INTRODUCTION

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Idee des Todes

> Der Engel des Todes, der in gewissen Sagen Samael heißt, und mit dem, wie berichtet wird, auch Moses ringen mußte, ist die Sprache. Er kündigt uns den Tod an—was sonst tut die Sprache? Aber ebendiese Ankündigung macht es uns schwer, zu sterben. Seit unvordenklicher Zeit, seit Anbeginn ihrer Geschichte liegt die Menschheit mit dem Engel im Kampf, um ihm das geheimnis zu entreißen, daß er bloß ankündigt. Aber aus seinen knabenhaften Händen läßt sich nur die Ankündigung zerren, die er uns ohnehin zu überbringen kam. Der Engel hat daran keine Schuld, und nur wer die Unschuld der Sprache erfaßt, begreift auch die wahre Bedeutung der Ankündigung und kann—vielleicht—lernen zu sterben.
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> *Giorgio Agamben*[1]

Biblical exegesis nowadays is characterized by a proliferation of methods. S. Moore speaks of a double paradigm shift; since the nineteen-seventies, there has been a methodological shift from diachronic to synchronic methods, and an epistemic shift from modern to post-modern thinking.[2] The two are connected and that is why J. Dunn's definition of the new criticism as "the flight from history" is only partly correct.[3] The shift from diachronic to synchronic methods involves a transposition not only from the historical context to the world of the text (from history to story), but also from the text to the process of reading (from author to reader) and even from the constitution of meaning to the reflection on methods (from interpretation to methodology). Its relation to historical critical methods can define the new

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[1] G. Agamben, *Idee der Prosa* (Übersetzung aus dem Italienischen—*Idea della Prosa*, 1985—von Dagmar Leupold und Clemens-Carl Härle), Frankfurt am Main 2003; p. 139.

[2] S. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels. The Theoretical Challenge*, New Haven-London 1989; p. 130. See also P. Chatelion Counet, *John, a Postmodern Gospel. Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel*, Leiden etc. 2000; pp. 104–19.

[3] J. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making, Vol. 1), Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge-U.K. 2003; pp. 67–97.

criticism only partly.[4] For the greater part, it has to be considered as a phenomenon in itself.

1. *The Methodological Shift: A Thousand Methods!*

The shift from diachronic to synchronic exegesis, as described by Moore, does not involve the end of historical critical research. Far from it. As it seems, the orientation on the history of the development of texts in the field of the exegesis of the Old Testament, as well as the research of the "historical Jesus" in the field of the New Testament, are never-ending stories. The new criticism does not replace the old methods, but goes incompletely different ways. In fact, there is no competition and—it seems necessary to say so—nothing to be afraid of.[5]

Most of the diachronic instruments developed through historical critical research—Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism, Composition Criticism, etc.—are history-oriented; one understands the text as the outcome of a historical development. Diachronic instruments are devised to reconstruct the production of texts; the want to discover the *pre-text*. The success of these methods turned out to be tremendous as the "discovery" of the sources of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels—to mention only two colossal results—unquestionably shows. The research goes on.[6]

[4] According to D. Clines and J. Exum, to those engaged in the newest of the "new" literary criticisms—feminist, Marxist, reader-response, deconstructionist, and the like—even stylistics, rhetorical criticism, and structuralism and other formalist criticism are no longer "new"; D. Clines & J. Exum, "The New Literary Criticism," in J. Exum and D. Clines (eds.): *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (11–25), Sheffield 1993; here p. 12.

[5] See the reaction of J. Ashton who calls the method of deconstruction "the work of the devil"; ironically enough, he takes over the deconstructive insight that texts try to hide their textuality in order to create the illusion of truth and reality: "The Fourth Gospel is not only an instance of the Gospel genre, but also a reflection upon it" (J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford 1991; pp. 502/513 and p. 434).

[6] Notable in the new diachronic studies is the interest in interpretive communities and (first) readers. This applies to Old Testament studies as well as to New Testament studies; to mention just a few from the recent studies: B.E. Reid, *The Transfiguration: A Source—and Redaction-Critical Study of Luke 9:28–36*, Paris 1993; M.P. Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel: The Rejected Prophet-Motif in Matthaean Redaction*, Sheffield 1993; B. Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, Göttingen 2000; J. Vermeylen, *La loi du plus fort: histoire de la rédaction des récits davidiques de 1 Samuel 8 à 1 Rois 2*, Leuven etc. 2000; J.A. Wagenaar, *Judgement and Salvation: The Composition and Redaction of Micah 2–5*, Leiden etc. 2001; A. Groenewald, *Psalm 69: Its Structure, Redaction and Composition*, Münster 2003.

