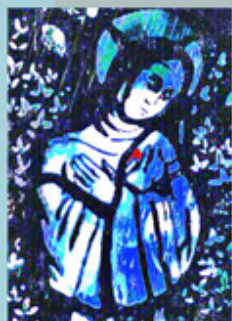


The Mind of Love Mysticism



Wim van den Dungen



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by
Wim van den Dungen

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First edition in 2026

POD Publication

Published for Taurus Press

by LULU.com

ISBN : 978-1-291-63712-0

BISAC : REL047000

RELIGION / Mysticism



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Plus est en vous.

Motto of the 15th-century van Gruuthuse family

Preface

Flemish mysticism came my way during the last years of my studies in philosophy at the RUG (Rijksuniversiteit Gent). At that time, the philosophy of science stood at the center of my work, because I was looking for criteria by which rationality could be distinguished from irrationality. This question seemed unavoidable if meaningful statements were to be made about disciplines situated at the margins of the accepted scientific paradigm, such as parapsychology, transpersonal psychology, homeopathy, alternative healing, and related fields. My first attraction to mystics arose partly from this horizon, because extraordinary phenomena were often reported around them. Only much later did I understand that these phenomena, however striking, are *secondary*. Mysticism is not defined by *anomaly*. It is, first of all, a *transformed mode* of life, experience, cognition, desire, discipline, and relation to the Divine.

My study of Beatrice of Nazareth (1200 – 1268), the Cistercian prioress of Nazareth near Lier in Brabant, belonged from the beginning to this broader investigation into knowledge and mysticism. In 1983, I studied *On Seven Ways of Holy Love*, her seminal Middle Dutch treatise, under Joseph Alaerts, s.j. (born 1937), Jesuit Ruusbroec expert, priest, theologian, philologist, and contributor to the critical edition of Ruusbroec's *Opera Omnia*. Between 1986 and 1990, as a scientific collaborator at Ghent University, Faculty of Logic and Epistemology, I investigated the cognitive aspects of mystical experience. In 1994, this work led to *Kennis en Minne-Mystiek*, which advocated *mysticology*: the study of the logical, epistemological, and phenomenological features of mystical experience (Staal, 1978). Beatrice's treatise served as the hermeneutical object there. That earlier text is now outdated, and its analytical structures are insufficient. Its translation was also based on the Brussels manuscript rather than on the Hague manuscript, now accepted as the oldest witness (Gumbert, 1987) and intensively studied by recent scholarship (Huls, 2002; 2013).

By *mysticology*, I do not mean a new theology of mysticism, nor a devotional commentary on mystical authors, nor a psychological reduction of mystical states. I mean a *critical study* of mystical experience, mystical cognition, and the ways in which such experience is expressed, reported, interpreted, transmitted, symbolized, doctrinally shaped, and *cognitively distinctive*. Mystical experience is treated here as a serious experiential datum, but never as transparent possession of reality-as-such. It reaches us through report, memory, language, image, discipline, doctrine, and community. The task is therefore neither to believe the report naively nor to dissolve it into explanation, but to ask *what kind of experience is being reported*, in *what register* it is expressed, and *what kind of knowledge*, if any, it claims.

Two distinctions proved decisive for the present book. First, the mystic's experience must be distinguished from the superstructure through which that experience is understood, interpreted, authorized, remembered, and made

communicable (Staal, 1980). By *superstructure*, I mean the doctrinal, symbolic, linguistic, ritual, institutional, and communal forms through which religious or mystical experience is organized. This superstructure includes the mystic's immediate conceptual world, her monastic and interpretive context, and the broader spiritual culture of her time. It is not the experience itself, the substructure. Yet it is also not an accidental ornament added from outside. Without some superstructure, mystical experience could not be remembered, shared, judged, or transmitted.

Second, the distinction between direct and indirect registers, learned from Alaerts, helps separate words, images, and motifs that point toward the lived experience of the Divine from those that organize doctrine, explanation, authorization, and theological consequence. The direct register does not give unmediated access to the experience itself. It names the textual layer *nearest to reported mystical actuality*. The indirect register, by contrast, belongs to the explanatory and doctrinal forms by which the experience is interpreted, defended, or integrated into a theological world. A superstructure is never the real thing itself. Yet it cannot simply be bypassed. It must be identified, disciplined, and made explicit before it is allowed to organize interpretation.

The core thesis of this book is that, in the first six ways, Beatrice presents the *existential problems* facing the mystic on the path toward a first stable mystical plateau, described in the sixth way. By *mystical plateau*, I mean a relatively stabilized condition of transformed consciousness, not a final state, not a metaphysical possession, and not a completed union with the Divine. It is a spiritual and cognitive *stabilization* after struggle, excess, discipline, failure, renewed desire, and reorganization of the soul. There, existential struggle gives rise to a phenomenology of self-actualization, the first of two stages of cognition beyond the rational.

This phrase, *beyond the rational*, must be read carefully. It does not mean irrational, anti-rational, or exempt from critical judgment. It means that certain forms of mystical cognition exceed *ordinary conceptual ordering* while still showing structure, intelligibility, discipline, and transformative force. Beatrice's language does not merely describe emotional intensity. It organizes a world of desire, action, obedience, receptivity, suffering, and love into a pattern of *spiritual knowing*. Her text must be read neither as doctrine alone nor as private affect alone, but as a *disciplined report of holy love* becoming cognitively and existentially formative.

Through *minne*, holy love for Christ, Beatrice integrates actional, affective, and cognitive dimensions into a single hyper-concept. By *hyper-concept*, I mean a symbolic and integrative form in which several dimensions of meaning are gathered into one higher-order configuration. *Minne* is not love in general. It is Divine love as desire, wound, service, sweetness, storm, discipline, knowledge, and eschatological longing. In the sixth way, this integration is expressed through the metaphor of the *good housewife*, a figure of ordered spiritual activity, interior

governance, and stabilized participation in Divine love. This angelic integration is called 'angelic' not because Beatrice ceases to be human, but because the soul's activity becomes ordered, lucid, generous, and spiritually functional beyond ordinary egoic self-concern.

This angelic integration does not remain merely private or affective. It helps prepare the later grammar by which Ruusbroec and other Christian mystics will understand their experience of the Divine. Beatrice's originality lies not only in the intensity of her love language but in the *disciplined manner* in which *minne* becomes a *cognitive form*. She does not merely say that the soul loves God. She shows how holy love *educates* the soul, *displaces* self-appropriation, *organizes* action, *transforms* desire, and *opens* a higher relation to the Divine. Her treatise is not only a document of devotion but also of *mystical cognition*.

The seventh way introduces a deeper tension. In my reading, Beatrice's later mystical awareness presses beyond the integration of the sixth way and against the limits of the Catholic theological superstructure. The nondual pressure of this highest mystical condition cannot easily be harmonized with the Augustinian or Thomist conviction that what is created can never experience the Divine essence. By *nondual pressure*, I do not mean a doctrinal claim that creature and Creator simply become identical. I mean the experiential pressure in which ordinary opposition between lover and Beloved, subject and object, seeking and finding, temporal desire and Divine immediacy, is *stretched* to its limit. Beatrice does not resolve this tension theoretically. Instead, the seventh way bears it spiritually, affectively, and eschatologically.

This unresolved tension leads toward *contemptus mundi* and toward the Pauline longing *cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*. These terms do not name a hatred of creation in any simple sense. They name the spiritual exhaustion of a soul for whom finite life can no longer contain the intensity of its desire for Divine immediacy. The problem is not Beatrice's alone ; it will trouble later Christian mystics, including Ruusbroec, Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Ávila. Christian mysticism repeatedly reaches a threshold where experience presses beyond the doctrinal forms that make it speakable, while those forms remain necessary if the experience is not to disappear into silence, fantasy, or private absolutism.

My thanks go to J. Alaerts, s.j., and to my late relative, Sister Paule Stefens (1913 – 1993). The rapport I had with this mystic, and the extraordinary experiences we shared, deepened my understanding of the difference between a *lived* Christian life and a *church-based path*. That distinction has remained important for this book. It does not imply hostility toward the Church, but it does require that mystical experience, mystical cognition, and mystical transformation not be *reduced* to ecclesiastical form. A lived Christian life may pass through the Church, receive from the Church, and remain answerable to Christian memory, while still *exceeding the institutional forms* by which that life is supervised, interpreted, or authorized.

The writing of this book was also prompted by Jos Huls's *Seuen maniren van minnen van Beatrijs van Nazareth : Het mystieke proces en de mystagogische implicaties* (2002) and *The Minne-Journey : Beatrice of Nazareth's "Seven Ways of Minne" : Mystical Process and Mystagogical Implications* (2013).

Huls clarified the mystagogical movement of Beatrice's treatise with great care, especially the journey of *minne* as a transformative process. Although some of my conclusions differ from his, I thank him for his excellent contributions to the study of Beatrice.

My own aim is more strictly critical-mysticological : to clarify how Beatrice's text bears witness to *minne* as experience, cognition, report, interpretation, and theological tension.

Introduction

In this study, the reader finds the results of an investigation into the relations between mysticism and cognition (begun in 1985). First, *the source text* for this extraordinary spiritual movement, called ‘Flemish mysticism,’ had to be found. This research brought me into contact with the long-lost treatise of the mystic Beatrice of Nazareth (1200 – 1268), the *Seuen Maniren van Minnen*, the Seven Ways of *Minne*, hereafter abbreviated as ‘7M.’ It is the *first treatise* in Early Dutch literature to describe the mystical growth process or ‘minne-journey’ (Huls, 2013) in terms that match what researchers in the 20th-century identified as the universal characteristics of mystical experience (Stace, 1960 ; Tart, 1978 ; van den Dungen, 2018). A lost vernacular autobiographical or quasi-autobiographical source, used by the author of the *Vita Beatricis*, is often associated with her, although its exact form and scope remain uncertain.

The Middle Dutch word *minne* most directly translates to English love, as well as to modern Dutch *liefde* and French *amour*. However, a simple one-to-one translation fails to capture its rich historical weight. In medieval literature and culture, *minne* was a complex and highly nuanced concept, and its exact meaning depended entirely on context. Because meaning shifts so dramatically across genres, translators must carefully assess whether they are reading a chivalric romance, a religious poem, or a legal document. For example, in secular literature, such as knightly romances and troubadour poetry, the term referred to *hoofse minne*, or courtly love. This was a highly stylized, idealized, and often secret devotion between a knight and a noble lady, serving as an ennobling force that inspired great deeds of chivalry.

Conversely, in the religious writings of 13th-century mystics such as Hadewijch of Antwerp, Beatrice of Nazareth, and John of Ruusbroec, *minne* takes on a deeply spiritual, consuming meaning. In this context, *minne* was frequently personified as a demanding lady or queen, representing the human soul’s fierce, sometimes agonizing longing to unite with the Divine. It exemplified God’s overwhelming love for humanity. In Beatrice’s treatise, *minne* names Divine love as it becomes intimate, addresses the soul, and draws it toward *restored closeness* to God, which her Christian-Cistercian superstructure interprets as Edenic.

Beyond the realms of high literature and religious ecstasy, *minne* also carried practical, everyday meanings. It could denote physical desire, romance, and sexual intimacy between partners. It also encompassed general affection, friendship, goodwill, and peace. For instance, the historical phrase in der minne, which still echoes in modern Dutch, described settling a legal dispute amicably and in good faith without going to court. Ultimately, the word served as a broad linguistic umbrella, bridging the gap between Divine devotion, noble ideals, and the everyday realities of *human connection*.

In the present study, *minne* refers specifically to the mystical process between the bride and the Bridegroom. This also requires distinguishing Dutch *godsdiens*,

English *religion*, and *mysticism*. Mysticism differs from religion, even though affinities between the two cannot be excluded, given their cultural coalescence within the Western European Catholic climate. In Dutch, the word '*godsdienst*' is often translated as 'religion,' which introduces distinctions that need clarification. The English word 'religion' carries the etymological weight of the Latin *religare* (to bind, tie fast, or reconnect), which emphasizes the *spiritual bond* or relationship between humanity and the Divine, *regardless* of whether this bond is institutionally organized. The Dutch '*godsdienst*,' on the other hand, comes from a completely different conceptual angle. It is a compound of '*God*' and '*dienst*' (service). Literally, it means 'service to God.' Because of this, the word '*godsdienst*' has historically placed a much heavier emphasis on the duty, practice, and *outward acts* of honoring God, rather than on the *internal* spiritual connection alone. If the 'binding' connotations of *religion* are to be maintained, the 'serving' essence of '*godsdienst*' is best translated as : (i) 'worship,' the most accurate word to capture the active 'service' ('*dienst*') aspect. Worship implies the acts of reverence, honor, and homage paid to a Supreme Being, (ii) 'Divine Service,' the most literal translation of '*godsdienst*,' perfectly captures the idea of serving the Divine in a formal liturgy, a church gathering, or a specific ceremonial duty, (iii) 'religious practice' or 'observance,' pointing to the overarching system of duties, rituals, and rules that a believer follows, capturing the pragmatic, action-oriented nature of the Dutch word much better than 'religion' alone, to be used in descriptive contexts (e.g., "*Vrijheid van godsdienst*." often practically translates to the freedom to *practice* one's faith openly), and (iv) 'faith,' usually the direct translation for the Dutch '*geloof*' (which refers to unconditional belief). It is sometimes used as a substitute for '*godsdienst*' when speaking broadly about different worldviews. However, 'geloof' leans heavily on internal conviction rather than external service, moving away from the literal meaning of '*dienst*.'

In short, *religion* refers to a connection with the Divine, while '*godsdienst*' emphasizes service, worship, practice, and observance. When this connection is socially and doctrinally organized, it becomes institutional religion or churchly religion. *Faith* names the inward assent or trust by which the believer lives within, alongside, or sometimes against that institutional form. Mysticism, as an intensification of this connection with the Divine to the point of direct experience, may occur within, alongside, or sometimes outside ecclesiastical structures ; conflicts arise when mystical testimony is judged by theological, sacramental, or disciplinary norms *not* generated by the experience itself.

A recurrent problem for accomplished Christian mystics is this : ecclesiastical mediation, especially in its Roman Catholic institutional form, often subjected claims of direct Divine experience to sacramental, doctrinal, and clerical discernment, particularly when such claims appeared to bypass authorized forms of mediation. While the Holy Spirit may inspire mystics, there is no question of any *theosis* of the soul implying a *union of essences*. If such an essential fusion were possible, the mystic would appear to speak with Divine authority in a way difficult to subordinate to episcopal, sacramental, and doctrinal mediation. The

formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, ‘outside the Church there is no salvation,’ traditionally associated with Cyprian of Carthage, a 3rd-century bishop and martyr, expresses this concern for ecclesial mediation and authorized spiritual belonging. Mysticism involves the direct experience of the radical other (*totaliter aliter*). This is the direct, existential *relationship* between an experiencing subject and the Divine, an infusion of the ‘sacred’ into the ‘profane,’ through which the ‘sacred’ becomes *experiential*. But if God becomes intimate with the soul, communicates with it, how can it be maintained that these ‘lovers’ nevertheless remain divided (what the theology of essences demands) ? Mystical testimony at least exposes the pressure placed on theological distinctions rooted in Greek metaphysics, especially where intimacy with the Divine is reported without experiential distance. The traditional emphasis on the soul’s receptivity to grace creates a tension with the participatory activity of the ‘good soul’ seeking her Bridegroom, expressed in the ‘see’ and ‘go out’ of Ruusbroec’s famous phrase in the last part of his *The Spiritual Espousals* : “*Siet, de brudegom comt, gaet ute om hem te ontmoete,*” or “See, the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him.” ‘Seeing’ is the state of Divine contemplation beyond human comprehension. The ‘Bridegroom coming’ is the ultimate union of the soul with God. ‘Going out’ means completely transcending the self and all earthly attachments, and ‘meeting Him’ is the final, unmediated resting in the fathomless abyss of Divine love.

Across many cultures and periods, figures appear whose reports can be compared as mystical, but only under strict register discipline. Their objects, languages, disciplines, and superstructures differ sharply, and the object of mystical experience is named differently : God, Christ, Allah, Brahman, *Íśvara*, Kether, Creator, *Tathāgatagarbha*, and others. The comparison concerns reportable structures, transformative claims, and cognitive limits ; it does not presuppose a single hidden object or a universal mystical doctrine behind them.

In the previous century, transpersonal psychology proposed recurring marks of mystical experience, such as ‘oneness,’ ‘totality,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘time and space transcendence,’ ‘sacredness,’ ‘bliss,’ ‘paradoxicality,’ ‘ineffability,’ and ‘temporality.’

Insofar as these categories are handled as comparative indicators rather than universal essences, they can be integrated into an understanding of mystical experience in terms of cognitive growth and knowledge manipulation. A new field of research then arises, cutting across transpersonal psychology, comparative cultural and religious studies, and criticism, called ‘mysticology’ : the study of the cognitive factors co-constituting reported mystical states of consciousness, without reducing them to one perennial model. Thus, the *unio mystica* of the Christian West may be placed in controlled comparison, under strict register discipline, with *samādhi* in Yoga, *mokṣa* in Jainism, *mukṭi* in Hinduism, *nirvāṇa* in Buddhism, and *satori* in Japanese Zen. Such comparison does not equate these terms, derive them from a common essence, or erase their doctrinal worlds ; it

asks how different traditions articulate transformation, limit, liberation, and the overcoming of ordinary egoic cognition.

