Van de Ven, I. & Chateau, L. (2024). *Digital Culture and the Hermeneutic Tradition: Suspicion, trust, and dialogue*. New York: Editorial Routledge.

The emergence of the information society, social media, and artificial intelligence has displaced the traditional place of hermeneutics towards increasingly opaque and technified spaces of social validation. In this new environment, forms of access to truth, no longer articulated so much from a discursive rationality as from algorithms of reputation and echo, have become more volatile, while new types of dialogue are emerging that challenge classical forms of intersubjective understanding. Can hermeneutics, in its comprehensive and critical vocation, still offer a framework for interpreting these symbolic mutations? The question is both a provocation and a starting point. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly urgent to undertake a symbolic reading of the present that allows us to unravel the emerging configurations of subjectivity in the digital age.

The task of rethinking the digital present from a hermeneutic matrix—that is, as a space charged with meanings that require situated interpretation—takes on a particularly suggestive formulation in the proposal by Inge van de Ven and Lucie Chateau, developed in the book Digital Culture and the Hermeneutic Tradition. Far from being a mere technical application of classical concepts, the authors advocate a renewal of hermeneutics that takes on the epistemic and symbolic challenges of the algorithmic era. Van de Ven, a researcher at Tilburg University, works at the intersection of comparative literature, digital culture and contemporary reading practices; Chateau, a professor at the University of Paris 8, delves into hermeneutic theory, epistemology and digital aesthetics. From this convergence, the book develops an approach that not only updates the fundamentals of interpretation but also inserts itself into the broader debate on the status of the algorithm as a mediator of meaning, a crucial topic in contemporary philosophy of technology.

The work starts from a crucial question: how are the interpretation of the world and the production of meaning configured in a digital culture governed by algorithmic logics and data regimes?

Instead of assuming a purely academic or historical hermeneutics, Van de Ven and Chateau articulate a perspective that turns hermeneutics into a form of critical rationality, capable of confronting the new devices of intelligibility that organise contemporary life. Among these, the notion of epistemic surveillance occupies a central place, since it is not only a matter of informational supervision, but also of a profound reorganisation of the circuits through which knowledge is validated, distributed and imposed. In this horizon, hermeneutics not only questions the regimes of truth established by algorithmic systems, but also allows us to rethink the agency of the subject in the face of automated structures that condition and often anticipate the very frameworks of interpretation. At this point, the proposal links up with current debates around algorithmic criticism, post-phenomenological thinking, and the return of a reconfigured hermeneutics of suspicion.

The book is structured into four main sections: (1) The Familiar and the Strange: Rethinking Hermeneutics for the Digital, which rethinks hermeneutics in the digital context; (2) Paranoid Readings of Toxic Memes: Suspicious Hermeneutics, which addresses a critical and distrustful interpretation of toxic memes on the internet; (3) Especially For You: Hermeneutics of Faith, which explores the dimension of hermeneutical faith in the reception of digital content; and (4) Can We Talk? Dialogical Hermeneutics, which analyses the possibilities and limits of interpretative dialogue in digital environments.

The first chapter, The Familiar and the Strange: Rethinking Hermeneutics for the Digital, presents the core of rigorous research on the hermeneutic framework and its application to both digital technologies and literary studies in computational environments. The authors focus, in particular, on tracing the historical evolution of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher (with his conception of interpretation as the art of understanding) to Gadamer, whose proposal revolves around dialogue and the fusion of horizons as forms of comprehensive openness. In line with contemporary characterisations of our era as post-critical or even post-hermeneutic, Van de Ven and Chateau argue that hermeneutics has not disappeared, but has mutated, persisting in new forms in various digital practices such as fandoms or conspiracy communities. Based on this observation,

they propose an escalated digital hermeneutics for the analysis of cultural objects, articulated on three complementary levels: a distant reading, based on the algorithmic treatment of large corpora; a close reading, oriented towards the qualitative examination of selected fragments; and finally, a hermeneutics of platforms, focused on the affordances and algorithmic biases inherent in digital environments, in line with what Safiya Noble proposes in Algorithms of Oppression. This scaled digital hermeneutics, conceived as a pedagogical method and linguistic strategy, recovers Gadamer's gesture of interpretation from a dialogical approach that recognises the agency distributed between humans and algorithms.

The second chapter, Paranoid Readings of Toxic Memes: Suspicious Hermeneutics, takes as its axis of analysis the hermeneutics of suspicion developed by Paul Ricoeur and its projection into the realm of digital cultures. The authors highlight how this mode of interpretation, originally aimed at revealing latent structures of domination, has led to an excess of paranoid reading practices, characterised by systematic distrust of the media and institutions. Far from promoting enlightening criticism, this interpretative

drift tends to encourage the proliferation of conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives that erode the public space. Thus, after outlining the history of this way of thinking and how it manifests itself today, Van de Ven and Chateau focus on synthesising an exemplary digital hermeneutic reading of mistrust in toxic memes about depression.