As distinct from the orientation on the historical production, synchronic instruments developed through literary critical research—semiotics (post-) structuralism, narratology, intertextuality, reader response criticism, etc.—are text-oriented; one tries to explore the text, not as the result of a historical process, but as the point of departure for a reading process. Synchronic methods are devised to reconstruct the *present* text and its reception. Although rather new, literary criticism has already yielded some classical studies.[7]

Are the diachronic and synchronic approaches compatible? Scholars argue about the primacy of the different methods. Some say that "the experience of reading the text," the synchronic approach, is "more important than understanding the process of its composition," the diachronic approach.[8] Others say "every study [of a biblical text] . . . must contribute something to the realisation of the book" and its *Sitz im Leben*.[9]

Scholars who reflect on the question of compatibility orientate mostly on the results of different methods and not on the methods themselves. Thus, their view that they are compatible relies on the mutual application; it is the answer to another question. To give an example, this answer is comparable to the application of insights from psychology to space technology. Taking in account certain theories of behaviorism, longer space travels can be made more successful, but this does not turn psychology and physics into compatible methods. Like the common intention to make a car drive better does not make the instruments to replace a tire interchangeable with the instruments to repair cylinders, so the fact that one aims at the same target (the explanation of biblical texts), does not turn diachronic and synchronic exegesis as compatible methods.

The real question of compatibility concerns the methods of research, not their results. Even if the results are compatible or interchangeable, this says nothing about the methods and approaches. In his introductory

[7] See R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design*, Philadelphia 1983; R.M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand. Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*, Minneapolis 1991; E. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, Minneapolis 1991; G. Aichele (et al.); E.A. Castelli (ed.), *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective*, New Haven etc. 1995 (seven "postmodern" areas of engagement are organized here: reader-response, structuralism and narratology, poststructuralism, feminism, and rhetorical, psychoanalytic, and ideological criticism; the book is presented as if there is no "author" but only a collective).

[8] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 5.

[9] Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p. 476.

article on the volume *Synchronic or Diachronic?*,[10] J. Barr makes the interesting remark that synchronic studies are not anti-history and can not be anti-history because "historically [a biblical text] meant what it meant synchronically in the relevant biblical time."[11] But if synchronic studies are not anti-history how then does the synchronic differ from the diachronic? Barr states that the term "synchronic" is used more as a sort of metaphor than as an exact account of the proposed shift from a "historical" paradigm to a "literary" one;[12] in this he is not entirely correct. Indeed, the term "synchronic" describes orientation on literary approaches, but it points also to an important new objective that is not anti-historical but rather a-historical. Barr correctly refers to F. de Saussure for whom the difference was not between non-historical and historical, but between system and element.[13] This observation has far-reaching consequences for the distinction between the methods—maybe farther than Barr would like; it shows the incompatibility of the synchronic and the diachronic. Synchronic research focuses on systems, *the paradigmatic*, as de Saussure says, while diachronic research focuses on elements within those systems, *the syntagmatic*. Diachronic methods are oriented towards historic and verifiable elements *in praesentia*; synchronic methods are orientated towards ideas *in absentia*.[14] The red pottage of Jacob offered to Esau, the siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E., and the Babylonian Captivity are diachronic in the sense of syntagmatic elements that can be presented as objects in time and space. Against this, the idea of desiring an object—pottage or birthright, the capture of a city, or the return from captivity—belongs to the synchronic in the sense of a paradigmatic system beyond time and place.[15] De Saussure offers the example of a column in a temple. It is connected to the architrave,

[10] J.C. de Moor (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (papers read at the ninth joint meeting of "Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België" and "The Society for Old Testament Study" held at Kampen, 1994), Brill-Leiden etc. 1995.

[11] J. Barr, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic," p. 2 (in: *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, see note 10).

[12] Barr, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic," p. 9.

[13] Barr quotes the English translation of *Course de linguistique générale*, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic," p. 6.

[14] F. de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Édition critique préparée par Tullio de Mauro), Paris 1990; pp. 170–75.

[15] Cf. A. Greimas, *Du sens. Essais sémiotiques*, Paris 1970; in his scheme of "actants," Greimas places the striving for an object on the axis of desire (p. 249ff.).

which it supports; this is a syntagmatic relation that has its specific importance in time and place—removing the column could have disastrous consequences for the temple. But if one notes that this column is a Doric column, then it evokes a mental comparison with other orders (Ionic, Corinthian, etc.), thus with elements that are not presented in space; this relation is associative or paradigmatic—changing your opinion about the artificial design is perhaps disastrous for your achieved ability in the field of classical architecture but not for the edifice as such.[16] To explore syntagmatic or paradigmatic relations, one needs completely different instruments.