In his *Mystica Theologia*, ps.-Dionysios the Areopagite described the ultimate unification of the soul with God (the end point of the soul's return 'to the homeland') as a 'mysterious' thing. The Greek *mustikos* stood for 'secret' and 'hidden.' This referred to the essence of God, which remains absent from creation (only His 'energies' or accidents are deemed to enter the world, a clear instance of Platonism). Hence, even mystics *do not* penetrate God's essence, for the basic theological premise is that God *cannot* be known as He is. Negative, apophatic theology is the basis of true mystical theology. God's essence is *unknowable*. Yet by experiencing God's Kingdom (His Cosmos), the mystic can, in this understanding, penetrate deep into His presence in every natural finitude (cf. the 'indwelling' of the *Shekinah* in the Qabalah). Yet some mystics use language that appears to press toward essential unity between the soul and God, as in Ruusbroec's *Third Life* or Meister Eckhart's image of the 'eye of God.' Such language could be judged by ecclesiastical authorities as pantheistic, heterodox, or dangerously ambiguous, and in some historical contexts mystical writings, and sometimes mystics themselves, became subject to condemnation, suppression, or violent punishment.

The importance of studying the cognitive factors involved in mystical experience is obvious, for mystical giants not infrequently determine the course of cultures (Laozi, Śākyamuni Buddha, Mahāvīra, Jesus, and Muhammad). That they attribute the origin of their life's work to a 'mystical entry' or 'mysterious pass' (*Xuanguan*) demands attention. This raises, but does not settle, the question of deep analogies among mystical traditions. More importantly, mysticism, defined here in the Christian and critical-mysticological register as reported direct experience of the Divine, points toward an experimental dimension of disciplined transformation (Staal, 1975). Mystics report a rare transformation while living in this world ; they testify to a unity or immediacy that may disclose radical truth, but only under mediation, interpretation, and limit. The fact that some wrote down their mystical growth processes and the experiences they encountered suggests that mysticism is not only for the few but can become part of everyday life (Laski, 1980). For the limited purposes of comparative modeling, many mystical and transpersonal accounts can be read as involving a transformation in which the ordinary center of consciousness, the 'I' or ego that defines personality, undergoes decentration (Piaget, 1976). This is a heuristic model of transformation, not a claim that all traditions describe the same process, aim at the same object, or authorize the same metaphysics. This begins with preparatory actions or spiritual exercises that lead into *purificatio*, understood as renunciation, purification, and loosening of egoic attachment. A 'sacred frame of reference' (Sundén, 1966) introduced in childhood assists in this radical change. Through the pendulum movement from 'profane' to 'sacred' (Deikman, 1976), egoic closure may loosen, and a new, already latent center of consciousness may become active, namely the higher self as the focus of individuality. From this higher self (the *re-equilibration*

of identity from circular to elliptic), more connections are given, its hyper-concepts, ‘panoramically’ overlooked, and through ‘inner reflection’, contemplative intuition is active beyond the rational intellect (cf. *Existence and Choice*, 2023). This totals knowledge content into symbolic, overarching hyper-concepts. Thus, the second stage or *illuminatio* is set afoot. The higher self, with its superconsciousness, is a source of greater meaning, bliss, and spontaneous, compassionate action.

Research on creativity and self-expression (Maslow, 1972), as well as the classification of so-called ‘altered states of consciousness’ (Tart, 1972), provided criteria for distinguishing schizophrenia from mystical experience and psychedelic mysticism from the traditional, ascetic version. This refutes the idea of Freud and others that the utterances of mystics must per definition *always* be placed in the same basket as the incomprehensible monologues peculiar to manic-depressive psychotics or hysterics. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the mystics were not aware of the dangers inherent in the mystical growth process, in shedding the ego and entering the dynamism of bimodality, quite the contrary. In Beatrice’s treatise, we find a description of *insania amoris*, described by her as a state of mental sickness, and demarcated from the *actual mystical experience*.

In other words, the mystics themselves thematized the psychic dangers inherent in *too rapid* a spiritual growth.

Wilber (1982 ; 1984), among others, argues that some psychotic states may involve inundation by both lower and higher unconscious contents, producing mental disturbance when the ego cannot integrate what overwhelms it. To the extent that the schizophrenic hears the ‘voices’ of his higher self, he is resourceful, creative, and intuitive. At the same time, however, he is disturbed by the whispers of his ‘Shadow.’ Thus, his ego is a permanent, disjunctive battlefield. His consciousness is an incoherent, chaotic whole. At certain stages of mystical growth, there is clearly a *temporary regression*. After all, the mystics do not shy away from their Shadow. In mature mystical states, however, the tradition commonly expects integration rather than permanent psychic fragmentation.

The examination of the constituents of mystical experience suggests that the mystical state of consciousness is *an integrated whole* in which all the preceding stages of cognitive growth are harmoniously addressed. The regressive phenomena (which Freud et al. identified) often co-occur with visionary and ecstatic phenomena and are associated with certain phases of the spiritual transformation process. Fixation in such a phase can be called pathological without question. Furthermore, the psychedelic movement (1960s, Leary et al. using LSD) has provided new insights into the debate about psychedelic mysticism. It appears that psychedelics induce experiences phenomenologically close to ascetic mysticism only in a minority, probably in those already disposed to realize such states by way of asceticism, i.e., without psychedelics. As Bucke (1961) and others, such as Pahnke (1972), suggest, genuine mystical experience tends to increase ethical commitment (successful disembodiment leads to a certain

totalization that fulfills itself in action). And this seems to be the decisive criterion. If psychedelic mysticism does provide this, it cannot be sharply distinguished from its ascetic variant on ethical-outcome grounds alone (Heigl, 1983). Moreover, the use of certain psychedelics in spiritual practices has historical backing (Crowley, 2019). Indeed, advanced ascetic mystics sometimes use herbal remedies strictly ritualistically (cf. the use of fly agaric in early Christianity, of *soma* in the Vedic rite, of certain herbs to enhance magical powers as Patañjali indicated, of cannabis and opium in Shamanism, etc.).

Moreover, certain ascetic exercises, such as fasting and flagellation, may alter neurochemical conditions in ways that intensify visionary, ecstatic, or dissociative states ; this does not require claiming that the substances produced are biochemically identical to LSD. Yet some continue to contrast the rigorous preparatory (ascetic) phase inherent in any ‘authentic’ mystical growth process (*purificatio*) with the random, not framed by spiritual exercises, ingestion of a biochemically active substance. Ascetic mysticism is character-building and seeks to provide a moral basis supporting the continuity of mystical experience, moving, where successful, from peak to plateau. As indicated, experiments suggest that professionally supervised psychedelic mystical experience can have lasting positive effects on subjects’ ethical behavior (Pahnke and the ‘Good Friday’ experiment).

Consequently, the discussion is not yet closed.

The form and content of Beatrice’s treatise appear to have influenced the mystical language of Jan van Ruusbroec (1293 – 1381), and unlike her contemporary Hadewijch of Antwerp, she wrote for a mystically aspiring audience of fellow nuns in a didactic (not poetic) language. It is very likely that the text was used to instruct young novices. This means that it was more than a personal spiritual travelogue; it says something about the broader dynamics of growth involved in entering higher states and stations of consciousness.

The originality of Beatrice of Nazareth speaks from every sentence of her work. With the 7M, one of the earliest and most characteristic syntheses of Flemish mysticism becomes historically visible. The word *minne* (/ˈmɪn:ə/) stands at the center. It belongs to the Germanic *minn-* word-family, ultimately related to Indo-European *men-*, ‘to think’ or ‘remember,’ and is therefore cognate with Latin *memini* and *mens*. Early forms like the Old High German *minna* and Old Icelandic *minne* were often used to describe ‘remembrance’ or even a ‘toast’ drunk in memory of someone. In the medieval Germanic worldview, love was seen as the act of *constantly keeping someone in one’s mind*. The consummation of *minne* shows itself in the actual handling of the active tension between thinking (ratio) and feeling (affect) in the service of *the full externalization* of the authentic possibilities of the bride (the soul), conscious of her finitude *tensed on* the infinity of her beloved Bridegroom. As soon as the first steps toward the Bridegroom are taken, His constant, though not always experienced, presence guides and guards the entire loving process until its end.

The distinction introduced by Staal (1975) between ‘superstructure’ and ‘substructure’ in the scientific investigation of mysticism will prove to be crucial to understanding the treatise. The ‘substructure’ concerns the record of *a direct, lived experience* of a mystical encounter between the bride and the Bridegroom, whereas the ‘superstructure’ has everything to do with *a speculative systematization* of the mystical experience and its theoretical consequences in view of a presupposed, in this case, Catholic dogmatic theology. In Beatrice’s discourse, we find both registers. In the first six ways, there is an ‘emancipatory’ or didactic discourse aimed at the transformation of egoic life toward a higher mode of consciousness, presented in the image of the ‘good housewife’. In these ways, the struggle towards bimodality is evident and culminates in self-actualization. In the seventh way, she incorporates theological dogma, quoting Augustine, discussing the Trinity, and lamenting the world (*contemptus mundi*). Her take on the consummation of the mystical experience in self-realization is predicated on the principles of dogmatic theology and the Platonizing metaphysics implied (superstructure).

My study of Beatrice’s work began in 1984, was published in *Mystiek en Cognitie* (1989), and later reworked as *Kennis en Minne-Mystiek* (1994). In 2016, the treatise was translated into English, with a short commentary added to each version, without any study of the underlying knowledge manipulation. The present study reopens that earlier work through ms. **H**, critical hermeneutics, and the developed framework of mysticology. Both earlier translations were based on the Brussels manuscript. The 7M survives in three manuscript witnesses :

- *Manuscript H* (ms. **H**) : *Royal Library*, The Hague, between 1270 and 1320 ;
- *Manuscript B* (ms. **B**) : *Royal Library of Brussels*. It dates from ca.1350 ;
- *Manuscript W* (ms. **W**) : *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*. It dates to the first or second half of the 15th-century.

Note : Compared to ms. **B**, ms. **H** and ms. **W** share numerous variants. In ms. **B**, a number of German-like variants can be found.

Before Gumbert (1987), Vekeman, Reypens, and Van Mierlo deemed the Brussels manuscript (ms. **B**) the oldest, while others, like de Vreese and Liefstinck, had already dated manuscript **H** as early 14th-century. *Kennis en Minne-Mystiek* (1994) was also based on the Brussels codex. In 2002, Huls, in his doctoral thesis, revisited the text with manuscript **H** as his root text. His work shows that a consensus has been reached : ms. **H** is the oldest, written in a manner matching that of the Brussels manuscript, and the most reliable reflection of the original 13th-century prose. It preserves a specific rhythm and theological precision that Huls argues is crucial for understanding the mystical process Beatrice intended to describe. He points out that later copies (like ms. **B** and ms. **W**) sometimes smooth out or misinterpret Beatrice’s complex spiritual vocabulary to fit later 15th-century devotional standards. By comparing them, Huls shows how the *dynamic tension* of the original *minne* was sometimes lost in translation by later scribes. Here, the translation is revisited using ms. **H**, the oldest witness.

Chapter 1 | Introduces the critical-epistemological and hermeneutical tools needed for responsible interpretation.

Chapter 2 | Examines early Christian superstructures only as controls for the later reading of Beatrice, especially the ways *New Testament*, Pauline, ecclesial, and doctrinal formations preserved, mediated, and constrained the language through which reported Divine experience could become communicable.

Chapter 3 | Situates Beatrice historically and summarizes the Beatrice study.

Chapter 4 | Identifies the 7M as a root text of Flemish mysticism and revisits its translation.

Chapter 5 | Lays out the general, medial, and immediate contexts.

Chapter 6 | Examines the formal characteristics, registers, Edenic structure, the problem of interpolation, and models to structure the treatise.

Chapter 7 | Interprets the treatise way by way.

Chapter 8 | Presents critical controls from bimodality, transpersonal psychology, decentration, crisis, creativity, and nondual awareness.

Chapter 9 | Critically tests the treatise in light of these controls.

Chapter 10 | What remains when historical, textual, theological, psychological, and institutional controls have done their work ?

The reader should not mistake the long approach for a delay.

Beatrice appears only *after* the main controls have been made explicit : critical epistemology, hermeneutics, early Christian superstructure, manuscript history, contextual theology, transpersonal psychology, nondual cognition, and actional transformation. These controls do not replace her or push her to the margin. They prevent the *Seuen Maniren* from being possessed too quickly by devotion, doctrine, psychology, historicism, or later comparative theory.

Only under these conditions can the text be read as what it is for this study : not an isolated medieval document, not a transparent transcript of Divine immediacy, and not a free example of universal mysticism, but a historically mediated witness to *minne* as direct experience, cognition, report, interpretation, and theological tension. So this book is not medieval textual scholarship or confessional theology, although it must remain answerable to both where they constrain interpretation. Its governing aim is critical mysticology : to understand how mystical experience becomes meaningful, communicable, interpretable, and cognitively distinctive without being reduced to doctrine, psychology, institutional reception, metaphysical possession, or universal mystical theory.

The book expects *disciplinary unease*. Medievalists, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, devotional readers, and secular readers may each find one register too strong or another too restrained. This is unavoidable. No single discipline is allowed to possess the mystical datum. Each register is necessary ; none is sovereign. The task is to keep them *distinct* enough for Beatrice's witness to be heard without being reduced, inflated, protected from criticism, or dissolved into abstraction, yet *kept together* by the affirmation of the possible immediacy of the holy, the numinous, the wondrous, irrespective of how it is named.

Chapter 1 | Critical Hermeneutics

Definitional clarity is not a formal ornament that precedes interpretation from the outside. It is the first act of interpretation itself.

A study of mysticism that begins without clarifying its operative distinctions will almost inevitably confuse registers that must be kept apart if Beatrice is to be read correctly : experience and report, report and doctrine, doctrine and metaphysics, metaphysics and knowledge, knowledge and warranted interpretation. The risk is especially acute in a book devoted to mystical cognition. Mystical discourse is almost always tempted by inflation from within and reduction from without. From within, it is tempting to take the language of union, Divine presence, *minne*, fruition, excess, or self-loss as though it were already conceptual possession of the ultimate. From without, it is tempting to explain it away as piety, discipline, rhetoric, neurology, gender performance, or an institutional symptom. A critical hermeneutic must refuse both temptations. It must allow the mystical claim to appear in its own force, while also distinguishing carefully what sort of claim is being made and what sorts of validation are or are not available. That is why the chapter does not begin with Beatrice's imagery, nor with the history of Brabantine spirituality, nor with an inventory of manuscript witnesses, important as all of these are. It begins with the minimum epistemological architecture, without which none of those materials can be handled critically.

The necessity of such a prelude becomes clearer as soon as one recalls what kind of object Beatrice's text is. Beatrice of Nazareth, a Cistercian prioress in Brabant, is known above all through *Seven manieren van minne* and through the Latin *Vita Beatricis*. The Ruusbroec Institute correctly presents the treatise as the central work by which she is remembered and as a text that exerted influence in her own period and beyond, including on later mystical figures in the Low Countries. What scholars and the modern reader encounter is not the naked interiority of Beatrice, but a mediated textual field in which voice, authority, gender, doctrine, and hagiographical framing interact. That is precisely why this chapter's argument begins with method.

1.1 Definitions

§ 1 Cognition

Cognition, in the critical sense required here, is the rule-governed activity by which something is intended, interpreted, argued, corrected, and, where possible, validated as an object of knowledge. Its formal condition remains the *fact of reason* : no claim to knowledge can be made without a subject-pole that knows and an object-pole about which something is known. These poles must not be substantiated. The transcendental subject is not a hidden ego-substance behind interpretation, and the transcendental object is not the thing-in-itself seized by

thought. They are the necessary functions without which conceptual knowing could not be coherently practiced at all.

This definition should remain critical rather than psychological. Cognition can be studied by biology, psychology, information theory, sociology, or neuroscience, but such studies describe downstream operations. They do not replace the normative question at stake here : under what conditions can a claim count as valid knowledge ? In hermeneutics, this question receives a specific form. The interpreter does not merely receive a text, nor invent it sovereignly. She encounters a historically transmitted object of meaning, already mediated by language, genre, manuscript history, theological vocabulary, institutional setting, and reception. The Kantian formal condition of experience is thus practically mediated through a Peircean and Habermasian network of linguistic and symbolic exchange. Cognition is not a *solitary gaze*, but the disciplined activity wherein signals, icons, and symbols are exchanged, tested, and validated intersubjectively. Its normativity appears precisely when this communicative cognition turns back upon itself, asking under what conditions valid conceptual knowledge is possible. That reflexive, transcendental turn is critical epistemology, which does not describe cognition from the *outside* but uncovers the rules *already operative in the practice of knowing* : principles in transcendental logic, norms in theoretical epistemology, and maxims in applied epistemology.

For the study of Beatrice of Nazareth, this means that cognition is not a general theory imposed from without on the text, but the controlled activity through which the text can become an object of knowledge. The interpreter must bring concepts, questions, and theoretical expectations, but these must be checked by lexical usage, Middle Dutch context, Cistercian theology, the relation between the 7M and the *Vita*, manuscript transmission, and the history of reception. Critical cognition thus holds together two demands : the text never speaks without interpretation ; interpretation is never valid when the text is absorbed into the interpreter's projection.

The normative turn appears when cognition reflects upon its own conditions and asks what must be presupposed for such interpretation to be accountable. That reflexive turn is critical epistemology.

In the present chapter, however, epistemology must remain instrumental : it supplies the discipline of interpretation, not a speculative superstructure that displaces Beatrice herself. Its task is to secure the minimum architecture of valid reading : principles at the transcendental level, norms at the theoretical level, and maxims at the applied level.

For critical hermeneutics, these become the practical controls on reading : no naive textual realism, no sovereign readerly subjectivism, and no unregulated passage from mystical language to doctrinal, psychological, or metaphysical assertion.

§ 2 The Knower

The *knower*, or subject of experience, is the irreducible subject-pole implied in every act of cognition. In the strict critical register, this pole must be kept rigorously free of substantialist inflation : it is not a private substance, not a self-enclosed Cartesian ego, and not an isolated psychological individual who first stands outside the world and only afterward begins to know it. It is the transcendental subject understood functionally : the formal condition on the side of subjectivity, without which no object could be intended, no proposition formulated, no experience organized, and no knowledge claim submitted to validation. To deny this subject already presupposes a subject making the denial. The point is not ontological grandeur, but critical necessity.