The third chapter, Especially For You: Hermeneutics of Faith, examines the ways in which excessive and uncritical trust in algorithms and digital platforms manifests itself, particularly among public figures and other members of these technological communities. From there, the authors address a set of technological expressions associated with this phenomenon, including algorithmic biases, echo chambers, and filter bubbles. In this context, they revisit Paul Ricoeur's work to confront his proposal for a hermeneutics of faith or restoration with interpretive approaches such as superficial reading, formulated by Best and Marcus, or reparative reading, proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

The fourth chapter, Can We Talk? Dialogical Hermeneutics, proposes Hans-Georg Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics as a theoretical framework

for rethinking digital spaces for deliberation, particularly those affected by polarisation and algorithmic biases. Through the study of the subreddit r/changemyview, the authors analyse how certain digital environments allow, at least in principle, a fusion of horizons between interlocutors with divergent positions. However, they warn that technical affordances such as voting systems and visibility algorithms can reinforce discursive hierarchies, hindering the exercise of genuine dialogical understanding. This tension between openness and closure is also articulated with Miranda Fricker's concept of hermeneutic injustice, showing how users from marginalised groups often lack the resources necessary for their experiences to be recognised as legitimate.

Despite these limitations, the authors identify possibilities for transformation through interventions in the design and moderation of platforms. Subreddits with clear rules that discourage fallacies or personal attacks manage, in some cases, to sustain more constructive dialogues. Likewise, pedagogical tools such as scaled analysis (distant and close reading) are proposed to teach users to identify structural biases in digital debates. The chapter concludes by emphasising the urgency of rethinking the architecture of the digital sphere from a hermeneutic perspective that promotes transformative exchanges, integrating principles of epistemic justice into technological design.

Although Digital Culture and the Hermeneutic Tradition is a valuable contribution to contemporary philosophy by updating the hermeneutic tradition in the digital context, it has some limitations that deserve attention for deeper and more robust reflection.

First, the approach proposed by scaled digital hermeneutics, although innovative in its combination of distant, close and platform readings, could become trapped in an overly methodological and formal perspective, with the risk of insufficient engagement with the material and socio-economic conditions that shape those same platforms. The dialogue between humans and algorithms, while recognised in its distributed agency, does not address with the necessary depth the dynamics of power, property and capital that permeate algorithmic technoculture, leaving a gap with contemporary Marxist or postcolonial critiques that illuminate technology as a terrain of conflict and domination. This omission could lead to an idealised or neutralised view of the

fusion of digital horizons, without fully recognising the asymmetries and exclusions that these platforms reproduce.

Furthermore, in the second chapter, the criticism of paranoid proliferation in the reading of toxic memes, although relevant, is somewhat ambivalent in that it does not offer a sufficient balance that recognises the emancipatory and disruptive function that radical suspicion can also have in contexts of disinformation and media manipulation. The warning against excessive suspicion could be read as a call for moderation at a time when the urgency to reveal the hidden structures of digital power calls for incisive and confrontational interpretations.

As for the dimension of hermeneutic faith in the third chapter, the exploration of uncritical trust in algorithms, while essential, is limited to a relatively descriptive analysis of biases and filter bubbles, without delving into normative proposals or effective strategies for recovering the critical agency of the subject. The hermeneutics of faith thus remains an ideal, without a clear articulation of how to materialise it in digital praxis.

Finally, the chapter devoted to dialogical hermeneutics on platforms

such as Reddit rightly points out the tensions between openness and closure, as well as identifying epistemic injustices, but the proposal for interventions in platform design and moderation is too timid given the magnitude of the structural challenges. The call for clear rules and digital pedagogies is necessary but insufficient if it is not accompanied by a more forceful political and ethical critique that questions the economic and technological foundations that reproduce inequality and polarisation.

Despite these limitations, Van de Ven and Chateau's work represents a bold attempt to place hermeneutics at the heart of reflection on digital culture. Their commitment to a digital hermeneutics that integrates algorithmic and dialogical approaches is in tune with contemporary authors such as Maurizio Ferraris, Rosa María Rodríguez Magda and Yanis Varoufakis, extending a fertile field of study that confronts the philosophical tradition with the complexities of the algorithmic era, showing that interpretation is more necessary than ever to unravel the contemporary configuration of meaning.

The approach of a distributed agency, in which humans and algorithms participate in the production of meaning,

opens a door to a hybrid ontology of the digital subject which, although still under construction, points towards a renewed dialogue between philosophy and technology. This view favours epistemic criticism, stimulating an understanding of digital culture that is not limited to technology, but emerges as a symbolic battle for recognition, justice and truth. On the other hand, the hermeneutic approach of suspicion and faith, in dialectical tension, offers conceptual tools to navigate the complexity of today's media ecosystem, where both fake news and uncritical trust proliferate. This duality reveals the richness of hermeneutics as an interpretive practice capable of balancing criticism and openness, mistrust and hope.

In conclusion, by placing epistemic justice and the ethical dimension of digital design at the centre, the authors propose a horizon where philosophy can intervene in the technical and social configuration of the digital public space. Although the scope of their proposals still requires greater political specificity, their call to rethink the digital sphere from a hermeneutic perspective constitutes an unavoidable invitation for contemporary philosophy, based on the proposal to rethink not only how we interpret the world, but also how the world itself is interpreted through technologies that reconfigure experience and subjectivity.

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