If researchers of the diachronic and the synchronic point to compatibility, they mostly refer to the harmonization of results, not of methods. To give a few examples from again the volume *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, E. Talstra, who defends "and" instead of "or" between the synchronic and the diachronic, asks nevertheless in which order one would have to apply them; he thinks that synchronic analysis has procedural priority over diachronic analysis.[17] In the same volume, R. Carroll chooses the diachronic reading as the preferred reading because only a diachronic approach can explain the contradictions and discrepancies in a text (here Jeremiah); synchrony is "a holistic reading" and hence renders the contradictions and discrepancies "unresolvable."[18] These are two opposed understandings of the relation between synchronic and diachronic methods that show two things: the diachronic and the synchronic are separated in respect to: (1) the instrumental reach (procedural priority) and (2) the field of research (they handle different problems). To keep to the point of contradictions: a diachronic approach considers a contradiction as an indication of redaction and looks for further elements to prove this idea; these elements are of a *syntagmatic* nature in the sense that they constitute the materials of a historical reconstruction. A synchronic approach considers the contradiction as an expression of a systematic structure and looks for further ideas to underpin this structure; these ideas are of a *paradigmatic* nature in the sense that they constitute the construction in which the contradiction appears as a manifestation.

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[16] De Saussure, *Cours*, p. 171; for paradigmatic (which will be an important term in later structuralism) de Saussure uses the term "the associative."

[17] E. Talstra, "Deuteronomy 9 and 10; Synchronic and Diachronic Observations," pp. 188 and 207 (in: *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, see note 10).

[18] R.P. Carroll, "Synchronic Deconstructions of Jeremaiah; Diachrony to the Rescue," p. 50 (in: *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, see note 10).

Like D. Clines we would like to deconstruct the categories "diachronic" and "synchronic" as a false "binary opposition."[19] However, after two hundred years of an unchallenged procedural priority of historical critical methods, the appearance of a new criticism works as deconstruction in itself. Since the nineteen-seventies, the hegemony of the one over the other has come to an end and it is no longer evident which is the privileged term in the dominant culture; this is deconstructive enough. A further deconstruction, holding the idea that the diachronic is essentially synchronic and vice versa, cannot be made; at least not on the methodological part of the difference (later on, we will amplify on the details of Derrida's deconstruction of the epistemic difference). Even Clines is far from denying the methodological distinction or even arguing that it is a bad one. We endorse his viewpoint that the categories of "synchronic" and "diachronic" are names for segments of a spectrum rather than the labels on the only two pigeonholes for all that goes in the name of biblical scholarship.[20]

The broadest term to collect the different methods is hermeneutics. A first dichotomy can be made by discerning between a hermeneutics of production (the diachronic search for syntagmatic elements) and a hermeneutics of reception (the synchronic search for paradigmatic elements). In their "diagram of biblical interpretation," Soulen and Soulen take the well-known distinction between the world behind the text ("whence"), the world of the text ("what/what about"), and the world in front of the text ("whither"), to spread the different methods over three partly overlapping columns.[21] Diachronic studies reach from the "whence" to the "what," synchronic studies from the "what" to the "whither". Both sorts of methods can take in account their mutual *results* so that, dependent of the status quaestionis, one can speak either of synchronic oriented diachronics (question: how came the final text to its present form), or diachronic oriented synchronics (question: what is the meaning and function of the final text).[22] Creative crossings, in the sense that the borders of the *methods* are

[19] D.J.A. Clines, "Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic," p. 67 (in: *Synchronic or Diachronic?*, see note 10).

[20] Clines, "Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic," p. 52.

[21] R.N. Soulen & R.K. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, Louisville etc. 2001[3]; p. 235.

[22] Cf. U. Berges, "Sion als thema in het boek Jesaja: Nieuwe exegetische benadering en theologische gevolgen," in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, 39 (1999) 118–38; esp. 119–20.

crossed in an eclectic and anarchistic way, are a postmodern endeavour that until now seldom has been undertaken.[23]

2. *The Epistemic Shift: One Text?*

The "all sail, no anchor" character of today's methodology in exegesis is said to be counterbalanced through the orientation on the one biblical text as the safe haven of all analyses. But since the early nineteen-seventies this is exactly the question: can or may we speak of "one text" in a non-problematical way? There are two reasons to deny the fact that the bible is "one text." The first one has to do with the text as a stable signifier, the second one with the text as an incomplete sign.

The bible doesn't exist as a signifier. Editions like the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or the *Novum Testamentum Graece* are necessary constructs because of the absence of autographs. The necessity of these editions shows that the idea—that the biblical text is "one"—is not a fact but a decision. In addition, the different canons of the bible in Jewish, Roman-Catholic, Reformatory, and Orthodox traditions make even more clear that the idea of "one text" is based on decisions. This means that the object of exegesis, with every new edition of Nestle-Aland or Kittel, is in a state of flux. It makes the Saussurian dream of a stable object, as the base for a linguistic science, groundless.

