Ways out of the Crisis

3. Literary critics should distinguish clearly between the cognitive and the appropriating approach, and they should no longer engage in the appropriating approach to text interpretation. They should restrict themselves to dealing with cognitive tasks of interpretation. Above all, literary critics should focus on the various properties of a text and their explanation. When the cognitive and the appropriating aims of interpretation are no longer confounded the practical and emotional uses of literary texts can stand in their own right and can be dealt with separately in a rational way.
4. The *explanatory* problem "How can we find out the properties of a literary text and explain them?" is of the same general kind as explanatory questions in other empirical sciences. The understanding and interpretation of literary texts is an explanation of a *special type of objects*, namely literary texts. Therefore the traditional opposition of explanation and understanding is fundamentally misguided.
5. Conceived this way, literary criticism aims at the description and explanation of the specific properties of a particular literary and aesthetic product. It does not aim at the discovery of laws and regularities underlying the production and reception of literary texts, although often tacitly presupposing these within an explanation. It is empirical literary psychology and literary reception research, not literary criticism, which are concerned with this task.

6. Ordinary methodological principles of the empirical sciences can be applied in order to critically evaluate descriptions and explanations of text properties. Descriptive statements can be deduced from explanatory hypotheses, and these statements can be confronted with empirical descriptions of the literary text. Proceeding in this way, we can submit explanatory hypotheses to severe empirical tests.
7. The author of a text, her or his beliefs, intentions and background are essential for a satisfactory explanation of a text and its properties. The author's socio-cultural background alone usually cannot explain the properties of a text *directly*. Many texts with very different properties share the same background. This background does not suffice to explain the particular features of the text. Hence, the author who produced the text with his or her beliefs and intentions must be taken into account. Author-related textual explanation has to be re-admitted into literary criticism.
8. The traditional authorial intentionalism in hermeneutics has to be expanded into a more comprehensive program which considers the author's entire position in producing a literary text. The author's position includes not only intentions of the author, but also his or her beliefs and socio-cultural background. All these elements of the author's position contribute to the properties of the text to be interpreted.
9. Interpretational hypotheses have to be confronted with as much relevant textual evidence as possible. We should therefore not simply adopt an interpretational hypothesis and then look for conforming evidence only as it is often practiced in literary criticism. Instead, we should look for textual elements which might pose problems for an interpretational hypothesis and which might eventually falsify it.
10. The empirical test of explanatory hypotheses requires careful study of the text to be interpreted and attention to the author's position. But, furthermore, it can profit from the confrontation with conflicting explanatory hypotheses. A comparison of a hypothesis with competitors in the light of textual evidence adds to the severity of the empirical test and, eventually, increases our justifiable confidence in the surviving hypothesis.
11. The adoption of aims and methods of the empirical sciences may help to overcome the crisis of literary criticism.

The Theses' Transferability to other Interpretive Disciplines

These eleven theses apply to the crisis in literary criticism *as an example*. We believe, however, that the diagnosis and therapy can be transferred to other interpretive disciplines, e.g. to disciplines that are concerned with *different kinds of artistic phenomena*: with movies, pieces of music, works of visual arts and so on. However, these transfers to other disciplines need to be examined separately.

Two Aims

With this manifesto the group pursues mainly one goal, and that is to establish a consistent empirical orientation, first in the interpretation of literary texts and, consequently, in *all* other interpretive disciplines. And there is another aim connected to this, which should at least be mentioned here: a re-formation of *general* hermeneutics.

Join the Group!

In order to form a powerful trend in literary criticism and other interpretive disciplines we appeal to scholars, students, teachers and other interested persons to join the group *Erklärende Hermeneutik / Explanatory Hermeneutics* if they agree with the two central issues (fundamental unease with the current situation of the interpretive disciplines and empirical orientation). Membership does not involve any costs or obligations – it only shows that the person supports the group's convictions and activities.

Organization and Administration

The group is organized by Axel Bühler, Peter Tepe and Willie van Peer. Contact addresses:

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Tanja Semlow is in charge of administration. Please send membership requests, responses and academic papers to: semLOW@phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de.

Online Journal as Publication Forum

Since Peter Tepe already publishes an online journal (<http://www.mythos-magazin.de>, Editor: Annette Greif) this journal will be used as a publication forum of the group *Erklärende Hermeneutik / Explanatory Hermeneutics*.