This formal subject, however, must not be left suspended in abstraction, lest the critical project succumb to a category mistake by confusing a normative placeholder with a disembodied ghost. In hermeneutics, this transcendental condition is never encountered in isolation, but only as performed by an historically situated interpreter within a communicative community of sign-interpreters. The formal subject knows through language, inherited categories, textual habits, genre expectations, institutional memories, and the communicative discipline of a scholarly network. The interpreter is active, constructive, and theory-laden, but not sovereign. She does not generate the object of interpretation from herself, but stands before a textual object that resists, constrains, corrects, and sometimes defeats her expectations. This establishes the critical balance : there is no valid reading without an interpreting subject, and there is no valid interpretation when the object is swallowed by subjective projection.

For the study of Beatrice of Nazareth, the knower must therefore be explicitly specified as the historically embedded sign-interpreter of a medieval mystical text. What appears meaningful in the 7M does not appear outside interpretation, but neither may it be reduced to modern projection, psychological reduction, devotional enthusiasm, or philosophical system-building. The interpreter brings concepts to the text, but these concepts must remain strictly answerable to Middle Dutch usage, Cistercian theology, the semantics of *minne*, manuscript transmission, the relation between the vernacular treatise and the Latin *Vita*, and the wider Brabantine milieu of women's mystical writing. The text is not mute, but it speaks only through disciplined mediation. This definition is therefore deliberately modest and methodologically precise. It does not require securing a complete theory of subjectivity before Beatrice can be read ; it asks only that the reader be methodologically located and critically accountable. The knower is the interpreter who receives a historically transmitted object of meaning under conditions of linguistic, doctrinal, and evidential constraint. Such a knower must neither pretend to occupy a view from nowhere nor collapse the text into a private psychological experience.

Critical hermeneutics begins exactly here : the interpreter is necessary but insufficient ; the text resists but never interprets itself. This preserves the precise

middle required for the rest of the study : Beatrice's mystical discourse can be read as historically mediated meaning, not as a private psychological artifact, not as an unfiltered report of mystical immediacy, and not as a free surface for later theory to possess.

§ 3 The Known

The *object of experience* is what appears, is intended, or is taken up as something meaningful by a subject of experience. It must not be confused with the thing-in-itself. The object of experience is not reality-as-such directly seized by consciousness, but the object as it enters the field of sensation, interpretation, judgment, discourse, and possible validation. It is therefore an object-for-a-knower, but not merely a projection of the knower. This establishes the critical balance : the object of experience is subject-related without being subject-produced.

At the transcendental level, this object-pole is called the transcendental object. It names the necessary principle that every act of conceptual knowledge is about something. Without such an object-pole, knowledge would remain enclosed within the merely subjective sphere and could not even claim objectivity. *Regulae I* formulates this as the principle of objectivity : all conceptual knowledge implies something known, something different from the transcendental subject, and something that must be assumed to refer beyond intersubjective construction toward the extra-mental. This reference does not grant access to the *noumenon* ; it merely prevents knowledge from collapsing into idealism.

At the experiential level, the object of experience is the sensate or mental object as it appears within consciousness. In the case of sensate objects, the object is not perception, because perception remains a critical posit, a normative placeholder for sensory givenness. What appears is sensation : givenness as already organized, filtered, named, interpreted, and situated within a horizon. In the case of mental objects, the object may be a concept, memory, image, proposition, hypothesis, text, argument, or ideal construction. In both cases, the object of experience is what consciousness is directed toward, but it becomes an object of knowledge only when it is conceptually articulated and made answerable to the norms of valid knowing.

A concise definition may therefore read : the object of experience is the appearing or intended object-pole of cognition, given to the subject as sensate or mental content, but critically distinguished from reality-as-such. In *Regulae I*, its transcendental form is the transcendental object : the non-contingent principle of objectivity without which no conceptual knowledge could be about anything. Its theoretical form is the object of knowledge, the content taken up under norms of validity. Its applied form is the object as handled in inquiry, where objectivity is produced through interpretation, testing where possible, argument, correction, and intersubjective validation. It is neither a *noumenal* thing directly possessed nor a

mere subjective projection, but the object as appearing, interpreted, judged, argued, and, where possible, validated.

For hermeneutics, the definition sharpens further. The text is an object of experience insofar as it appears to the interpreter as meaningful ; it becomes an object of knowledge only when that meaning is disciplined by language, context, textual resistance, doctrinal setting, historical evidence, intersubjective correction, and the norms of valid interpretation. The interpreter does not invent the text, but neither does the text yield meaning without interpretation. This keeps the critical dyad intact : no object without a subject, and no valid interpretation when the object is sovereignly absorbed by the subject.

For the study of Beatrice of Nazareth, the textual object must therefore be held strictly in its proper register. The 7M is not a *noumenal* object, not a transparent container of mystical immediacy, and not a free surface for modern theory. It is a historically transmitted object of meaning, mediated by Middle Dutch language, the semantics of *minne*, Cistercian theology, manuscript transmission, the Latin *Vita*, and later reception. It becomes an object of knowledge only when the interpreter allows these mediations to constrain the reading. The text resists, but it does not interpret itself. The interpreter interprets, but may not possess the text. This precise middle is the methodological prerequisite for critical hermeneutics, ensuring that the object of mystical inquiry is respected in both its historical givenness and its interpretive reception.

§ 4 Perception versus Sensation

The difference between *perception* and *sensation* is not a psychological nuance but a critical demarcation. In *Regulae I*, *perception* is not what appears to consciousness, not a lived datum, not a visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, or olfactory object, and not a describable event in the world. It is a normative placeholder : the rule that something must be given to the sensory side of cognition if sensate experience and conceptual knowledge are to be possible at all. It says that there must be sensory givenness. It does not describe what this givenness is.

As soon as one speaks of photons striking the retina, pressure waves reaching the ear, molecular compounds stimulating olfactory receptors, or neural signals passing through the thalamus, one has moved into a descriptive-scientific register. That register is legitimate, but it is downstream. The strict critical function of *perception* is more austere : it guards the extra-mental pole without pretending to describe the noumenal source of stimulation. *Perception* is therefore presupposed by *sensation*, but it is not itself an experienced content. It permits critical thought to speak of sensory givenness without collapsing into naive realism or idealism.

Sensation, by contrast, is what appears. It is *perception* as interpreted, organized, filtered, temporally situated, spatially articulated, affectively colored, and conceptually prepared. *Regulae II* formulates the relation as : $S(ensation) = P(erception) \times I(nterpretation)$. This must not be read as an empirical causal equation. It is a critical schema. Its point is that no sensate object appears as

uninterpreted sensory content. What appears as red, loud, warm, smooth, bitter, fragrant, massive, delicate, balanced, tense, or harmonious is already a presentation within consciousness. *Sensation* is not a copy of *perception* ; it is the phenomenal presentation of sensate objects after organization and interpretation have already entered the field.

This distinction blocks two errors at once. The realist error identifies *sensation* with direct access to the thing as it is, as if the world simply impressed itself upon the mind. The idealist error treats *sensation* as wholly produced by subjectivity or intersubjective coherence, thereby abolishing the extra-mental pole. The critical position refuses both reductions. *Perception* is posited to prevent idealism ; *sensation* is interpreted to prevent realism. The dyad remains intact.

The distinction also clarifies *reality-for-me*. *Reality-for-me* does not consist of perceptions. It consists of sensations, appearances, presentations, lived meanings, remembered forms, affective resonances, and horizon-bound interpretations. *Perception* does not belong to the first-person field because it is not something lived, observed, or described from within experience. It is presupposed so that appearing can take place. *Sensation*, however, does appear to me, and therefore belongs to lived first-person reality. The sequence remains strict : reality-as-such must be assumed but cannot be known ; *perception* is the normative posit of sensory givenness ; *sensation* is first-person appearance ; warranted knowledge is intersubjective stabilization.

For critical hermeneutics, the transfer is decisive. A text is not encountered as *perception*. Marks, sounds, inscriptions, typography, rhythm, syntax, genre, semantic expectation, and doctrinal resonance are already given as *sensation* and interpretation. The reader never meets the text as an uninterpreted object. Yet the text is not merely the reader's projection, because something in it must be allowed to resist, constrain, correct, and sometimes defeat interpretation. The lesson from the *perception/sensation* distinction is therefore methodological : there is no text without interpretation, but there is no valid interpretation if the text is swallowed by the interpreter.

For Beatrice of Nazareth, this means that the 7M must not be approached as if its meaning were simply lying there, fully present and waiting to be copied into modern language. Nor may it be treated as material freely constituted by the contemporary reader. Its words, metaphors, rhythms, theological assumptions, and affective intensities appear only through interpretation, but that interpretation must remain answerable to Middle Dutch usage, the semantics of *minne*, Cistercian theology, the Latin *Vita*, manuscript transmission, and the wider Brabantine mystical milieu. The text appears through mediation ; it is not exhausted by mediation.

Perception is the critical placeholder for sensory givenness. *Sensation* is the conscious presentation of sensate objects within experience, already shaped by interpretation. In hermeneutics, the parallel is clear : textual meaning is never unmediated, yet it is not arbitrary. The interpreter works within sensation,

language, memory, expectation, and doctrine, while the text remains the object that resists subjective possession. This is why critical hermeneutics must train not a fantasy of immediate access, but a disciplined receptivity to mediated meaning.

§ 5 Reality

Reality must be defined critically, not ontologically. In the critical register, reality is not a self-present object that conceptual thought can seize as it exists from its own side. Conceptual knowledge does not reach reality-as-such directly ; it works with appearances, propositions, signs, arguments, tests, interpretations, and regulative assumptions. The first distinction is therefore decisive : reality-as-such names the extra-mental real that must be thought as independent of the knower, but cannot be possessed as an object of descriptive knowledge. It functions as a necessary limit, not as a knowable substance. To treat it as directly accessible is ontological realism ; to deny its regulative role is idealism. Both positions transgress the critical boundary.

This distinction is especially important in mysticology. Mystical discourse often speaks as if ultimate reality, Divine presence, union, or nondual immediacy were directly given. Such language must be taken seriously as testimony, symbol, practice, and doctrinally mediated expression, but it must not be converted without remainder into conceptual knowledge of reality-as-such. The critical reader may study what is claimed, how it is articulated, how it functions within a tradition, and how it transforms the subject of experience. She may not infer that the claim, because it concerns the Divine or the ultimate, has thereby escaped the conditions of interpretation. The mystical object is not denied ; its conceptual possession is denied.

Reality-for-me names the first-person field of lived appearance : sensation, memory, expectation, affective coloring, linguistic habit, theoretical connotation, devotional formation, and horizon-bound meaning. It does not include perception in the strict critical sense. Perception is the necessary posit of sensory input, the minimal placeholder for givenness without which sensation could not arise. Sensation is what appears in and to consciousness once this givenness has been organized, filtered, named, and interpreted. The subject does not consciously possess perception ; the subject undergoes sensation and meaning. Reality-for-me is therefore not reality privately seized, but reality as lived, sensed, interpreted, and remembered by this subject under this horizon. Its value is phenomenological and hermeneutical ; its danger is inflation into private certainty.

Reality-for-us names reality as stabilized within a communicative community of sign-interpreters. In science, this stabilization takes the form of empirico-formal propositions valid *pro tem*, disciplined by correspondence and consensus, testing and argument. In hermeneutics, it takes the form of warranted interpretation, disciplined by textual evidence, linguistic competence, historical context, doctrinal comparison, manuscript transmission, reception history, and argumentative accountability. This is a third-person register only if ‘third-person’

is not misunderstood as a view from nowhere. It is not noumenal access. It is public discipline. It is stronger than reality-for-me because it has passed through intersubjective correction ; it is weaker than reality-as-such because it never becomes possession of the real as it is in itself.

For the study of Beatrice of Nazareth, these three registers must be kept apart. Reality-as-such marks the limit before which all conceptual claims about God, union, or ultimate presence must remain modest. Reality-for-me marks the lived and affective field in which mystical experience is reported, remembered, shaped, and confessed. Reality-for-us marks the disciplined field in which Beatrice's discourse becomes interpretable : Middle Dutch vocabulary, the semantics of *minne*, Cistercian theology, the vernacular treatise, the Latin *Vita*, the Brabantine women's mystical milieu, and the history of reception. These are not three realities. They are three epistemic registers under which the word reality must be handled if critical hermeneutics is not to collapse into either naive realism or subjectivist projection.

A concise definition may therefore read : reality is the critical name for what is encountered under three epistemic registers : reality-as-such, the extra-mental real that must be thought but cannot be conceptually possessed ; reality-for-me, the first-person field of sensation, appearance, memory, affect, and lived meaning ; and reality-for-us, the intersubjectively disciplined field in which appearances and meanings become publicly accountable. The corrected sequence remains strict : reality-as-such as limit ; perception as critical posit ; sensation as first-person appearance ; interpretation as meaning-formation ; warranted knowledge as intersubjective stabilization.

Critical hermeneutics is thereby directly supported and brought to its proper focus : Beatrice's mystical language may be read as meaningful and truth-claiming within its own register, but it may not be naively treated as transparent access to the Divine, nor reduced to private psychology, nor absorbed into later philosophical vocabulary. The text must be allowed to mediate reality without being mistaken for unmediated reality itself, securing the exact epistemic posture required for a rigorously grounded mysticology.

§ 6 Paradigm

A paradigm is a historically situated and intersubjectively stabilized horizon within which a community of sign-interpreters organizes what can count as meaningful, relevant, arguable, and, where appropriate, valid (Kuhn, 1962). It does not provide direct access to reality-as-such, for the noumenon is not conceptually possessed. Nor is it merely collective opinion, for a paradigm remains answerable to what resists it : in science, to testing, correspondence, argument, and consensus ; in hermeneutics, to textual evidence, linguistic usage, genre, historical context, doctrinal coherence, manuscript transmission, reception, and argumentative correction. A paradigm, therefore, belongs strictly to reality-

for-us. It is the public horizon within which appearances and meanings are ordered, stabilized, disputed, and revised.

In scientific inquiry, a paradigm gathers concepts, methods, assumptions, standards of relevance, exemplary problems, and rules of inquiry into a working framework for research. It shapes what can be seen, asked, measured, tested, and argued. But how does this structural insight apply when the object of inquiry is not a physical phenomenon but a transmitted text ? In critical hermeneutics, a paradigm names the historically operative field through which a text becomes intelligible : its language, symbolic world, theological grammar, institutional setting, accepted authorities, spiritual practices, and forms of life. A mystical text is never read outside such horizons. It is received through them, contested through them, and made accountable within them.

For the study of Beatrice of Nazareth, two paradigmatic horizons must therefore be distinguished. The first is the medieval paradigm within which Beatrice's discourse takes shape : Middle Dutch religious language, the semantics of *minne*, Cistercian affective theology, bridal mysticism, monastic discipline, hagiographical mediation, and the Brabantine milieu of women's mystical writing. The second is the modern critical paradigm within which the interpreter now reads : philology, historical theology, critical epistemology, mysticology, manuscript study, reception history, and methodological anti-reification. These horizons may overlap, but they must not be fused. Beatrice's paradigm must not be swallowed by the interpreter's theory, and the interpreter's paradigm must not pretend to vanish before Beatrice's text.

A paradigm is therefore not a substance, not a worldview possessing truth from its own side, and not a prison from which no correction is possible. It is a revisable horizon of intelligibility. It enables interpretation, but also limits it ; it opens questions, but also hides alternatives ; it stabilizes meaning, but also requires correction when the text, the evidence, or another community of readers resists its assumptions. In this sense, paradigms are necessary but fallible. They belong to the intersubjective register of reality-for-us and function as the medium through which knowledge, interpretation, and textual meaning can become publicly accountable.

For critical hermeneutics, the operative rule is precise : no reading occurs outside a paradigm, but no paradigm may be treated as final. The interpreter must identify the paradigm from which Beatrice speaks, the paradigm from which she herself reads, and the points at which both horizons meet, distort, correct, or illuminate one another. Only then can Beatrice's mystical language be interpreted without naive realism, without readerly sovereignty, and without the silent imposition of later metaphysical or psychological schemes. This structural vigilance completes the epistemological framing of the chapter, ensuring that the mysticological analysis proceeds not as a collision of private beliefs, but as a disciplined coordination of historical and critical horizons.

§ 7 Heuristics

Heuristics, from the Greek *heuriskein*, meaning ‘to find or discover,’ is the disciplined art of finding possible paths of thought before proof, testing, or strict validation can begin. It belongs to invention, orientation, and discovery, not yet to demonstration. In the architecture of *Regulae I*, its most proper philosophical place is immanent metaphysics. Science produces empirico-formal propositions that must be testable and arguable ; immanent metaphysics produces speculative, arguable, totalizing models that cannot be tested as facts but may help thought discover new relations, formulate new questions, invent new concepts, and open possible research directions. Heuristics, therefore, names the fecund, non-factual power of speculative reason when it remains within critical limits.

A heuristic proposition is not yet empirico-formal knowledge. It is a possible route toward such knowledge, or a possible framework within which such knowledge may later be organized. This is why the strict distinction between finding and proving must be preserved. To find is to generate a candidate : an analogy, model, interpretation, hypothesis, principle of organization, lexical field, doctrinal comparison, or totalizing picture. But how does this generation avoid becoming an arbitrary projection ? To prove, or, more accurately in science, to validate *pro tem*, is to submit what has been found to testing and argument : testing checks the correspondence-pole, argument checks the consensus-pole, and coherence names the provisional integration of both as a provisional truth-claim. In hermeneutics, where experimental testing is not the decisive operation, the justificatory moment takes another form : a possible reading must be checked against textual evidence, linguistic competence, historical context, manuscript transmission, doctrinal coherence, reception history, and intersubjective correction. The heuristic moment opens the field ; the justificatory moment decides whether anything opened there may count as a warranted interpretation. Confusing these moments produces dogmatism. Denying their relation produces sterile methodologism.