The absence of a stable signifier opens an epistemological abyss[24] that is deepened by the notion that texts are incomplete signs. M.-A. Tolbert tries to explain the phenomenon that parables, even if investigated

[23] Attempts to realize such crossings are described by D. Carr as a "pivotal role" between synchronic and diachronic methods, D. Carr, "Reading Isaiah from Beginning (Isaiah 1) to End (Isaiah 65–66): Multiple Modern Possibilities," in R.F. Melugin and M.A. Sweeney (ed.): *New Visions of Isaiah* (188–218), Sheffield 1996; here p. 217. Against the combination of synchronic and diachronic readings is E.W. Conrad who takes over the idea of J. Noble that diachronic readings are based on a "Quotation-Theory" (the text is formed through the verbatim incorporation of original documents) while synchronic readings are based on "Resource-Theory" (the author used his sources as a resource to draw freely ideas, characters, themes, etc. without being tied); E.W. Conrad, "Prophet, Redactor and Audience: Reforming the Notion of Isaiah's Formation," in R.F. Melugin and M.A. Sweeney et al. (306–26); here pp. 309–10.

[24] Moore, *Literary Criticism*, p. 128.

by the same method, are interpreted so divergently.[25] She looks for an explanation not in the methods—because identical methods can lead to different interpretations—but in the form of the parable itself. Her ideas can be transferred to texts in general. Tolbert points to the *open* character of parables and explains this from a rhetorical model that considers the parable a (persuasive) metaphor. She states that the parable is an *incomplete* metaphor. The entire parable serves as the vehicle (or comparatum), but the tenor (the comparandum) is absent: "The need to complete the [metaphorical] movement in the parable by supplying a tenor is the impulse behind parable interpretation."[26] The open character of parables necessitates interpretation: "The meaning of the parable (. . .) lies partially outside the story itself in the interaction of text and context, whatever that context may be."[27]

This vision on parables as incomplete metaphors is a useful concretization of Derrida's concept of *écriture* as an open text. Our suggestion is to understand "text" according to Tolbert's ideas as absolutely "open." Texts must be seen, not as incomplete metaphors, but as incomplete signs.[28] (1) Just as a parable is a vehicle without tenor, so the biblical text is a signifier without signified. The biblical text is an *incomplete* sign because of the absence of signifieds. (2) Texts are linked intertextually with other texts. (3) Texts are connected to various associations of the interpreter. The (contextual) movement always brings the text to new situations and ever-changing new contexts. Derrida calls this process re-contextualization; the refolding to one's own situation is the way in which the interpreter becomes the implied reader of the text. However, also the context of the interpreter is in constant evolution.

The epistemic shift that evolves from these considerations about texts as incomplete signs is twofold. (a) The idea of meaning becomes problematical. And (b) the difference between diachrony and synchrony comes into question.

[25] M.-A. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables. An Approach to Multiple Interpretations*, Philadelphia 1979; pp. 45–49.

[26] Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, p. 45.

[27] Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, p. 49.

[28] De Saussure defines "sign" as the connection between a "concept" (signified) and an "acoustic image" (signifier): "Nous proposer de conserver le mot *signe* pour designer le total, et de remplacer *concept* et *image acoustique* respectivement par *signifié* et *signifiant*" (*Cours*, p. 9).

2.1. *The Absence of the Signified (Meaning)*

If texts are incomplete signs—Derrida gave his famous adage "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte"[29] to this insight—meaning becomes insecure. De Saussure struggled with the idea of negative differentiation: the dependence of signified and signifier. In speech or "discourse" (*parole*), the sign is negatively determined: it receives meaning from what it is not (from other signs). In the system of language (*langue*) the sign is positively determined: it is itself (not influenced by users or semantic differences). De Saussure did not prove this; it was a postulation.[30] In his concept of sign the referent (or object) disappears (figure 1). From the sign-triangle of the Stoa (the connection between 1. a real thing with 2. its sound or signifier and 3. its intelligible thing or signified), he cuts away the corner with the "external real thing" (τὸ ἐκτος ὑποκειμενον).[31]

SE (Concept)
SA (Image acoustique)

Figure 1. *De Saussure's (two-dimensional) concept of sign*

What remains is the relation between the signifier and the signified; these belong together like the two sides of a sheet of paper.[32]

Derrida denies that we ever possess a signified which is not simultaneously also a signifier. The sheet of paper on de Saussure's table gives the impression of a meaningful underside but when we turn the page over, we are again confronted by a signifier (see figure 2).

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[29] J. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, Paris 1967; p. 227.

[30] De Saussure, *Cours*, pp. 45 and 166. The explanation why de Saussure did not want his pupils to publish his lectures, has to be sought in his disappointment in failing to find a stable structure for linguistics.

[31] I.e. the *object* (*τυγχάνον*) or "real" thing; cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* (Loeb Classics) London etc. 1967 (II. 1,11–12). The concept of the Stoa is used by many modern authors as the basis for their concept of sign; cf. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, London (1923) 1966 (p. 11); E. Fischer-Lichte, *Bedeutung: Probleme einer semiotischen Hermeneutik und Aesthetik*, München 1979 (pp. 40–44).

[32] De Saussure, *Cours*, pp. 89, 144, and 166.

Post-structuralism, as Robert Young says, "involves a shift from the signified to the signifier; it fractures the serene unity of the stable sign."[33]

$$\boxed{\text{SA}} \quad \longleftarrow \cancel{\text{SE}} \longrightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{SA}} \quad \longleftarrow \cancel{\text{SE}} \longrightarrow \quad \boxed{\text{SA}}$$

Figure 2. *Derrida's (one-dimensional) concept of sign*

To give an example, the signifieds of the signifier "Messiah"—let's say that possible signifieds of Messiah are "redeemer," "Son of Man," "liberator," "eschatological Prophet," "Christ," or simply "Jesus"—turn out to be themselves signifiers: "redeemer means . . .," "Son of Man means . . .", etc. In theology, as has been sufficiently proven by all the Quests in the historical-Jesus research, even "Jesus" is a mere signifier.[34]

2.2. *Deconstruction of Diachrony and Synchrony*

Derrida presents a criticism of the distinction between diachrony and synchrony in various places in his writings, namely, as of a more encompassing criticism of De Saussure's ideas on *langue*, and *parole*. Structuralism presupposes that language as a system (*langue*) contains all the structures used by a particular expression of language (*parole*).[35] The syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structures of the language system are recognizable in every expression of language.[36]

For *post*structuralist critics, these structures are constructs and the idea of a *langue* that contains all these structures is an *idée-fixe*. The *langue* is not a transcendental reality, something that enables the use of language; the reverse applies. Stating that a *langue* exists independent of the *parole* and even as its prerequisite *is* using language. This in itself simple conclusion has a deconstructive effect. It makes the distinction between language *system* and language *use* ineffective and *indécidable*: the language system can only manifest itself in the written or spoken word (Derrida's *écriture*); presentation of a *langue* can only

[33] R. Young (ed.): *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston etc. 1981; p. 8.

[34] "Que le signifié soit originairement et essentiellement (. . .) trace, qu'il soit *toujours déjà en position de signifiant*, telle est la proposition en apparence innocente où la métaphysique du logos, de la présence et de la conscience, doit réfléchir l'écriture comme sa mort et sa resource"; Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, p. 108.

[35] De Saussure, *Cours*, pp. 36–39, 141–43, and 193–97.

[36] For a classification of semiotics in syntaxis, semantics, and pragmatics, see Ch. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Chicago 1938.

happen via the *parole*. This thought is found in Derrida's idea that nothing precedes the *écriture*,[37] as well as in Wittgenstein's idea that meanings do not exist in a preconstrued system, but that they develop in and through the use of language.

With that, the distinction between diachronic and synchronic approaches to the text also comes into question. Derrida's ideas about iterability and recontextualization[38] make it clear that texts are layered and fragmented in their synchronic appearance too. He shows that a text that is supposed to form a synchronic unity (supposed, because its components possess thematic, linguistic, and semantic similarities) ultimately consists of layered and fragmented meanings. This is the case, not because of a diachronic breaking up of the text in documents, pretexts, and fragments which are written in different times or come from different traditions, but because of layers which are present in the components themselves.[39] The hypothesis of diachronic fragmentation reinforces the observed synchronic fragmentation. Conversely, however, it remains the question whether the observed synchronic fragmentation can be a confirmation of the lack of diachronic unity. Synchronic fragmentation (dissemination) is always present. The argument that a text must be diachronically layered because of its lack of unity fails because of this essential synchronic dissemination, which in itself carries the diachrony (in the sense of being layered) of language as such. This means that, in the end, there is no clear cut between diachronic and synchronic stratifications.

3. *A Threefold Epistemic Shift*

Derrida's deconstruction of diachronic and synchronic stratifications does not affect the pluralism of methods, it affects the way of thinking, and brings about not a methodological but an epistemic revolution.

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[37] Derrida rejects the possibility of reducing signifiers to a metaphysical presence (the Logos): "L'extériorité du signifiant est l'extériorité de l'écriture en général et nous tenterons de montrer . . . qu'il n'y a pas de signe linguistique avant l'écriture" (*De la Grammatologie*, p. 26).