Immanent metaphysics is heuristic because it speculates about the totality of existence without claiming the status of science. It asks what all existents may share, how the totality of facts may be conceived, what kind of world-picture best accommodates scientific findings, and how scattered domains of knowledge may be unified without overstepping the limits of conceptual thought. Such speculation cannot be verified by experiment, because its object is not a bounded factual state of affairs. Yet it can be assessed by formal well-formedness, arguability, coherence, fertility, and its capacity to provide science with new vantage points. *Regulae I*, therefore, does not abolish metaphysics ; it disciplines metaphysics into an immanent, heuristic, argumentative, and strictly non-foundational register. This same rule must govern critical hermeneutics : heuristic models may orient interpretation, but they may not be treated as grounds from which the text’s meaning is simply deduced.

Heuristics also operates in scientific discovery, rhetoric, creative thought, and textual interpretation. In science, heuristic procedures assist the context of

discovery : they help the researcher choose what to test, which anomaly to follow, which model to build, or which method to adapt. In rhetoric, heuristics helps find arguments, topics, examples, and persuasive routes. In creative thought, it helps invent hyper-concepts and world-orienting models. In critical hermeneutics, it helps the interpreter find possible intelligibilities in a text whose meaning is never simply given. It asks which terms carry the argument, which metaphors organize the mystical movement, which doctrinal assumptions are active, which affective transitions structure the experience, which inherited forms are repeated or transformed, and which modern categories may help without taking possession of the text. Yet in all these cases, the same critical rule applies : finding is not validating. A rhetorically effective discovery may still be false ; a scientifically fertile hypothesis may still fail ; a metaphysical world-picture may still be arguable but unconvincing ; a brilliant interpretation may still be textually unwarranted. Heuristics is indispensable, but it has no right to enthrone its own products.

Dewey's sequence — sensing a difficulty, localizing and defining the problem, proposing solutions, considering their consequences, and accepting a solution — may be retained as a pragmatic account of inquiry. The familiar sequence of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification may likewise be retained as a descriptive schema of creative discovery. But neither provides the critical definition of heuristics. *Regulae I* grounds the importance of heuristics in the distinction between speculative discovery and critical validation, and especially in the role of immanent metaphysics as a heuristic companion to science. In the present chapter, the same distinction must be transferred to hermeneutics : the discovery of a possible reading is not yet the validation of that reading. A possible parallel, pattern, structure, or mystical grammar must be allowed to emerge, but it must then be checked against the text and its historical mediations.

The historical names may remain as orientation markers in the genealogy of the *ars inveniendi* : Cicero (106 BCE – 43 BCE) for rhetorical invention, Lullus (ca. 1232 – ca. 1316) for combinatorial invention, Bacon (1561 – 1626) for methodical discovery, Tschirnhaus (1651 – 1708) for the art of discovery, and Wolff (1679 – 1754) for systematic rational method. These figures indicate that invention has a long history and that the discovery of arguments, combinations, methods, and conceptual routes has always belonged to disciplined thought. But the critical definition should not be carried by these names. It should be carried by demarcation : science tests and argues ; heuristics finds ; immanent metaphysics speculates and argues ; transcendent metaphysics gestures, symbolizes, or unsays. When immanent metaphysics remains arguable, nominalistic, and answerable to science without pretending to become science, it functions as one of the most important heuristic powers of philosophy.

For Beatrice of Nazareth, heuristics are necessary because the 7M cannot be entered by neutral inspection. The interpreter needs exploratory instruments : the semantics of *minne*, Cistercian bridal theology, monastic discipline, affective

transformation, stages of love, the relation between the vernacular treatise and the Latin *Vita*, the wider Brabantine women's mystical milieu, and the comparative grammar of mystical experience. These instruments help the reader find possible pathways through the text. They may reveal a sequence, a tension, a doctrinal pressure, a symbolic economy, or a transformation of the soul that would otherwise remain unnoticed. But they remain instruments. They may not legislate the meaning of Beatrice's language in advance.

The same warning applies to modern concepts. Terms such as mysticology, affect, cognition, embodiment, transformation, process, nonduality, or creative thought may serve as heuristic operators if they clarify the reading and remain visibly secondary to Beatrice's own language. They become illegitimate when they replace that language, as if *minne* were merely a modern psychological state, a metaphysical principle, an aesthetic intensity, or a general transpersonal category. A heuristic that illuminates *minne* is useful ; a heuristic that absorbs *minne* into a later system has become a distortion. Critical hermeneutics must therefore use modern categories without allowing them to become sovereign.

Heuristics is the disciplined art of finding possible paths of inquiry, model-building, interpretation, and conceptual invention before proof or validation. Its hermeneutical expression is the disciplined invention of possible readings of Beatrice, always answerable to Middle Dutch usage, Cistercian theology, manuscript mediation, the Latin *Vita*, and the internal movement of *minne*. Criticism demarcates the registers so that invention does not harden into dogma : heuristics opens possibilities ; science tests and argues them where they become testable and arguable ; immanent metaphysics argues but does not test ; hermeneutics warrants interpretations through textual and historical discipline ; and transcendent metaphysics can only gesture, symbolize apophatically, or unsay.

§ 8 Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the speculative, non-factual, arguable inquiry into the totality of what exists and, at its outer edge, into what appears to exceed that totality. It does not produce empirico-formal facts, because its propositions cannot be experimentally tested. It therefore differs from science, whose statements must be both testable and arguable. Yet metaphysics is not thereby meaningless. In the critical framework, the decisive distinction is not between meaningful science and meaningless metaphysics, but between testable knowledge and untestable speculation that may remain critically admissible when it is logically well-formed, arguable, coherent, heuristic, and aware of its own limits. Science tests and argues ; immanent metaphysics orients and argues ; transcendent metaphysics unsays. Metaphysics may not pretend to test where no test is possible.

Traditional metaphysics is the pre-critical form of this enterprise. It lets ontology precede epistemology. It first decides what reality ultimately is, and only afterward explains knowledge on the basis of that supposed ground. In Greek

concept-realism, Scholastic substance-thinking, rationalist ontology, idealist system-building, and many theological metaphysics, this ground is treated as self-sufficient, permanent, and conceptually knowable. The concept then pretends to grasp the essence — *ousia*, *eidōs*, *substantia* — of what exists from its own side. This is a transgression. The mistake is not speculation as such, but the reification of speculation into knowledge of reality-as-such. Traditional metaphysics treats a regulative idea as a constitutive object ; an ontological illusion.

Critical metaphysics begins only after epistemology has done its demarcative work. It accepts that knowledge must be grounded in the *fact of reason*, not in an external ontology. It therefore does not ground the principles and norms of knowledge, beauty, or action. These are reflexively uncovered within the activities themselves. Critical metaphysics comes afterward, as disciplined speculation. Its first admissible form is immanent metaphysics : an arguable, totalizing, heuristic account of the world that remains within the limits of possible experience and critical reason. It may ask what all existents share, how process, relation, becoming, matter, information, and consciousness may be conceived together, or how scattered domains of knowledge may be oriented within one world-picture. But it may not claim factual status. Its method is argumentative, not experimental ; its value is heuristic, not empirical ; its truth-status is provisional, not demonstrative.

The second form is transcendent metaphysics. Here, thought approaches what exceeds the world as a conceptual totality : infinity, the absolute, the ineffable, God, Divine presence, mystical union, or whatever cannot be framed as an object within possible experience. *Regulae I* does not simply abolish this region. It restricts it. Transcendent metaphysics cannot become conceptual knowledge, cannot legislate science, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, or mysticology, and cannot function as a ground. At best, it is indirect, symbolic, apophatic, poetic, liturgical, or contemplative. Its proper discipline is negative : it may orient, evoke, gesture, or unsay, but it may not claim to know, conceptually, what lies beyond the reach of conceptual thought. Once the transcendent is possessed as an object, it has already been misrecognized by possession.

This is crucial for the study of Beatrice of Nazareth. Her mystical discourse belongs to a Christian theological and devotional world in which God, grace, love, union, and *minne* are not decorative metaphors but operative realities within the life of the soul. Critical hermeneutics must take this seriously. It may not reduce Beatrice's language to psychology, literary ornament, gendered affect, or institutional ideology. But seriousness does not mean uncritical acceptance. Beatrice's claims about Divine love and union must be read as historically mediated mystical discourse : experiential, symbolic, doctrinal, affective, and theological, but never exempt from interpretation. The Divine is not denied ; conceptual possession of the Divine is denied.

The relation between science, metaphysics, theology, and mysticology must therefore be held in careful tension. Science tests and argues. Immanent

metaphysics orients and argues. Theology, in its confessional register, interprets revelation, doctrine, practice, and ecclesial language. Transcendent metaphysics unsays where conceptuality breaks down. Mysticology studies mystical experience and its expressions critically, without either dissolving them into psychology or elevating them into immediate metaphysical knowledge. Confusing these registers produces dogmatism. Separating them too radically produces blindness to the way mystical texts actually work.

For Beatrice, this means that metaphysical language must be handled as mediated language. When she speaks of love, union, longing, fruition, storm, rest, or abandonment, the interpreter must ask what kind of claim is being made. Is the text describing an experience ? Is it using theological grammar ? Is it exhorting the reader ? Is it staging a transformation of the soul ? Is it speaking apophatically, where language approaches its own limit ? These questions prevent premature metaphysical capture. They also prevent reductive explanation. The point is not to decide in advance whether Beatrice is really describing God, psyche, body, affect, doctrine, or literary convention. The point is to let the text's own mediated forms determine the register in which its claims can be responsibly interpreted.

The critical position is therefore not anti-metaphysical but anti-foundational. Metaphysics may not ground knowledge, may not replace science, may not legislate interpretation, and may not claim direct access to the *noumenon*. Yet it remains indispensable as a disciplined horizon of intelligibility, invention, unification, and limit-awareness. In a chapter on critical hermeneutics, its role is precise : it warns the interpreter not to mistake mystical language for unmediated access to reality-as-such, while also warning against the opposite error, namely, reducing such language to private psychology or historical residue. Science tests and argues ; immanent metaphysics orients and argues ; transcendent metaphysics unsays ; critical mysticology interprets.

§ 9 Mysticology

Mysticology is the critical study of mystical experience, mystical cognition, and the symbolic, textual, practical, institutional, and metaphysical forms through which such experience is expressed and interpreted. These dimensions belong together in the concrete history of mysticism, but they are not identical. Mysticology treats mystical experience as a *serious experiential datum*, but never as self-validating doctrine, scientific fact, or immediate metaphysical knowledge. Its task is to clarify what is reported when mystics speak of spontaneous presence, innermost awareness, *unio mystica*, self-realization as selflessness, nonduality, gnosis, or, for Beatrice and the Flemish mystics, *minne*. To do this, mysticology strictly distinguishes the experience itself (the substructure) from the traditions, languages, doctrines, symbols, and institutions that mediate it (the superstructure).

How, then, does mysticology situate these experiences in relation to reason ? It studies the relation between formal, critical cognition and states of consciousness that appear to exceed ordinary, discursive rationality without thereby becoming

irrational. It investigates how mystical experience relates to two distinct thresholds of cognition : on the one hand, to *creative thought*, insofar as transpersonal experience is still interpreted through hyper-concepts, metaphors, visions, and ritual practices ruled by immanent metaphysical models aiming at self-actualization ; and on the other hand, to *nondual thought*, insofar as the experience gestures toward a non-conceptual mode of awareness beyond ordinary subject-object cognition, aiming at the self-realization of selflessness (*In Togetherness*, 2018). It also asks how such modes are cultivated, stabilized by practice, expressed in language, and related to the limits of conceptual knowledge. This does not mean transpersonal, mystical cognition is simply placed *above* reason. It means reason investigates its own limit without surrendering the rules of criticism. The mystic may report what seems to transcend conceptuality ; mysticology asks how such a report can be understood, compared, interpreted, and situated without reducing it to dogma. It holds that the intellect's conceptual thought only reaches the edge of immanent metaphysics, at the limit of creatively seeking the 'radical other' and actualizing its own unique 'higher' self.

Mysticology cannot pass this critical limit because transgressing it regresses thought directly back into the onto-theological illusion that critical thought finally escaped by centuries of keeping proper demarcations.

The distinction between *self-actualization* and *self-realization* must, therefore, be handled carefully. In a comparative register, self-actualization may name the discovery, development, or visionary and symbolic integration of a higher self, while self-realization names the actual realization of nondual, non-conceptual, innermost awareness, understood here as selflessness and therefore strictly ineffable. These terms function as highly effective heuristic markers when comparing transpersonal vocabularies. They must not, however, be allowed to govern Beatrice's meaning in advance. She does not write from a modern transpersonal, Vedāntic, Buddhist, or Jungian paradigm. Her language belongs to a Christian, Cistercian, vernacular, affective, and hagiographically mediated world in which the decisive terms are God, grace, love, *minne*, longing, service, fruition, abandonment, excess, and the soul's transformation under Divine love.

Because of this complexity, the field of mysticology must operate across several distinct registers.

Empirically, it studies mystical practices, altered states, contemplative discipline, ritual settings, testimony, behavior, bodily effects, neural correlates, and the social conditions under which mystical experience arises and is transmitted. Hermeneutically, it studies mystical texts, symbols, metaphors, paradoxes, negations, doctrinal formulas, and apophatic strategies.

Epistemologically, it investigates the relation between mystical claims and valid knowledge. Metaphysically, it asks how mystical experience may inspire immanent, arguable, heuristic world-pictures, while recognizing that transcendent metaphysics can only gesture, symbolize apophatically, or unsay.

These registers must remain distinguished : science tests and argues correlates ; hermeneutics interprets expressions ; immanent metaphysics argues but does not test ; and transcendent metaphysics cannot become a conceptual possession.

How to maintain critical boundaries ?

By rigorous negative demarcation. Mysticismology is *not* theology, although it critically studies theological interpretations of mystical experience ; theology, in its confessional register, interprets revelation, doctrine, and the language of faith from within a tradition. It is *not* psychology, although it takes psychological, affective, embodied, and neurocognitive research seriously. It is *not* sociology of religion, although it studies institutions, communities, authority, and transmission. It is *not* metaphysics, although it examines the metaphysical models generated by mystical traditions. It is a *border-discipline* : it stands where direct experience, reason, symbol, vision, doctrine, ritual, institution, and speculation meet. Without these demarcations, mystical experience is either inflated into conceptual possession of the *noumenon* or reduced to a human phenomenon already explained away.

A central concern of this border-discipline is the relation between direct mystical experience and its superstructuring. More precisely, it studies reports of immediacy as soon as they are remembered, named, narrated, written, translated, transmitted, authorized, or contested. Mystics do not report from nowhere. Their experiences are shaped, prepared, and interpreted through languages, practices, symbols, expectations, and inherited models. Christian union with God, Buddhist realization of emptiness, Sufi *fanā*’, Vedāntic nonduality, Kabbalistic *devekut*, Daoist ‘mysterious pass,’ and Neoplatonic ascent may share structural affinities, but they do not say the same thing merely because they all speak of transcendence or unity.

One compares without flattening. One seeks recurrent patterns, but refuses premature universalism. Similarity is not identity.

Likewise, the relation between the mystic and the institution must be investigated. Religious establishments preserve mystical lineages by offering discipline, vocabulary, ritual, ethical orientation, communal testing, and safeguards against private fantasy. Yet they may also domesticate the mystic, subordinate experience to doctrine, censor what exceeds orthodoxy, or claim to understand what the mystical report can only indicate indirectly.

Mysticismology does not romanticize the solitary mystic against the institution, but neither does it grant the institution final ownership of mystical meaning. It asks what is preserved, what is clarified, what is distorted, and what is suppressed.

For Beatrice of Nazareth, this institutional question is unavoidable. The 7M is a vernacular mystical treatise, but its reception cannot be separated from the Latin *Vita*, Cistercian discipline, monastic authority, bridal mysticism, and the wider Brabantine milieu of women’s mystical writing. The interpreter must therefore ask how Beatrice’s experience is textually shaped, how *minne* functions as an

experiential, doctrinal, affective, and transformative operator, how the vernacular voice relates to Latin mediation, and how a woman's mystical authority is preserved, reframed, or constrained by institutional transmission. The mystical report is never merely private, nor is it simply institutional ; it emerges precisely through their tension.

Mysticology lets mystical experience become an object of disciplined inquiry without destroying its distinctive register. It neither canonizes the mystic nor explains the mystic away. It allows reason to approach its own limit, while preventing that limit from being seized as dogma, reduced to mechanism, or dissolved into vague spiritual rhetoric.

For the study of Beatrice, the practical rule is exact : her mystical discourse must be read as a mediated testimony of Divine love or *minne*, not as a transparent access to reality-as-such, not as a private psychological artifact, and not as available material for comparative theory to colonize.

Mysticology honors the claim, locates the tradition, studies the practices, interprets the language, and refuses both reductive explanation and metaphysical capture. Its task is not to decide anything in advance, but to let the text's own mediated forms determine the register in which her claims can be responsibly and critically interpreted.