[38] See J. Derrida, *Marges de la Philosophie*, Paris 1972 (on iterability: p. 375); and J. Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Paris 1990 (on recontextualization: p. 252).

[39] Derrida explains the synchronic stratification through the idea that signifieds always appear in the form of signifiers; the signified is not at rest in a signifier but is always itself a new signifier (*De la Grammatologie*, p. 108).

One of the most far-reaching consequences is the insight that we do not control language—the *écriture* which is a web of written and spoken (and unwritten and unspoken) entity of signs, forever in the making—but that language is in control of us. This insight marks the shift from hermeneutics to posthermeneutics, from structuralism to poststructuralism, and from modernism to postmodernism.

(1) *Pragmatics: from historical hermeneutics to posthermeneutics* Derrida's insights re-instate pragmatics (in the sense of Ch. Morris's relation between signs and users). In historical-critical hermeneutics, as well as in structuralism, the person of the researcher may be of no importance. Since the nineteen-seventies, the subject of understanding regained a new role through reader-response criticism. The *post*-hermeneutical re-instatement, however, does not assign most power to the reader (*intentio lectoris*)[40] but emphasizes the working of play, *différance* and dissemination. Language and texts (the *intentio operis*) have a manipulating and playful influence on their users who fail to master this game. Rather than a flight from history, postmodern (posthermeneutical) exegesis—that takes interest in historical (first) readers—is a reaction to the search for historical pre-texts, and the absence of the subject. But against the traditional hermeneutical view, the power of the understanding subject is overruled by the uncontrollable forces of the *écriture*.

(2) *Referentiality: from structuralism to poststructuralism* Whereas in structuralism the referent disappeared behind the search for systems and structures, *post*structuralism re-instates referentiality. The corner that de Saussure took away from the sign-triangle of the Stoa (the "real thing") returns, but in a special way. Poststructuralist critics affirm that exegesis does not (re)present the referent but, at most, gives witness to it. The referent is not simply the undifferentiated "reality," but is a trace (Derrida) of something figural (Lyotard) that escapes any system of (re)presentation.[41] The figural, "thing *manqué*," is heterogeneous to the "textual"; at the same time it is constitutive for referentiality ("it is about something"). Reference and designation are

[40] Cf. U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1990; Eco tries to restrain the role of the reader ("the universe of literary studies has been haunted during the last years by the ghost of the reader," p. 46); the protection against over-interpretations lies in the *intentio operis* (p. 52). According to Derrida, however, the work won't give much protection, because of the *disseminatio operis* (*Marges*, p. 392).

[41] J.-F. Lyotard, *Discours/Figure*, Paris 1971; p. 75.

essential elements of language which, however, cannot be seen as effects of the system or the *langue* because they cannot be expressed as in opposition to this language system. More simply said, "that it is about something" is heterogeneous to "what is said."[42] A consequence for biblical exegesis is that the interpreter has to reflect constantly on the tendency of signifiers to present the unpresentable. This must sound familiar to biblical scholars and interpreters of the Word of God, whose task it is, from the beginnings of exegesis, to give witness of the unpresentable.

(3) *Multi-interpretability (dissemination): from modernism to postmodernism* In modern hermeneutics the aim of understanding is progress. The goal of a "Horizontverschmelzung" is a better understanding ("besser Verstehen").[43] Knowledge is considered as a tool to control our world.[44] Against this "Zielstrebigkeit" of the predominantly German hermeneutics,[45] *post*modernism (predominantly French) holds the idea of uncontrollable perspectives, polysemy, and dissemination. Parting of the idea that exegesis has to reveal a transcendental truth is a consequence for biblical exegesis of this principle of multi-interpretability.

4. *Conclusion*

All in all, the postmodern epistemic shift is characterized by a radicalization of the "Reflexion auf eigenes Tun." To a certain extent E. McKnight is right in identifying poststructuralism and postmodernism with "reader-oriented exegesis."[46] A complete identification is too restrictive, but in emphasizing pragmatic aspects over syntactic

[42] Lyotard, *Discours/Figure* p. 14; see about the "figural," B. Readings, *Introducing Lyotard. Art and Politics*, London 1991; pp. 3–52.

[43] H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1960; pp. 282 and 289.

[44] Habermas distinguishes between three interests of knowledge (technical, practical, and emancipatory); the technical interest intends to rule instrumentally the "objectivised external world"; J. Habermas: "Erkenntnis und Interesse," in H. Albert and E. Topitsch (eds.): *Werturteilstreit* (334–53), Darmstadt 1971; here pp. 342–43).