1.2 Why an Epistemological Prelude ?

Beatrice and the 7M require historical discipline because her text does not arrive as an *immediate deposit* of her mystical experience. It arrives strictly as *mediated* discourse : vernacular, monastic, doctrinal, affective, gendered, institutional, and transmitted. Her mystical language was mediated by Middle Dutch vocabulary, Cistercian theology, monastic practice, Latin transmission, institutional reception, and the specific grammar of *minne*. She entails hermeneutics because these mediations must be interpreted without reduction or inflation. Furthermore, this mediation is deeply linguistic. Beatrice's decisive vocabulary, above all *minne*, cannot be translated merely as 'love' without remainder. *Minne* carries affective, theological, devotional, courtly, ascetic, and mystical resonances that belong irreducibly to Middle Dutch religious language. A historically undisciplined reading will either modernize the term into psychology, eroticize it too narrowly, moralize it too quickly, or spiritualize it into a vague universal. The word must be allowed to *work inside its own semantic field* before it is correlated with modern categories. What is being read is *not* Beatrice's mystical experience in its *raw* substructure, but a written form into which that experience, memory, teaching, theological vocabulary, and literary shaping have already entered. A hermeneutic that ignores this textual mediation will either treat the manuscript as a transparent window onto mystical immediacy or dissolve it into presupposed interpretive schemes acting as pigeonholes. Contrary to traditional, ontological hermeneutics, *critical* hermeneutics necessitates epistemology because the limits of the act of

interpretation itself must be known beforehand to responsibly read a text, especially one that speaks of the direct experience of the ‘radical other.’

Hence, hermeneutics has to be preceded by epistemology. A mystical text makes claims, but not all of them belong to the same register. Some are experiential reports ; some are doctrinal formulations ; some are exhortations ; some are symbolic intensifications ; some are apophatic gestures ; some are descriptions of transformation ; and some are theological claims about God and the soul. In an uncritical epistemological framework, these registers are easily confused. One then treats testimony as proof, vision and symbol as doctrine, doctrine as experience, experience as metaphysics, or metaphysics as psychological data. The result is not interpretation but category confusion.

Before one asks what Beatrice means, one must clarify what kind of object is being interpreted, what kind of subject interprets it, what kind of reality is being invoked, what kind of knowledge is possible, and what counts as warranted interpretation. The epistemological prelude does not displace the text ; it protects the text from *premature possession*. It establishes the rules by which the interpreter may approach without claiming a view from nowhere and without reducing the manuscript to a private projection. The epistemological framework is required because critical hermeneutics depends on the strict maintenance of the subject-object dyad. There is no text without interpretation, but there is no valid interpretation if the text is swallowed by the interpreter. The interpreter brings concepts, expectations, linguistic habits, comparative models, and philosophical tools. The text brings resistance : vocabulary, syntax, genre, doctrine, rhythm, manuscript history, reception, and internal movement. An epistemological prelude defines this balance before the hermeneutical work begins, permanently preventing both naive textual realism and sovereign readerly subjectivism.

The framework is also required because Beatrice’s mystical language concerns reality *at the very edge of conceptuality*. When a text speaks of God, Divine love, union, fruition, excess, abandonment, or self-loss, the temptation is either to accept such language as metaphysical knowledge of the *noumenon* or to reduce it to psychological, sociological, or literary mechanisms.

Critical epistemology blocks both reductions. It states that reality-as-such cannot be conceptually possessed ; that mystical testimony can be studied as meaningful and truth-claiming within its own register ; and that the Divine is not denied, while its conceptual possession is.

§ 1 Critical Epistemology

Regulae I : On Truth (2025) is an in-depth study of critical epistemology.

Before starting the study of the mysticism of Beatrice of Nazareth, a clear outline of the underlying epistemological options is necessary. Not only is this crucial for grasping the knowledge manipulation specific to mysticism, but the choices made also allow for a distinct position within the multiplicity of knowledge theories that

characterize the philosophical landscape, ranging from naive realism to explicit idealism or mentalism. These extremes need to be *avoided*.

Historically, epistemology answers how we arrive at true conceptual knowledge. Before the rise of critical thought at the end of the 18th-century (Kant), the answer was framed in an ontology that was deemed ‘first philosophy’ (Aristotle), and so was formulated before the study of the limitations of our cognitive capacity had been effectuated, leading to epistemological positions that exceeded what is actually possible (*in casu*, realism or idealism, both exaggerations of the known and the knower, respectively). Criticism, undelving the necessary conditions of conceptual thought, identified a series of limitations that, if exceeded, plunge epistemology into ontological illusions. The description of the knowledge act from outside it was deemed impossible, for no God’s Eye position can be taken, and if one does, it leads to unacceptable antinomies and paralogisms. These animated all pre-critical epistemologies, be they realist or idealist. The question of valid cognition can only be consistently answered when the possibility of conceptual knowledge is sought *in the cognitive act itself*, reflexively unearthing by way of the transcendental method, the necessary conditions of valid conceptual knowledge. The descriptive approach is thus replaced by a normative take.

Critical epistemology is the normative discipline that answers the question of how valid empirico-formal knowledge is possible and how it can be advanced. In the approach proposed in *Regulae I*, the analysis leads to three moments : (i) transcendental logic undelving *principles*, (ii) theory of knowledge, deriving *norms*, and (iii) applied epistemology, proposing practical rules of thumb or *maxims*.

§ 2 Transcendental Logic

Transcendental logic concerns the conditions without which conceptual knowledge could not even be coherently claimed. It does not begin from ontology, psychology, sociology, or science, but from the reflexive self-critique of conceptual thought itself. Its point of ingress is the *fact of reason* : whenever knowledge is asserted, denied, defended, doubted, or revised, a *minimum dyad* is already operative, namely a transcendental subject that knows and a transcendental object about which something is known. These are not substances. They are non-contingent functions of valid cognition. To deny the transcendental subject is to presuppose someone denying ; to deny the transcendental object is to make that denial itself the object of knowledge.

Transcendental logic, therefore, yields *principles* : unavoidable, non-empirical rules that block radical skepticism and prevent knowledge from being grounded in something *outside* knowledge.

§ 3 Theory of Knowledge

The theory of knowledge, or theoretical epistemology, translates these transcendental principles into *norms* governing valid knowing. It asks how

empirico-formal propositions can count as valid knowledge, while refusing both naive realism and ontological idealism. The object-pole requires correspondence : knowledge must intend something extra-mental and cannot collapse into consensus alone. The subject-pole requires consensus : knowledge is never a naked registration of reality because observation is theory-laden and mediated by a community of sign-interpreters.

Truth, then, is not absolute possession of the *noumenon*, but the coherent balance between correspondence and consensus, between the monologue of Nature and the dialogue of argument. This is why *Regulae I* treats valid knowledge as fallible, conventional, probabilistic, and *pro tem*, yet *not* arbitrary or *anything goes* (Feyerabend).

The critical middle is held : no final access to things-in-themselves, but also no surrender to mere perspectivism.

§ 4 Applied Epistemology

Applied epistemology brings these principles and norms into the *concrete practice* of producing knowledge. Here, the register changes : the necessity of transcendental logic and the normativity of theory become maxims for *situated research*.

Applied epistemology, therefore, concerns the research cell, the procedures of communication, the actual methods of testing of hypotheses, participant observation in the human sciences, methodological opportunism, correction, revision, and the management of unavoidable arbitrariness.

Its rules are closer to case law than statute law. They can be adjusted, broken, or replaced when the situation demands it, but they remain answerable to the higher norms of valid knowing.

For a later critical hermeneutics, this is decisive : texts become objects of knowledge only when interpretation remains disciplined by the same triadic architecture : transcendental conditions, theoretical norms, and applied maxims. The interpreter may work with meaning rather than laboratory fact, but the critical obligation remains the same : no reification of the text, no sovereign subjectivism of the reader, and no unregulated passage from interpretation to truth-claim.

1.3 Hermeneutics : an Evolution

Hermeneutics is the disciplined art and theory of interpretation. From Greek *hermēneutikē technē*, the art of explaining, expressing, and translating, it concerns the passage by which something obscure, foreign, compressed, symbolic, historical, or linguistically mediated becomes intelligible. Its mythical association with Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is fitting but should not be inflated : hermeneutics does not magically deliver hidden meanings from above ; it studies

and regulates the mediation by which meaning is carried across from one horizon to another.

In the strict sense, hermeneutics is the *doctrine of decoding*. Its object is not merely the text as an isolated artifact, nor the reader as a sovereign producer of meaning, but the *relation between text and reader* whenever that relation is not self-evident. A text has structure, wording, genre, context, intention, history, and internal resistance ; a reader brings language, expectation, memory, doctrine, prejudice, method, and horizon.

Interpretation becomes necessary because meaning is neither simply lying in the text like an object waiting to be picked up, nor merely projected by the reader. It arises in the disciplined encounter between textual givenness and interpretive activity.

A general definition may therefore read : Hermeneutics is the disciplined inquiry into the conditions, methods, and limits of interpretation, especially where the meaning of a text, symbol, utterance, event, or tradition must be clarified by mediating between what is given and the horizon of the interpreter.

In its strict textual sense, it is the doctrine of decoding : the regulated clarification of the relation between text and reader when that relation is obscured by language, history, genre, symbolism, doctrine, translation, distance, or interpretive prejudice.

Critical hermeneutics belongs naturally after critical epistemology because it treats texts as objects of knowledge under special conditions. It must preserve both poles : the text must not be reified as a self-speaking object, and the reader must not be inflated into the source of all meaning.

Critical hermeneutics begins precisely there.

§ 1 Historical Overview

Hermeneutics begins as an *art of mediation* before it becomes a philosophy of understanding. In its earliest sense, it names the work of bringing meaning across : from Divine speech into human words, from a foreign language into one's own tongue, from an ancient text into present understanding, from obscurity into intelligibility.

The connection with Hermes is more than decorative but less than doctrinal : Hermes is the god of mediation, not the guarantor of secret meaning.

In Antiquity

In antiquity, hermeneutical practices were distributed across rhetoric, grammar, philology, law, theology, and philosophical commentary. Greek reflection on *hermēneia* already joins expression, interpretation, and translation, while Hellenistic and late-antique schools develop methods for reading Homer, myths, or sacred writings either literally, morally, allegorically, or philosophically. Philo of Alexandria reads Scripture through a Platonizing allegorical lens ; Origen

develops Christian allegorical exegesis ; Augustine, especially in *De doctrina Christiana*, gives the West a durable rule : interpretation must attend to signs, language, ambiguity, translation, context, and charity.

In this early phase, hermeneutics is not yet a *general theory of understanding*. It is a disciplined art for resolving obscurity in authoritative texts, especially legal, literary, and sacred texts (Grondin, 1994 ; Palmer, 1969). The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* similarly treats hermeneutics historically as beginning in ancient and theological interpretive practices before its modern philosophical transformation.

In the Middle Ages

In the medieval period, hermeneutics remained largely theological, juridical, and philological. The Bible is interpreted through layered senses : literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

The *literal* sense is the textual or historical sense: what the words *directly* say in their grammatical, narrative, legal, or historical context. *It asks what is stated.*

The *allegorical* sense is the doctrinal or typological sense : what the text *signifies beyond its immediate wording*, especially how persons, events, or institutions point to Christ, the Church, or a theological mystery. *It asks what is believed.*

The *moral* sense is the ethical or tropological sense : what the text *teaches the soul* to do, avoid, cultivate, or become. *It asks how one should act.*

The *anagogical* sense is the upward, eschatological, or mystical sense : what the text *indicates* concerning final things, heavenly realities, spiritual ascent, or union with God. *It asks toward what ultimate fulfillment the text directs the reader.*

The literal sense concerns the narrated fact ; the allegorical sense concerns faith ; the moral sense concerns conduct ; the anagogical sense concerns final destiny.

The important point is not merely that medieval interpreters *multiplied meanings*, but that they did so under a *governed hierarchy*. Meaning was not arbitrary ; it was regulated by doctrine, ecclesial authority, grammar, inherited commentary, and the assumed unity of Scripture. This gave hermeneutics a stabilizing framework, but also bound it to *dogmatic* superstructures.

Medieval exegesis, therefore, carries a double lesson for critical hermeneutics. On the one hand, it shows that interpretation always works with rules, traditions, and communities of competence. On the other hand, it also shows the danger of subordinating textual resistance to a prior theology of meaning.

The text may be over-read because the interpreter already knows what it must say. This is the perennial danger of doctrinally secured interpretation.

The Reformation

The Reformation transforms hermeneutics by contesting the authority that governs interpretation. Luther's appeal to Scripture, and the Protestant insistence

that Scripture should interpret Scripture, shift attention from ecclesial mediation toward textual clarity, philology, vernacular translation, and the internal coherence of the biblical corpus. This does not abolish tradition ; it displaces its authority. Flacius Illyricus's *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (1567) is a decisive Reformation attempt to codify biblical interpretation by showing how Scripture can be understood through Scripture itself, without final dependence on external ecclesial authority (Flacius Illyricus, 1567 ; Büttgen & Thouard, 2009). He developed rules for handling obscure passages by considering grammar, context, scope, genre, and comparisons with clearer passages.

The hermeneutical problem is now sharpened : if the reader stands before the text *without* a final ecclesial arbiter, how is a valid interpretation to be distinguished from private arbitrariness ? Reformation hermeneutics, therefore, intensifies the *relation between text and reader*. It democratizes access, but it also *multiplies conflict*. The gain is textual accountability ; the risk is interpretive fragmentation.

Early Modernity

In early modernity and the Enlightenment, hermeneutics became more methodical. The rise of philology, historical criticism, legal interpretation, and the human sciences forces interpreters to ask how ancient texts, laws, documents, and historical testimonies can be understood across distance. Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1654) uses the term *hermeneutica* in the seventeenth century as a general discipline of interpretation ; Chladenius (1969) and Meier (1996) expand the field by considering standpoint, obscurity, intention, and the conditions under which meaning becomes understandable.

This phase is important because hermeneutics begins to move beyond special rules for Scripture or law toward a more general account of interpretation. Yet it remains largely methodological : its dominant question is *how to interpret correctly*, not yet *what understanding is in its deepest structure*. Grondin's historical work is especially useful here because it corrects the simplified story that universal hermeneutics begins only with Schleiermacher ; earlier figures already recognized a general dimension in interpretation, even if they did not yet give it the later Romantic and philosophical form (Grondin, 1994).

Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), the father of modern theological and philosophical hermeneutics, marks the decisive modern expansion. He turns hermeneutics into a *general art of understanding linguistic discourse*. Interpretation is no longer a set of local rules for *difficult passages* ; it becomes necessary wherever *misunderstanding is possible*. Schleiermacher distinguishes grammatical interpretation, which attends to language, usage, syntax, and the shared structure of discourse, from psychological or technical interpretation, which tries to understand the singular act of meaning as produced by an individual author. His famous ambition is to understand the discourse as well as, and sometimes better than, its author understood it. This does not mean occult access

to an author's soul. It means that the interpreter can *reconstruct* linguistic and productive conditions that the author may have used *without explicit reflective mastery*.

Schleiermacher, therefore, introduces the *hermeneutical circle* in its modern form : the part is understood through the whole, and the whole through the parts ; word through sentence, sentence through work, work through author, author through language and epoch, and back again (Schleiermacher, 1998). The Stanford account identifies Schleiermacher as central to the modern philosophical emergence of hermeneutics and emphasizes his universalization of interpretation beyond special disciplines.

Dilthey

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911) shifted hermeneutics from a linguistic method to a foundation for the human sciences. The issue is no longer simply *how to read texts*, but how historical life can be understood at all. Dilthey opposes the explanatory model of the natural sciences to the understanding proper to the human sciences : Nature is *explained* ; lived expression is *understood*. This distinction must not be hardened too crudely, but its historical force is clear.

Human expressions — texts, actions, institutions, artworks, biographies, religions, laws — are not mere objects among objects ; they are *objectifications of life*. Hermeneutics becomes the discipline by which historically situated expressions are re-entered, reconstructed, and understood. Dilthey's problem is validity : How can historical understanding avoid romantic projection and skeptical relativism ? His answer appeals to method, historical consciousness, comparative interpretation, and the structural relation between lived experience, expression, and understanding (Dilthey, 1996). Traditional overview explicitly presents Dilthey as using hermeneutics to *justify the human sciences* and to secure the validity of interpretation against caprice and subjectivism.

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), effectuating the 'hermeneutic turn,' changes the register again. With him, hermeneutics ceases to be, first of all, a method for texts or a foundation for the human sciences ; it becomes an *ontology of human existence*. In *Being and Time* (1927), understanding is not an optional intellectual operation added to life. *Dasein* is *already interpretive* because it exists as being-in-the-world, projected into possibilities, situated by *thrownness*, and always already moving within a horizon of significance (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Interpretation is thus grounded in *the structure of existence* itself. One does not first stand outside the world and then interpret it ; one is *always already in a meaningful world*.

This move is powerful, but also dangerous for critical hermeneutics. Its gain is that it destroys the fantasy of a view from nowhere. Its risk is that hermeneutics becomes ontologized. The interpretive structure of existence may be illuminating, but it must not become a new ground from which textual validity is simply

inferred. In critical terms, Heidegger deepens hermeneutics, but also tempts it toward *metaphysical inflation*.

The modern map of hermeneutics is often described as tracing a path through Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, though this oversimplifies a much richer field (Palmer, 1969).

Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) develops Heidegger's insight into philosophical hermeneutics. In *Truth and Method* (1960), understanding is not primarily the result of applying a method to an object ; it is an *event* that happens *within* history, language, tradition, and dialogue (Gadamer, 1960/2004).

Gadamer rehabilitates prejudice in the technical sense of pre-judgment : not irrational bias as such, but the *prior horizon* without which understanding cannot begin. He also emphasizes *historically* effected consciousness, the fusion of horizons, the dialogical character of question and answer, and the claim that truth in the humanities cannot be reduced to scientific method. This is not a license for arbitrary interpretation. It means that *the interpreter belongs to history* and must therefore examine the enabling and distorting effects of tradition.

Gadamer's achievement is to show that understanding is not mechanical decoding. A text addresses us ; we question it ; it questions us ; meaning arises in a historically mediated conversation. Yet a critical guardrail is needed : the fusion of horizons must not become the fusion of all resistance into the reader's present horizon. The text must retain its capacity to resist, estrange, and correct.

The debate between Gadamer and Habermas politicized the field. Gadamer emphasizes tradition, dialogue, and the historically mediated character of understanding ; Habermas objects that tradition is not only a medium of truth but also a medium of domination. Hermeneutics must, therefore, be joined to a critique of ideology. Distorted communication, power, social interest, and institutional constraints can shape what appears as obvious meaning or legitimate authority (Habermas, 1968/1971; Habermas, 1967/1988). This is a necessary correction. A merely dialogical hermeneutics may underestimate power ; a merely suspicious hermeneutics may destroy *receptivity*.

Critical hermeneutics must hold both. It must ask *what the text says, what the tradition has made it say, who benefits from that reading, what has been suppressed*, and whether suspicion itself has become a new dogma. The MIT Press description of Habermas's work on the social sciences situates him within the methodological debate from Neo-Kantianism to behaviorism, precisely the terrain where hermeneutics and critique intersect.

Betti and Hirsch

Emilio Betti (1890 – 1968) and E. D. Hirsch (°1928) respond to this ontological and dialogical turn by defending objectivity and validity in interpretation. Betti insists that interpretation should respect the *autonomy of the object* and the

objectivations of spirit, against subjectivist or existential absorption (Betti, 1955). Hirsch, in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), distinguishes *meaning* from *significance* : the former is *what the text means*, ultimately tied to authorial intention, and the latter is the *relation of that meaning* to readers, situations, and uses (Hirsch, 1967). His aim is to preserve objective interpretation against historicism and psychologism. Even if one rejects Hirsch's stricter intentionalism, his distinction remains useful for critical hermeneutics : what a text means must not be confused with what it later does, inspires, legitimates, or becomes within another horizon. Yale's description of Hirsch's work explicitly frames it as a defense of objective knowledge in textual interpretation and as a clarification of meaning, significance, interpretation, and criticism.

Bultmann

Rudolf Bultmann (1884 – 1976) brings the hermeneutical problem into modern biblical theology with special sharpness. His program of demythologization does not simply discard myth ; it *interprets myth existentially*. The *New Testament*, on this view, speaks through mythological world-pictures that modern readers cannot simply inhabit literally, yet it may still address existence through its proclamation. Bultmann's importance lies in forcing theology to distinguish between textual world-picture, existential address, historical reconstruction, and faith-interpretation (Bultmann, 1953). For critical hermeneutics, this is valuable but risky. It is valuable because it refuses *naïve literalism*. It is risky because the existential interpretation may become too sovereign, translating the text into a prior philosophical grammar. The issue is, therefore, not whether demythologization is right or wrong as a single method, but whether it remains answerable to the text's plurality, historical distance, and symbolic density.

Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005) provides one of the richest mediations after Gadamer. He refuses both naïve immediacy and total suspicion. In *Freud and Philosophy* (1970), he names Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as *masters of suspicion* because they interpret surface meaning as a disguise for deeper forces : ideology, the will to power, and repression (Ricoeur, 1965/1970). In *Interpretation Theory* (1976), he develops the concepts of discourse, distanciation, textual autonomy, explanation, understanding, and the surplus of meaning (Ricoeur, 1976). A text, once written, is no longer reducible to authorial psychology ; it *opens a world before the reader*.

Interpretation must, therefore, pass through explanation, structure, semantics, symbol, suspicion, and appropriation. Ricoeur's great contribution is balance : hermeneutics must be both *retrieval* and *critique*, both *listening* and *suspicion*, both understanding and explanation. Yale's account of Freud and Philosophy confirms that Ricoeur places symbol and interpretation at the center of his philosophical project, especially in relation to Freud and religious symbol.

Derrida

Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004) and deconstruction challenge the confidence that dialogue, tradition, or method can stabilize meaning. Texts do not simply transmit intentions ; they also differ, defer, displace, supplement, and undo themselves through rhetorical and structural tensions. The 1981 Gadamer-Derrida encounter became emblematic because it brought German philosophical hermeneutics and French deconstruction into direct confrontation (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989). Gadamer stresses dialogue and the goodwill of understanding ; Derrida stresses rupture, dissemination, undecidability, and the impossibility of final closure.

A critical hermeneutics should not simply choose one over the other. Gadamer is needed against *interpretive nihilism* ; Derrida is needed against *premature reconciliation*. The text must be *understood*, but never *possessed*. It speaks, but *not* with a single transparent voice. The SUNY description of *Dialogue and Deconstruction* (1989) confirms that the encounter explicitly raised questions of textual questionability, psychoanalytic interpretation, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and the dialogical character of language.

Recent Developments

In literary theory, hermeneutics is transformed by structuralism, semiotics, reader-response theory, reception aesthetics, and post-structuralism. Structuralism shifts attention from author and history toward codes, systems, differences, genres, and narrative structures. Semiotics treats texts as sign-systems. Reception theory, especially in Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Hans Robert Jauss (1982), emphasizes the *horizon of expectations* and the reader's role in concretizing the work.

Reader-response criticism radicalizes the reader's contribution, sometimes at the cost of textual resistance. Post-structuralism then destabilizes the very distinction between *literal meaning* and *rhetorical play*.

These movements extend hermeneutics beyond authorial intention and historical reconstruction. Their value lies in showing that texts function within systems, genres, institutions, and acts of reception. Their danger lies in dissolving the text into structures or readers. Critical hermeneutics must learn from them without surrendering the object-pole.

Biblical hermeneutics in the 20th-century absorbed nearly all of these pressures. The historical-critical method analyzes sources, redaction, form, genre, *Sitz im Leben* (in biblical criticism and literary theory, it means the original social, cultural, and historical context in which a particular text, story, or oral tradition was first created and used), and historical context.

Canonical, narrative, rhetorical, liberationist, feminist, postcolonial, and theological interpretations then challenge the sufficiency of historical reconstruction alone. Anthony Thiselton's *The Two Horizons* (1980) is important because it brings philosophical hermeneutics — especially Heidegger, Gadamer, Bultmann, and Wittgenstein — into *New Testament* interpretation, framing it as

the interaction between the text's horizon and the interpreter's horizon. Thiselton's work is a study of *New Testament* hermeneutics and philosophical description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein.

Late 20th-century and contemporary hermeneutics pluralize the field further. Gianni Vattimo's weak thought radicalizes hermeneutics after Nietzsche and Heidegger by treating truth as interpretive rather than foundational (Vattimo, 1997). John Caputo develops a radical hermeneutics that emphasizes undecidability, event, and the instability of interpretation (Caputo, 1987). Richard Kearney (2001 ; 2010), Merold Westphal (2001), and others bring hermeneutics to religion, ethics, narrative identity, testimony, and postmodern theology.

At the same time, analytic philosophy, legal theory, cognitive science, digital humanities, and AI studies raise new hermeneutical questions about rule-following, meaning, authorship, archive, mediation, and machine-generated text. These later developments do not abolish classical hermeneutics. They expose its expanded field : interpretation is no longer confined to ancient texts, sacred writings, or literary works ; it now concerns institutions, histories, bodies, technologies, social practices, trauma, ideology, and data. Postmodern hermeneutics shifts toward the *creation* of meaning, and Vattimo's weak thought is one of its most influential forms. It argues that the history of Western philosophy is a steady 'weakening' of absolute, objective truths.

Synthesis

This history is a sequence of widening circles. First, hermeneutics is a practical art for explaining difficult texts. Secondly, it becomes a method for Scripture, law, and philology. Thirdly, with Schleiermacher, it becomes a general art of linguistic understanding. Fourthly, with Dilthey, it becomes the methodological foundation of the human sciences. Fifthly, with Heidegger, it becomes an existential ontology of understanding. Sixthly, with Gadamer, it becomes philosophical hermeneutics : the historical, linguistic, dialogical event of understanding. Seventhly, with Ricoeur, Habermas, and Derrida, it becomes contested by suspicion, ideology critique, discourse theory, textual autonomy, and deconstruction. Eighthly, in contemporary work, it becomes a general problem of mediation across texts, traditions, cultures, institutions, media, and technologies.

§ 2 General Considerations

This succinct history of hermeneutics moves from *explanation* to *interpretation*, from interpretation to *understanding*, from understanding to *existence*, and from existence back to *critique*. For the intended transition to critical hermeneutics, the operative point is clear : texts become objects of knowledge only when the text-reader relation is disciplined by the same critical vigilance that governs knowledge in general. The text must not be reified into an oracle, and the reader must not be inflated into its author. Interpretation is valid only where *both poles* remain in play.

A critical hermeneutics rooted in *Regulae I* should draw a precise conclusion from this history. Hermeneutics cannot be *reduced to decoding*, because understanding is historically, linguistically, and existentially mediated. But it cannot *abandon decoding* either, because interpretation must remain answerable to textual givenness. The reader is never empty ; the text is never self-speaking. Meaning emerges in the disciplined relation between the two.

Against hermeneutical objectivism, critical hermeneutics says : the text is never known *without interpretation*. Against hermeneutical subjectivism, it says : interpretation is not valid *unless corrected by the text*. Against tradition-bound dogmatism, it says : inherited meaning must be tested. Against suspicion without limit, it says : critique must still be able to hear.

This is the critical middle.

§ 3 Text and Meaning

This critical middle must now be extended from textual meaning to mystical cognition. A mystical text is not only a semantic artifact to be decoded ; it is also a mediated testimony to a transformation in the subject of experience. It reports, instructs, remembers, and symbolically organizes a shift in awareness, affect, identity, practice, and relation to the Divine. For that reason, the interpretation of such a text cannot remain limited to grammar, genre, and historical context, although these remain indispensable controls. It must also ask what kind of cognition is being expressed and what kind of cognitive transformation the text presupposes or seeks to produce. This is where genetic epistemology, communicative action, identity discourse, and the transpersonal distinction between creative and nondual thought become relevant. They are not introduced to replace hermeneutics with psychology or sociology, but to specify how a mystical text can encode, communicate, and solicit transformations of consciousness while remaining answerable to textual and historical evidence.

The Knower and Language

The interpreter's linguistic competence must be understood as the subjective expression of sign-based cognition. A text becomes meaningful only because a subject of experience is able to handle signs, recognize symbolic relations, and submit possible meanings to correction within a communicative community. In the present case, however, the object is not any text whatsoever, but a text concerning mystical experience. A mystical text is called such when it mediates testimony, instruction, symbolization, or reflection concerning an encounter with the Divine, the ultimate, or the 'radical other,' without thereby giving direct conceptual possession of that object.

Hence, the hermeneutical task is twofold : first, to decode the textual and historical mediation; second, to ask what kind of cognition, transformation, or mode of awareness is being expressed through that mediation.

Human intelligence manifests in sign use, meaning formation, and communication. In ordinary textual interpretation, this is already enough to require a theory of language and communicative validity. In the interpretation of mystical texts, however, an additional question arises : what activity of consciousness is being reported, trained, transformed, or solicited by the text ? Habermas is useful because mystical writing is a communicative act addressed to a real or implied community of readers and therefore raises questions of truthfulness, authority, asymmetry, and recognition. Piaget is useful for a different reason : genetic epistemology shows how coordinated action, interiorization, decentration, and re-equilibration generate new mental operators. This does not mean that a medieval mystical text is to be reduced to developmental psychology. It means that spiritual exercises, ascetic disciplines, affective practices, and contemplative acts may be read as organized activities capable of transforming the cognitive field from which the mystical report arises.

Habermas enters here only at the level of communicative validity. His distinction between purposive and communicative rationality clarifies that a mystical text is not merely an object handled by a solitary reader, but a communicative act situated between speaker, receiver, community, authority, and tradition. Strategic or purposive rationality treats the other primarily within a *subject-object* model ; communicative rationality presupposes a subject-subject relation in which validity claims can be recognized, challenged, clarified, or refused. For critical hermeneutics, this matters because Beatrice's text is not simply a private record of inner states. It is addressed, transmitted, received, and evaluated within a community of sign-interpreters. Its meaning, therefore, depends not only on what is said but also on how the text performs truthfulness, authority, instruction, and spiritual credibility.¹

Communicative rationality begins with a *subject-subject* model, meaning that autonomy always involves the ability to align with and critically relate to intersubjectively recognized validity claims. Habermas interprets validity claims through the lens of the language-act structure. Central to all hermeneutics is the distinction between the *propositional* and the *performative* aspects of the language act. The latter depends on the context in which the language act occurs, while the former refers to a state of affairs 'in reality.'

The subject-object model remains necessary at the epistemological level because every act of knowledge implies a knower and something known. But it is insufficient in terms of communication. We must move away from the narrow subject-object classification. Within a communicative community, a subject-subject model prevails, and attempts are made to relate to the other through acts of language. The relationship with the others is 'open.' Communicative rationality functions in the face of *symmetry*, with two factors to be eliminated : power differences and untruthfulness.² This last factor we will elaborate on, as it refers to an aspect of communicative rationality that is of interest to the critical investigation of mystical experience and cognition (mysticology) : the

authenticity of the mystic's account of the direct experience of the 'radical other.' Truthfulness implies that the discourse participants have *no hidden purposes* in participating, nor do they wish to manipulate the outcome.³

A mystical text is also a subject-subject relation : a speaker or writer addresses a receiver, directly or indirectly, within a community governed by expectations of truthfulness, authority, formation, and trust. Communicative rationality is useful here because it asks under what conditions a report can be treated as sincere, non-manipulative, and open to correction. For the critical investigation of mystical experience, this question becomes acute : the interpreter cannot verify Beatrice's experience directly, but can examine the textual signs of authenticity, the discipline of the language, the coherence of the spiritual sequence, the relation to communal norms, and the absence or presence of manipulative aims. Truthfulness is not proof of the Divine ; it is a condition for taking the mystical report seriously as testimony.

How can one assess this with sufficient probability ?

In his article *Wahrheitstheorien* (1973),⁴ Habermas believes that he can solve this problem by the so-called 'therapeutic discourse,' whereby, under the guidance of a therapist, recovery of truthfulness could be achieved. Later, since there is an asymmetry between therapist and patient that makes the notion of 'discourse' inapplicable, he returned to this and spoke of 'therapeutic criticism.'

This therapeutic critique, moreover, is complemented by an 'aesthetic critique' that provides the linguistic means "with which we can say what we *should* take an interest in and what our interests *really* are."⁵ The standards used in this process are not universal but culturally specific. "Therefore, with respect to truthfulness, there can be no discourse in the proper sense ?"⁶ According to Habermas, therapeutic criticism aims to change the determinants of a '*false*' *consciousness through self-reflection* and under the *guidance* of a therapist. The '*false*' consciousness distorts the real person.

The analogy with therapeutic criticism must be used cautiously. Spiritual guidance is not psychotherapy, and the medieval relation between an experienced religious figure and a novice is not a Habermasian discourse between equal participants. Yet the analogy is useful if it is kept formal. In both cases, an asymmetrical relation may aim at a greater capacity for self-recognition, truthfulness, and transformation. In a mystical setting, the guide or text may expose distortions of desire, affect, imagination, thought, and self-consciousness that prevent the subject from entering a more spacious cognitive and spiritual field. In the transpersonal model of *In Togetherness*, this transformation can be described heuristically as a movement beyond circular ego-consciousness toward creative thought, where hyper-concepts and symbolic integrations arise, and toward nondual thought, where conceptual mediation reaches its limit. This does not prove the mystical state. It clarifies why texts of spiritual instruction must be read both as instruments of cognitive transformation and as objects of interpretation.

Language and Authenticity

According to Kunneman, Habermas's conviction that there can be no discourse in the proper sense with respect to truthfulness is contradicted by developments "that have taken place in recent decades within the women's movement, the self-help movement, and within the various psychotherapeutic directions."⁷

Within these movements, *learning processes take place* that clearly demonstrate that it is possible to develop a discourse form that relates to the "inner, or more precisely, to the *identity* of those involved and that is characterized by a *symmetrical relationship* between the participants."⁸ Authenticity is negotiable. For Kunneman, this discourse is an 'identity discourse' and notes that not validity (of the propositional part), not correctness (of the norms), but *veracity* is central, especially then "the veracity of the expressions of persons and the adequacy of the identity models they have internalized ..."⁹

This truthfulness is spoken of in terms of *identity models*. An identity model provides an interpretation of crucial needs and potentials and thus structures the self-experience and self-expression of those involved, "just as in a theoretical discourse one speaks in terms of theoretical systems or paradigms," and which provide the basic concepts "by means of which empirical observations are structured."¹⁰ On symmetry, he is explicit: "no one possesses a priori privileged experience or exclusive insight."¹¹

Kunneman's identity discourse is useful because mystical texts do not merely communicate propositions; they shape the subject who receives them. They propose, test, and transform identity models. For Beatrice, the decisive question is therefore not only what *minne* means lexically, but what kind of self is constituted by living under *minne*. Does the text form a servant of Divine love, a bride of Christ, a soul wounded by excess, a subject disciplined by longing, or a transformed agent whose ordinary self-relation has been displaced? These are not psychological reductions. They are hermeneutical questions concerning the identity model internal to the text. A critical reading must ask what self-understanding the mystical discourse presupposes, what transformation it solicits, and how this differs from ordinary egoic, moral, doctrinal, or institutional identity.

What identity model do mystics employ? How does it differ from others?

Exemplary, Emancipatory, Canonical Texts

The transition from communicative rationality to the typology of mystical texts must now be made explicit. If mystical writing is a communicative act, then it can be classified according to what it tries to do with its reader. It may bear witness, instruct, transform, authorize, preserve, or crystallize communal identity. The following distinction between exemplary, emancipatory, and canonical texts is therefore not a merely literary taxonomy. It is a functional typology of mystical communication. It asks whether the text primarily presents a path, trains a reader, or stabilizes a community's spiritual identity. This typology also explains why Habermas, Kunneman, Piaget, and the transpersonal model have entered the

argument : each helps clarify one dimension of mystical textuality. Habermas clarifies communicative validity ; Kunneman clarifies identity and veracity ; Piaget clarifies the transformation of cognitive operators ; the transpersonal model clarifies why creative and nondual forms of cognition may be at stake in mystical testimony.