[45] About this confrontation between German (Gadamer, Habermas, Frank) and French philosophers (Derrida, Lyotard, Marion), cf. Ph. Forget (Hrsg.), *Text und Interpretation. Deutsch-Französische Debatte mit Beitragen von J. Derrida, Ph. Forget, M. Frank, H.-G. Gadamer, J. Greisch, und F. Laruelle.* München 1984; see also D. Mitchelfelder and R. Palmer (eds.), *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, New York 1989.

[46] E. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible. The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism*, Nashville 1990[2]; pp. 60–62.

and semantic aspects, it shows that from now on exegesis cannot be practiced without reflection of the exegetical subject on his or her interpretative community (S. Fish), his or her ideological perspectives (Sj. van Tilborg), and his or her epistemic "Vorverständnis" (J. Derrida). It leads to the challenge that biblical scholars have to explain what they seldom explain: what methods they use (and why), what their aim is in analyzing a certain text, what the boundaries are of the possibilities to say plausible things on this particular subject, and what their epistemic point of view is.

"For deconstructionist critics there is no text, only infinitely different interpretations," says Dunn in his review of postmodern exegesis.[47] Again, he is only partly correct. For deconstructionist thinkers there is no outside-text ("pas de hors-text"), the referent is a problem and the (reading) subject is a problem. And, indeed, an interpretation does not put an end to the understanding of a text. For deconstructionists there is not "one text." Texts—even when read for the first time—carry the understandings, presuppositions, and "Vorverständnisse" (the interpretations) of the reader. To become aware of all these interpretations, data, and impedimenta that one brings into the reading process, belongs to the rather new task that the postmodern epistemic shift demands.

5. *One Text, a Thousand Methods*

This book, dedicated to the memory of Sjef van Tilborg, brings together a variety of methods. These methods are not the subject of theoretical considerations only. The request of the redactors to the contributors of this volume was to concentrate on a (favorite) method, applying it—after a short introduction—to a specific text. The contributions are divided in two sections, Part One on the Old Testament, Part Two on the New Testament—as mentioned above, there is considerable doubt on the existence of "one text."

5.1. *Part One: Old Testament*

In the opening article of the first part, Ulrich Berges takes his point of departure in an *ideological-critical approach* that van Tilborg had once

[47] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 96 (our emphasis, *red.*).

applied in his monograph on Matthew 5–7.[48] Through an analysis of the theme of violence in the book of Lamentations, Berges criticizes the ideology of a notion of God that is free of any contradiction; he considers the image of a "soft" and always loving God, as part of the human wishful thinking and even idolatry.

Willem Beuken uses a *semantic analysis* to criticize some historical-critical insights, such as the hypothesis that the "Sitz im Leben" of Isaiah 22:1–14 is the festive atmosphere following the relief of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. Through strict semantic analysis and "close reading," Beuken shows that Isa 22:1–14 has created his own (hi)story. Several occurrences between the siege of Jerusalem in 701 and the downfall of 586 form the mourning situation in which the readers are transferred.

The instrument of *intertextuality* is used by Erik Eynikel who goes on the search for narrative time and symbolism in the book of Jonah. The indications of time in Jonah possess a symbolic value, as has been reported in previous literature; the question here is how to apply them to the context of Jonah. This intertextual quest takes the reader to various kinds of contemporary literature.

Composition-criticism is the method used by Alphonso Groenewald to describe the redaction-critical development of Psalm 69. Through this method, we concentrate on the positioning of a certain text in a cluster of texts (Psalm 69 in the Psalter). Composition criticism goes beyond the boundaries of redaction criticism that focuses mainly on specific redactional elements within a text. Groenewald, however, explains the "aktualisierende Einschreibungen" (the hand of redactors within Psalm 69) against the theology of the redactors ("the theology of the poor") who tried to make Psalm 69 suitable for a cluster of Psalms. The composition of the Psalter causes the redactional "Fortschreibung" of existing texts.

Poetical analysis is the focus of Matthijs Kronemeijer's article on the prosodic arrangement of Psalm 35. The approach is purely synchronic and takes its point of departure in the idea that the Psalm is a prayer. Close to the ideas of J. Fokkelman, Kronemeijer divides the Psalm in 74 verses of which 10 are tricola, and of which the 15 strophes are coupled to form stanzas. In composing the psalm, the poet used this structure to create a palindrome.

[48] Sj. van Tilborg, *The Sermon on the Mount as an Ideological Intervention*, Assen etc. 1986.

Archibald van Wieringen takes up *reader-oriented exegesis* and he applies it in a rather original way. For his analysis of the "chain of calls" in Isaiah 40:1–11, van Wieringen concentrates not on the receiver's pole but on the sender's pole. From the several headings in the book of Isaiah, he concludes that one has to distinguish between an (unnamed) implied author, the discursor/narrator Isaiah, and the character "Isaiah." These different roles of Isaiah have their influence on the communication with the implied reader(s). In his conclusions, van Wieringen compares these communication functions with those in Luke's Acts of the Apostles.