Traditional classifications of mystical texts usually sort them by literary form, theological register, or spiritual function : vision report, first-person confession, *vita*, sermon, letter, treatise, commentary, prayer, poem, rule of life, ascetical manual, apophatic discourse, or itinerary of ascent ; they may also be grouped according to the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, or according to cataphatic and apophatic modes of speech (ps.-Dionysius, 1987 ; Underhill, 1911 ; McGinn, 1991 ; Turner, 1995 ; Hollywood, 2002).

Such classifications remain indispensable, because they protect the reading from genre-confusion : a hagiographical *vita* does not function like a first-person confession, a doctrinal treatise does not function like a vision report, and a practical instruction does not function like speculative theology. Yet these traditional categories mainly answer the question : What kind of textual form is this ? The three types proposed here — exemplary, emancipatory, and canonical — answer a different, more directly hermeneutical question : What does the mystical text do within a communicative community ?

An exemplary text presents a traversed path and offers the mystic as a possible model ; its central issue is *authenticity*, i.e., whether the account plausibly mediates an *actual transformation* rather than merely repeating inherited formulas.

An emancipatory text is pedagogical and operative ; it seeks to free the reader from distorted consciousness through spiritual exercises, affective discipline, symbolic reorientation, and cognitive transformation.

A canonical text crystallizes a communal identity ; it preserves, stabilizes, and authorizes the language through which a community understands the experience of the Divine.

These three types are therefore not *ad hoc* because they arise from the communicative structure of mystical writing itself : testimony, transformation, and communal stabilization. They also map onto Staal's distinction between substructure and superstructure : exemplary discourse remains closest to the *lived experiential substructure* ; emancipatory discourse organizes practices and mental operators by which transformation may be repeated or approached ; canonical discourse foregrounds the superstructure of shared symbols, norms, and identity (Staal, 1980 ; van den Dungen, 2021). Exemplary and emancipatory texts are linked to uniqueness, transformation, and the communication of mystical knowledge, while canonical texts are linked to the crystallization of a community of sign-interpreters and to the possible fading of direct experience into speculative or institutional superstructure.

In the case of Beatrice, this typology is especially useful because the 7M is not merely a medieval treatise to be classified by genre, but a mediated testimony of *minne* that can simultaneously present a path, instruct a reader, and consolidate a Cistercian-Brabantine grammar of Divine love. The typology should therefore be used flexibly, passage by passage, not as three sealed boxes but as three dominant functions of mystical discourse. It is justified because mystical texts do not merely say something ; they witness, form, and transmit.

A mystical text may function as an exemplary discourse when it presents the inner course of a mystic in such a way that a possible path becomes visible to the reader. It is not “nothing more than a travel log” because even the most personal account is already mediated by language, doctrine, memory, genre, and communal expectation.

Yet the metaphor of a travel log remains useful if it is understood critically : the text communicates a traversed path of transformation, not an unmediated deposit of experience. In this exemplary function, the text offers a possible course of action or orientation within a given identity model. The reader is not compelled to follow it ; she is shown that such a transformation is thinkable, livable, and communicable within the community of meaning addressed by the text.

A mystical text may function as an emancipatory discourse when it is explicitly pedagogical, that is, when it seeks to bring a delimited audience into a new spiritual, affective, or cognitive position. Such a text does not merely describe transformation ; it participates in producing it. It may expose forms of distorted consciousness and prescribe a disciplined path of release through spiritual exercises, ascetic habits, affective training, attention, prayer, silence, concentration, self-examination, and the non-reification of its central symbols. In this sense, the genetic-cognitive model becomes relevant : the text can be read as organizing practices that transform the subject’s operative schemata. It does not merely say what the mystic experienced ; it indicates how the reader might be re-formed so that another mode of awareness becomes possible. This is why the categories of action, interiorization, decentration, and re-equilibration are hermeneutically useful. They describe the formal dynamics by which spiritual practice may become cognitive transformation.

Insofar as the text *is the reflection of a common learning process*, a kind of ‘manifesto’ of experienced spiritual growth, written down by a particular mystic as the voice of a community, a ‘canonical’ text is at hand, since the activity of writing seeks primarily to establish, preserve, or stabilize a *symbolic identity*, a ‘copying’ of the group identity which has already been shaped in the form of a shared learning process.

Whenever we study a text about the direct experience of the Divine¹², we will have to ask ourselves whether the text, in whole or in part, can be called exemplary, emancipatory, or canonical. This is important because each type has a particular constellation of characteristics directly influencing the reading.

Characteristic of these Types

This typology must remain subordinate to the text. A mystical text may contain exemplary, emancipatory, and canonical moments at once. The question is not to assign the whole work to one fixed box, but to identify the dominant function of a passage or sequence. In Beatrice, this matters because the 7M can be read simultaneously as a testimony of *minne*, an instruction in the path of love, and the crystallization of a Cistercian-Brabantine mystical identity.

The interpreter must therefore ask, passage by passage, whether the text is primarily reporting experience, shaping the reader, or stabilizing a communal grammar of Divine love.

An *exemplary* discourse brings us close to the experiences that make an author a mystical author, and thus specifies the object of the experience. The main issue here is *the authenticity* of what is written, about whether the author ‘really’ means what was written.

An *emancipatory discourse* will tell us more about the *developmental dynamics adopted*. This articulates a series of structures or levels of learning that build on one another and indicates the circumstances under which we are dealing with the transition to a new level of learning, or with stagnation or regression.

The genetic model should not be used to force mystical texts into standardized developmental stages. Its value is more precise. It allows the interpreter to ask whether the text presupposes a transformation of cognitive operators beyond ordinary formal and critical reason. In *In Togetherness* (2018), cognition unfolds through several modes : ante-rational modes using signal, icon, and context-bound forms ; rational modes using symbol, abstract concept, and critical concept ; and meta-rational modes in which creative thought operates through hyper-concepts while nondual thought exceeds conceptual operation.

This framework helps interpret mystical discourse when the text appears to move beyond ordinary propositional knowledge without falling back into pre-rational confusion. The task is therefore diagnostic : does the text show regression into mythic or psychomorphic structures, or does it articulate a disciplined passage toward creative and possibly nondual cognition ? In a genetic-cognitive approach, mystical practice may be read as a decentration of egoic self-reference and a re-equilibration of the subject in a new cognitive and spiritual field. Such a model does not prove the content of mystical experience ; it clarifies how mystical texts may encode transformations beyond the confines of formal and critical thought.

The *canonical* discourse crystallizes a group identity and can offer fascinating perspectives on the *ideological superstructure* (built on the individual, lived substructure). This superstructure (Staal, 1980),¹³ is much like an ideological manifesto, reflecting the values, expectations, and norms peculiar to the group regarding the experience of the Divine.

In all three types, superstructuring is at work and cannot be avoided, given the contextuality (immediate, medial, and general) characterizing every text.

§ 4 Language, Interpretation, and Critique

Can the rules of interpretation provide access to the meaning of a text ? And if they can, what can 'objective interpretation' mean once naive objectivism has been rejected ?

The Pre-Critical Approach

A theory about interpretation must lead to a methodology about interpretation. We find this ideal, for example, with Schleiermacher. This evolved into a search for a reliable set of rules for interpretation.¹⁴ The difficulty is that increasingly specific rules apply to fewer and fewer texts, while very general rules risk saying little more than what competent reading already presupposes. A canon such as "Zweiter Kanon. Der Sinn eines jeden Wortes an einer gegebenen Stelle muss bestimmt werden nach seinem Zusammensein mit denen, die es umgeben."¹⁵ is correct, but it largely states the obvious : words are understood through their relation to surrounding words. Such rules may orient interpretation, but they do not generate insight, nor do they secure objectivity.

In his *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Gadamer introduced a hermeneutic theory based on the idea that the interpreter cannot transcend his own historicity. This idea is sharpened by loosening the bond between textual meaning and the meaning foreseen or intended by the author. The written text thus acquires a relative autonomy, and Gadamer can seem to treat meaning as belonging to the historically effective life of language rather than to authorial consciousness alone : "Actually, the condition of being written down is central to the hermeneutic phenomenon because the detachment of a written text from the writer or author as well as from any particular addressee or reader gives it an *existence of its own*."¹⁶ It is this *ontological turn* that indicates how Gadamer meets Heidegger. In *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1957), we find : "Der Mensch spricht nur, indem er der Sprache entspricht. Die Sprache spricht. Ihr Sprechen spricht für uns im Gesprochenen."¹⁷

From the present critical standpoint, however, Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics does not sufficiently formalize the gap between the regulative horizon of textual meaning and the relative meaning reconstructed by an interpreter. "The fundamental distinction overlooked by Gadamer is that between the meaning of a text and the significance of that meaning to a present situation."¹⁸ The issue is, therefore, not that Gadamer collapses into hermeneutical nihilism, but that his emphasis on the event of understanding does not by itself provide the critical maxims needed to compare rival interpretations. "Norm concepts like the meaning of the author or the understanding of the original reader represent in truth mere empty blanks that are filled up by understanding from occasion to occasion."¹⁹

A Critical Hermeneutic

A critical hermeneutics must begin from the fact that no observation occurs without a cognitive framework. The dualistic assumption that the human sciences are hermeneutical while the natural sciences simply study ‘hard facts’ is therefore untenable. As argued in *Regulae I*, both fields operate through mediated, theory-laden procedures, even though their objects, methods, and standards of validation differ. Dilthey already told us that different factual regions do not ‘exist’, but are co-constituted by epistemology and method.²⁰ Ironically, Gadamer’s ‘universality of hermeneutics’ refers to this situation, among others. This universality means that every investigation and every interpretation entails tradition-bound theoretical presuppositions.²¹ In the context of criticism, this means that when we elevate the meaning of a text to the object of inquiry, we must think through the distinction between relative meaning and absolute meaning. This implies the distinction between the reality of the meaning of the text as it is (absolute) and the meaning as we determine it (relative). This determination is always fallible, of course, since, within the text as we read it, new dimensions can later be noticed, and/or outside-textual factors can influence the current state of affairs (or state of meaning) (new texts, new contextual information, new commentaries, etc.). Interpretation is never finished.

“What is the status of the many traditional canons and maxims of interpretation, and what is their purpose ?” Hirsch wonders. “Clearly, they are provisional guides, or rules of thumb.”²² It is clear to Hirsch that any attempt to establish strict rules is based on an error : “No possible set of rules or rites of preparation can generate or compel an insight into what an author means. The act of understanding is at first a genial (or a mistaken) guess, and there are no methods for making guesses, no rules for generating insights.”²³ This position is compatible with the view that we do not possess an extra-epistemic perspective relevant to formal-empirical knowledge itself, i.e., by definition, we cannot be absolutely sure in conceptual terms whether the relative meaning of the text coincides with the absolute meaning of the text. Any attempt to seek such an overarching position (or ‘demon of Laplace’) is related to the foundation postulate (valid knowledge is founded knowledge) and proves pre-critical. Can we approach the ultimate horizon of interpretation, the absolute meaning of a text ? As each interpretation takes place against a historical background that itself goes back to texts, thus raising the same question (the hermeneutic circularity).

The notation that follows is not an attempt to mathematize meaning. It is a critical shorthand. Its function is to keep apart what pre-critical hermeneutics repeatedly confuses : the regulative horizon of what the text means, the relative reconstruction proposed by an interpreter, and the evidential procedures by which one reconstruction can become more warranted than another. The formula protects the distinction ; it does not replace interpretation.

Let us assume that an author *x* intends to communicate a meaning *y* through a text *t* to a community of readers *z*. The interpreter therefore works with information

about *x*, *t*, and the auditorium *z*, in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's sense of the addressed or implied audience of discourse (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). The intended meaning of *y* functions as the regulative horizon of interpretation, assuming the extant presence of *t* and the reconstructable relation between author, text, and auditorium. The absolute meaning *y* forms *the regulative monological perspective* on meaning *y'*. The latter is the relative meaning reconstructed by the reader-interpreter, and, in some cases, by the author's own later self-interpretation of *t*. In other words, the relation between *y'* (relative) and *y* (absolute) is *problematized*. It is *not* the case that *y* constitutes *y'*, on the contrary : *y* constitutes the postponed, final horizon of *y'* (regulation, not constitution). At some point, we may think that we have adequately reconstructed this relation, and that *y' = y*, but this identity remains conceptually unknown.

An analogous critical tension remains present between the absolute meaning *y* and the relative meaning *y'*, comparable to the tension between the *noumenal* and the phenomenal. The interpreter seeks *y* and finds only *y'* : a relative meaning oriented toward the ever-elusive horizon of the text's absolute meaning.

The following formal relations pertain :

- * meaning-as-such, by analogy with the noumenal limit = regulative absolute meaning *y* ;
- * the ambivalent field of factual, relative, constitutive meaning *y'* based on the presence of *t* (the immediate context), the context of composition and the author of the text (the intermediate context), and the general historical situation of this composition (or the general context) ;
- * the specific hermeneutic rules of interpretation.

Critical hermeneutics begins when an initial suspicion about *y* is disciplined into a proposed relative meaning *y'* through hermeneutic evidence. This calls for a hermeneutic theory of interpretive evidence : the interpreter must determine whether a hypothetical meaning *y'* receives textual, contextual, and argumentative support, and whether it remains relevant when assessed in light of broader theoretical considerations.

"These two sides of the interpretative process, the hypothetical and the critical, are not, of course, neatly separated when we are pondering a text, for we are constantly testing out guesses both large and small as we gradually build up a coherent structure of meaning."²⁴

The critical-hermeneutic process also seeks to reconstruct the author's intentions, the meanings employed, and the processes of consciousness associated with them. This does not mean that the author simply possesses *y* as an object and deposits it unchanged in *t*. Rather, the author intends meaning, the text mediates that intention under historical and linguistic conditions, and the interpreter reconstructs only a relative meaning *y'* under the regulative horizon of *y*. Whenever an assumption is confirmed, however, this is not a 'theophanic'

presence of the absolute meaning, but merely the fallible and temporary factual confirmation of what we think we know about the author's intention, which itself is historically determined by reference to texts and written testimonies to which the same applies. In other words, the author's intentions must be framed by the study of every context that acts on the composition. This is possibly where the problem of circularity comes in, because what we can learn about an author (this is certainly true of a medieval author) is itself based on texts.

Interpretive Evidence and the Critical Method

For Hirsch, we can divide the hermeneutic process into two parts : an *interpretive* and a *critical* part. The interpretive consists of *a series of probability judgments supported by textual evidence* : "Hence, the objectivity of interpretation as a discipline depends upon our being able to make an objectively grounded choice between two disparate probability judgments on the basis of the common evidence which supports them."²⁵

Hirsch is useful insofar as he distinguishes the interpretive moment from the critical moment. The interpretive moment proposes a reading ; the critical moment compares that reading with other possible readings on the basis of shared evidence. This comparison does not yield objective interpretation in the strong objectivist sense. It yields a relative warrant : the claim that one reading is better supported, more coherent, more historically constrained, and less arbitrary than its rivals. Hirsch's criteria may therefore be retained, but only as applied maxims for comparative judgment. Without such maxims, interpretation risks arbitrariness ; but if these maxims are treated as foundations, critical hermeneutics regresses into the very objectivism it has already rejected.

Indeed, before Hirsch's criteria can be used, their critical status must be fixed. They are not foundations of objectivity in the strong sense, and they do not give access to the meaning of the text as it is in itself. They are applied maxims for ordering probability judgments within a critical-hermeneutic practice already governed by the epistemological prelude. The transcendental level establishes the dyad : an interpreter and a textual object. The theoretical level establishes the norm : interpretation must preserve both poles, neither reifying the text nor absorbing it into the reader. The applied level then uses rules of thumb to test whether a proposed reading is more warranted than its alternatives.

Hirsch is useful only at this third level.

His criteria help discipline interpretive probability ; they do not ground meaning, abolish circularity, or secure objective possession. This implies a set of interpretive principles that allow comparative judgments to be made ; otherwise, 'objective interpretation' collapses into hermeneutical nihilism, where meaning is treated as lost or irrecoverably private. The search for an objective criterion can therefore mean only the disciplined approximation of what the author meant ; and even this approximation is not absolute. Using Saussure's distinction between *parole* and *langue*, one may say that *parole* can never be mechanically derived

from an orderly sequence of meaningful words, because langue only names the system of linguistic possibilities shared by a language community.²⁶ If, for example, we establish historically that it was customary in 13th-century monasteries to read texts aloud, we can form a historically constrained image of the fundamentally unattainable parole as it was shaped at that time.

By objective interpretation, critical hermeneutics can mean only this : a relatively warranted interpretation *y'* regulated by the never-possessed horizon of the text's absolute meaning *y*. The word 'objective' must therefore be used critically, not ontologically. It does not mean that the interpreter possesses the text's meaning as it is in itself ; it means that a proposed reading has been disciplined by language, context, genre, internal coherence, authorial singularity, where reconstructable, and intersubjective correction. The absolute meaning of *y* regulates inquiry ; it does not constitute the interpretation.

In the context of interpretation, one may therefore ask for maxims that help systematize *probability judgments* without pretending to abolish hermeneutical finitude. Hirsch's formula remains useful if read critically : the interpreter does not verify meaning as one would verify an experimentally testable proposition, but argues that a given reading is more probable than its rivals. The result is not possession, but a warrant.

Hirsch's four criteria — legitimacy, totality, generic adequacy, and coherence — should therefore be treated as applied controls on *y'*, the proposed relative meaning of the text. They do not generate meaning, and they do not guarantee identity between *y'* and *y*. They discipline the interpretive claim under the higher norms of critical hermeneutics.

"The interpreter's goal is simply this - to show that a given reading is more probable than others. In hermeneutics, verification is a process of establishing *relative probabilities*."²⁷

Hirsch introduces criteria to organize the notion of 'probabilities' with respect to a given reading of a text, establishing its relative meaning *y'*. He calls the first three criteria preliminary, while the emphasis is on the last criterion (coherence).

The four criteria must be reassigned within the critical architecture.