In her article on *cognitive linguistics*, Ellen van Wolde shows how the theory and method of cognitive linguistics explicitly deal with the development of a mental picture in the text. Van Wolde applies the method to Genesis 28:10–22, by reconstructing the existence of two mental images in this text. These images reveal two conflicting concepts of God. The reconstruction enables the reader to construe a mental representation of Genesis 28 in which the conflict gets a function.

The question that concerns Annemarieke van der Woude is whether Isaiah 40–55 can be called a drama. In Isaiah research, she distinguishes four drama approaches: a liturgical, a theological, a theatrical, and a literary one. Van der Woude uses the concepts of "drama" and "dramatic text" as they are formulated within *drama criticism*, to answer this question. She argues that Isa 40–55 is not a drama to be performed, but a drama to be read. Several examples taken from Isa 40–55 illustrate her point.

5.2. *Part Two: New Testament*

In the opening article of the second part, Andries van Aarde applies *narratology* to Luke 12:35–48. His introduction in the method of narrative exegesis concentrates on the narrator's choice to describe the character internally or externally. By analyzing the temporal aspects in his passage, van Aarde makes clear that the narrator in the double narrative of Luke-Acts uses one ideological point of view. It concerns the knowledge of the "mystery" which demands responsibility from the part of the insiders. Through Peter and Paul, the narratees of the communication, and through "pauses" in the narrative, the implied reader is "informed" how to resolve the disturbances that cause these pauses. In line with the notions of van Tilborg, van

Aarde shows that narrative exegesis needs not disregard the historical situation within which a particular text communicates.

Deconstruction and *narratology* are the methods applied by Patrick Chatelion Counet to John 8, and especially to the interpretations of this passage as anti-Judaism. He analyzes the communication of "Jesus and the Jews" on the story level, "John and the Jews" on the narrative level, and "the readers and the Jews" on the level of enunciation. This analysis involves a threefold deconstruction (story, narration, and context) of two objects. On the one hand, a deconstruction of the Christian anti-Judaic interpretations of John 8, on the other hand, a deconstruction of the text itself—the presumed opposition between Jesus' (John's) theology and that of the Jews is reduced to oppositions in Jewish theology itself.

Through *historical-anthropology* Pieter Craffert tries to answer the question from what material a "resurrected body" is made. Focusing on Jesus' resurrected body, Craffert commentates on several interpretations that try to close the gap between ancient and today's perspectives by ethnocentric and anachronistic strategies. Introducing the social-scientific interpretation of anthropology, he undertakes a threefold analysis: of the subject's cultural system (i.e., ancient texts), of the interpreter's cultural system (i.e., modern-day perspectives), and cross-cultural comparisons. In his conclusion he recognizes the "cycle of meaning" of ancient people that can open our modern eyes for their living reality of souls, immortals, and resurrected bodies.

Detlev Dormeyer uses *narrative and pragmatic linguistics* for an interpretation of Acts 8:26–40. He differentiates three text elements, the external text-form, the content, and the pragmatic intention. These levels return in his interpretation of the nine narrative sequences of the large biographical apophthegm of Philip in Acts. Dormeyer makes several analogies for the meeting of Philip and the eunuch: with the Greek-Roman novel of love, with other meeting-stories, and with the idea of mental imaginations. This brings him close to van Tilborg's interest in Philostratus' *Imagines*, and in his conclusions he paints a "picture" of the missionary of Philip between the skylines of Jerusalem and Gaza.

As the title of his article already announces ("Is there another way?"), François Tolmie does not present a "classical" *rhetorical analysis* of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. With R. Anderson and P. Kern, he refutes the hypothesis that Galatians is either a sample of classical rhetoric or that it could be interpreted in the light of ancient rhetorical textbooks. Instead of applying an ancient rhetorical model to Galatians, Tolmie attempts to reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy from the text itself. He concentrates on two sections of Galatians (1:1–5 and 1:6–10) in order to identify the dominant rhetorical strategy. Of course, this is a first step in a proceeding project.

In his article on *intertextuality* and mysticism, Huub Welzen describes one of the methods used in the Christian tradition for spiritual readings of biblical texts, the *lectio divina* as developed by Guigo II in the 12th century. Welzen connects this *lectio divina* to intertextuality as a linguistic re-creation of archetexts through the mystic's own experience. Examples to show the effects of these intertextual and mystic transformations are taken from Gregory of Nazianzus, John of the Cross, and Hildegard of Bingen, especially the prologue to her "Liber Scivias." The biblical echoes in their works show that the struggle of these mystics, with the ineffability of their experience, is shaped by biblical tradition.