Legitimacy of reading protects the linguistic object-pole : the reading must be possible within the historical language and public norm-structure of the text.

Totality protects the textual object-pole : the reading must not isolate convenient fragments while ignoring the whole. Generic adequacy protects the register of interpretation : the reading must not treat a mystical treatise, prayer, vision report, *vita*, sermon, or pedagogical sequence as if all belonged to one undifferentiated genre.

Coherence protects the integration of the proposed reading : the parts, the whole, the context, and the hypothesis must mutually support one another. Yet none of these criteria is sovereign. Each remains a maxim, and all remain corrigible.

(a) *The legitimacy of reading*

It must be shown that the reading is permissible within the known public norm structure of the language in which the text was written. Strictly synchronic readings, in which the text or part of the text is treated as a monolithic entity while context is disregarded, are rejected at this stage. A probable, relative interpretation always implies a *knowledge of the contexts* in which the text appeared. This criterion also refers to a philological argument : the text must be studied *in the original language*. A translation must always start from and be accompanied by the original text.

(b) *The totality of the reading*

A reading becomes more probable when it can account for all relevant elements of the text. As soon as certain parts are lifted out of the text, or the interpretation of certain parts is obscure, the chances of an objective interpretation decrease. A text may be structurally divided into segments, but such division belongs to the critical stage unless the segmentation is already supported by explicit textual evidence. This must be demonstrated, not assumed.

(c) *The generic adequacy of interpretation*

The interpretation must follow the text's implicit generic structure ; i.e., the *type of text* under consideration must help determine the interpretive register. A scientific discourse follows a development that differs from a poetic discourse. The interpreter must take this into account. This criterion is not free of difficulties, after all, for on the basis of what will the interpreter determine the genre ? Doesn't a point of view on the matter already imply a knowledge of the text, which implies a circularity ? Especially the fact that this criterion is seemingly imposed from the outside but itself presupposes prior inner knowledge of the text suggests a moderate use. Of course, it is true that *a preliminary study of the context* of the text (criterion 1 : construction of a perspective on the language) may also entail *a suggestion regarding the genre*.

Yet this does not mean that the text cannot be 'unique' in its 'genre.' Hirsch himself writes about this third criterion :

"This third criterion is, however, highly presumptive, since the interpreter may easily mistake the text's genre."²⁸

(d) *The coherence of the text*

This last important criterion "gives significance to all the rest."²⁹ It seeks to regulate the choice between the various possibilities (first three criteria). A given interpretation becomes warranted only when it also makes sense as an *integrated* reading. Coherence, according to Hirsch, cannot be noticed from the outside. Coherence is a property of the probable (relative) interpretation and depends on the contexts and on the sense of the whole meaning, constituted by explicit local senses and a horizon of expectation and possibilities.³⁰ According to Hirsch, the coherence criterion can only be used "with reference to a particular context, and this context may be inferred only by positing the author's horizon, his disposition

toward a particular type of meaning.”³¹ However, this means circularity : the context is derived based on sub-meanings, and these are specified and made coherent with the context as referent. Hirsch notes this circularity. It is the cause of the *reader’s rare departure from his coherent interpretation*, for “his reading is just as plausible as his instructor’s, and, very often, the student is justified.”³²

Coherence is not the coherence of the text as possessed from outside, but the coherence of a proposed reading under constraint. It integrates the other maxims : linguistic legitimacy, textual totality, and generic adequacy. A reading becomes more probable when it can account for local meanings, the movement of the whole, the relevant contexts, and the horizon of expectation without forcing the text to say what the interpreter already wishes it to say. Yet coherence remains circular. The whole is inferred from the parts, while the parts are interpreted from within the projected whole.

This circularity is not a defect to be eliminated by the objectivist method ; it is the condition under which interpretation proceeds. The critical question is therefore not whether circularity can be abolished, but whether the circle remains open to correction by textual resistance, historical evidence, alternative readings, and intersubjective argument.

(e) Critical remarks

Hirsch does not escape the circularity of interpretation, and, from a critical standpoint, he need not. The problem begins only when coherence is asked to function as an objective foundation. It cannot do so. Coherence crowns the other criteria only as an applied maxim, not as a transcendental or theoretical norm. Its force is comparative : it helps decide whether one proposed reading is more warranted than another. It does not deliver the absolute meaning *y*, and it does not erase the gap between *y* and *y*’. Once this is made explicit, Hirsch’s criteria can be retained without objectivism. They become tools of critical probability, not guarantees of hermeneutical possession.

Nevertheless, Hirsch is right to insist that “It is necessary to establish that the context invoked is the most probable context.”³³

Let us consider the distinction between language and context. By *langue*, Saussure meant a linguistic system shared by a ‘speech-community’ at a certain time. This notion implies a historical perspective, and filling in this perspective is not possible without texts, traditions, etc. We can, therefore, clarify the notion of ‘context’ by indicating how the studied text is part of a community of sign users, taking into account that this community itself is part of a historical climate.

From general to specific, this becomes :

- *general* context : texts and traditions that allow the historical context of the general language community to be reconstructed ;
- *medial* context : texts, traditions, biographical materials, and related evidence that provide a perspective on the indirect context of a text within a well-defined speech community ;

- the *immediate context of the studied text itself*, or the sense of the text in terms of local meanings and a horizon of expectation and possibilities.

Circularity at a particular stage can be regulated by examining how the proposed interpretation relates to a higher contextual stage : from the text itself, to the text's context, and then to the historical context of that context. In this way, *historical continuity is revealed*. The 'coherence' of the studied text can be argued by indicating which connections are *unlikely to be* suggested (instead of Hirsch's verification, Popper's falsification). This likely *absence of certain connections can be argued by referring to* the degree of coherence between the text and the speech community in which it is situated. The speech community can itself be delineated through texts, traditions, institutional traces, and related evidence. Its coherence can then be argued analogously by situating it within the broader historical context to which that community belongs. Grasping the historical context itself involves reconstructing it from texts, traditions, etc. In the absence of an absolute perspective, we never know whether the suggested coherence of relative meaning *y'* is identical with the absolute meaning *y* of the text, which Hirsch suggests : "Since the quality of coherence depends upon the context inferred, there is no absolute standard of coherence by which we can adjudicate between different coherent readings."³⁴ Only in a *dogmatic* hermeneutic perspective, where one wishes to realize the *ontological identity* between *y* and *y'*, does this present untenable difficulties. Critical hermeneutics is guided by the understanding that an analogous distinction between regulative horizon and fallible reconstruction also applies to empirical inquiry, whether one works with texts or with measuring instruments. The background information used is itself based on background information, etc.

It is tempting, once we have worked out one pole of the transcendental scheme (the knower-object and the monological regulation), to radicalize it by positing the ontological 'extra-epistemic' primacy of, for instance, in the present hermeneutical problem, the historical reality (from which an ontological historicism then follows). It belongs to the critical tradition, however, to remain aware of the *fallibility* of formal-empirical knowledge. This means that historical reconstruction is adopted as active background information through the intersubjective consensus of the community of concerned sign-interpreters.

In other words, circularity and regressus are not abolished ; they are critically regulated. As far as the general and medial contexts are concerned, the interpreter relies on the horizon of knowledge currently available to the relevant community of sign-interpreters. This does not provide an ontological foundation for interpretation. It provides intersubjectively stabilized background information, valid *pro tem*, by which probability judgments can be compared and corrected. The Münchhausen problem is therefore not solved by discovering a final ground ; it is displaced by the critical method itself : no absolute foundation, no arbitrary break, no infinite regress pursued without limit, but a disciplined appeal to the best available contextual evidence under fallibilist conditions.

If legitimacy, totality, generic adequacy, and coherence make a reading more probable only by relating the text to language, genre, and context, how can critical hermeneutics prevent the *singular voice of the author* from disappearing into those very contexts ?

(f) *The uniqueness of an author*

The use of general, medial, and immediate context gives history its proper weight, but it also creates a danger : the author may disappear into context. To avoid this, the author's uniqueness should be retained as a hermeneutical maxim, not as an objectivist recovery of interior consciousness. Hirsch is useful here because he insists that interpretation must attend to the author's subjective stance insofar as it is relevant to the text. He does not present this uniqueness as a principle, although he does write that : "An essential task in the process of verification, is (...) a deliberate reconstruction of the author's subjective stance to the extent that this stance is relevant to the text at hand."³⁵ This implies that the text is understood as *a signal of conscious activity* and that we attempt to reconstruct this by capturing a similar state of consciousness or degree of discriminative activity, or "... to engage in intentional acts belonging to the same species as those of the author."³⁶

Yet this stance cannot be possessed directly ; for a medieval mystical author, it can only be reconstructed indirectly through textual form, vocabulary, genre, doctrinal horizon, manuscript mediation, reception, and historically plausible modes of spiritual practice. The text may be treated as a signal of conscious activity, but not as transparent access to consciousness itself. Authorial uniqueness constrains interpretation ; it does not abolish mediation.

This relates to Staal's claim that the study of mysticism cannot remain a "purely study-based approach,"³⁷ because some participatory familiarity with the relevant practices may be required. In the context of hermeneutical analysis, such familiarity functions as heuristic competence, not epistemic possession. It may help the interpreter recognize spiritual exercises, contemplative operations, affective transitions, symbolic disciplines, and altered modes of self-relation ; it does not grant direct access to Beatrice's consciousness and may not be used to bypass philology, history, doctrine, manuscript mediation, or intersubjective correction.³⁸

The result is a revised hierarchy. At the transcendental level, interpretation presupposes a subject and an object of interpretation. At the theoretical level, the norm is critical balance : the text must resist, and the interpreter must mediate. At the applied level, Hirsch's criteria, contextual reconstruction, authorial uniqueness, and participatory familiarity function as maxims. They help compare readings, but they do not ground meaning. They are valid only insofar as they serve the critical middle already established in the epistemological prelude. The text is not a noumenal object of possession ; the reader is not a sovereign producer of meaning ; the author is not immediately recoverable ; and contextual consensus is not final truth. Interpretation remains warranted, comparative, fallible, and

corrigible. Once a relative meaning *y'* has been made sufficiently warranted, what may the interpreter legitimately do with it within a later horizon of inquiry ?

The Critical Evaluation

Critical evaluation examines what the text can mean for us today, but only after interpretation has first attempted to establish a relatively warranted meaning *y'*. "Criticism, (...) builds on the results of interpretation ; it confronts textual meaning not as such, but as a component of a larger context."³⁹ In this respect, Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance remains useful, provided it is critically revised. Meaning does not change in the sense that the interpreter may not simply replace the text's historical claim with present use ; yet our access to meaning remains fallible, revisable, and mediated. Significance changes more openly because it concerns the relation between the interpreted text and later questions, aims, theories, and horizons. Critical evaluation updates significance, not by violating meaning, but by placing a warranted interpretation into a broader context of present inquiry.

Significance is formulated through extra-textual perspectives that indicate the importance of the text within a later horizon of inquiry. It can take shape only in light of a defined objective, and that objective is tied to a *thesis*.

The distinction between meaning and significance may be compared cautiously with Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,⁴⁰ but only heuristically. It should not be treated as a strict logical mapping onto hermeneutics. In Frege's semantics, *Sinn* concerns the mode of presentation of an expression, while *Bedeutung* concerns its reference ; this does not translate without remainder into the hermeneutical distinction between meaning and significance. The analogy is nevertheless useful if handled modestly. In the present context, *meaning* names the historically and linguistically constrained sense that a text can be argued to carry within its own horizon, while *significance* names the changing relevance, application, or value that this interpreted meaning acquires for later readers, questions, and contexts. Thus, the Fregean distinction does not ground the hermeneutical distinction ; it merely helps mark the difference between what a text can be argued to say and what that saying comes to matter for. If this distinction collapses, hermeneutic solipsism follows : the text means only what it means for the present reader. If it is hardened into objectivism, the opposite error follows : the interpreter pretends to possess authorial meaning as a fixed object. Critical hermeneutics refuses both. Meaning is regulated by language, author, genre, context, and textual resistance ; significance is the later activation of that warranted meaning within a new horizon of inquiry.

Hermeneutic solipsism radicalizes historical situatedness until it exceeds the conditions of possible knowledge. Subjectivity is always confronted with phenomena that must be treated as oriented toward reality-as-such ; yet whether this orientation coincides with reality-as-such cannot itself become an object of formal-empirical knowledge, because that question would require an extra-

epistemic standpoint. Consequently, hermeneutic solipsism is self-defeating. The statement : “The meaning of a text is equal to what it means to me and nothing more” already invites understanding as more than a private event in the speaker. It therefore presupposes the very transsubjective meaning it denies.

Critical evaluation can draw on theories and concepts not directly supplied by the text, provided they remain answerable to the warranted interpretation already established. In this way, the text can acquire a *new* dimension.

Hirsch’s criteria must therefore remain demoted and disciplined. They are not a return to objectivist hermeneutics, but practical maxims for evaluating competing readings within a critical-hermeneutic framework. Their function is not to overcome the gap between *y* and *y’*, but to prevent that gap from becoming arbitrary.

For the study of Beatrice, this matters decisively. A reading of *minne* must be legitimate within Middle Dutch usage, attentive to the whole movement of the 7M, adequate to its mystical and pedagogical genre, coherent across local and global meanings, sensitive to Beatrice’s singular voice, and open to contextual correction. But none of these grants possession of the text’s absolute meaning. Together, they yield only a more warranted interpretation of her mediated testimony of Divine love.

§ 5 Choosing a Text.

In light of the types of mystical texts we have identified, we will introduce a set of criteria for text selection. These promote the organized choice of a particular text and limit the possibility of choosing one that does not provide access to the mystical knowledge manipulation. We can group these criteria into two groups :

- 1 : philological restrictions ;
- 2 : mysticological restrictions.

Philological Constraints

a.1 Find a text that speaks *to* the object of *mysticism as experience* within a well-defined linguistic and indirect contextual area. Since we only have a working definition of the ‘radical other,’ this first limitation is still quite broad and not very practical, since we are required to systematically go through all the writings that we believe bring this up.

a.2 Find a text that meets **a.1** and can make a ‘uniqueness claim’ within the area in question. Uniqueness implies that in the language and cultural area in question, the text (i) for the first time discusses mysticism as experience in well-defined terms ; and/or (ii) differs in style from all other texts in that area ; and/or (iii) has undergone little or no direct influence in the composition of the text by other texts.

The greater the uniqueness, the more likely the text in question can be called emancipatory or exemplary, which implies that the author either primarily wishes to liberate others by communicating the structure of mysticism as experience or

merely offers a travelogue of personal experiences. In either case, the text can tell us something about the mystical manipulation of knowledge.

a.3 Find a text that satisfies **a.1** and **a.2** and that itself is at the root of a transformation of the area in question, i.e., has influenced others.

This restriction assures us that the text is not only unique within a certain language and cultural area but that the message's sphere of influence extends beyond the original audience, implying that the communication was important enough to be disseminated beyond the immediate and medial contexts.

a.4. Find a text that satisfies **a.1**, **a.2**, and **a.3** and influenced the mystical language of other mystics. This further restriction suggests the emergence of a community of mystic sign-interpreters.

Mysticological Constraints

These limitations point to a canonical text. Here, direct experience may fade into the background in favor of speculative dimensions.

b.1 Find a text written for a community of people known *to seek out mysticism as an experience*. A text written specifically for a mystical experience auditorium is likely to delve more deeply into the practical characteristics of mysticism as an experience than a theoretical text.

b.2 Find a text that satisfies **b.1** and clearly also contains *educational dimensions*. The educational relationship implies an asymmetry striving for symmetry, which implies that this transition must also be the object of the text. This transition will tell us something about the difference between mystical and non-mystical knowledge manipulation, which, in a critical phase, will contribute to a further specification of our understanding of post-rational cognitive stages. As will become clear, Beatrice of Nazareth's treatise, *ther 7M*, meets *all the criteria*.

§ 5 Critical Hermeneutics of Religious Texts

The preceding analysis allows us to specify what a critical hermeneutics of religious texts is. A hermeneutics of religious texts, in the broad sense, interprets writings in which human beings articulate relation to the Divine, the sacred, the hidden, the ultimate, salvation, transformation, ritual order, or spiritual authority. It asks how such texts speak, what they mean, how they function in a community, and how their symbols, doctrines, narratives, and practices cohere. A critical hermeneutics of religious texts does more. It subjects this interpretive activity to epistemological discipline. It does not allow doctrine, revelation, ecclesial authority, devotional familiarity, or present spiritual use to decide meaning in advance. Nor does it reduce religious language to mythology, psychology, ideology, or social function. It interprets religious texts under the critical distinction between the regulative horizon of meaning *y* and the relative reconstruction *y'* warranted by textual, linguistic, historical, generic, authorial, and contextual evidence (Gadamer, 1960 ; Hirsch, 1967 ; Ricoeur, 1976 ; Thiselton, 1992).

This difference is decisive. A non-critical hermeneutics of religious texts may remain confessional, devotional, traditional, phenomenological, historical, or literary. Each can disclose something. Confessional reading may preserve the internal grammar of faith ; devotional reading may preserve existential participation ; historical reading may reconstruct context ; literary reading may disclose form, voice, and symbol. Yet each becomes insufficient when it absolutizes its own register. The confessional reader may identify ecclesial doctrine with textual meaning ; the devotional reader may collapse meaning into spiritual use ; the historian may dissolve religious testimony into context ; the literary reader may treat symbolic form as if experience, ritual, and doctrine were secondary. Critical hermeneutics does not abolish these approaches. It orders them. It asks what each can legitimately contribute, where each exceeds its warrant, and how its claims can be corrected by the others (Ricoeur, 1976 ; Thiselton, 1992).

Religious texts require such discipline because they rarely operate as neutral descriptions. They confess, invoke, praise, command, narrate, symbolize, initiate, console, warn, transform, and authorize. They may contain doctrine, but they are not merely doctrine. They may preserve historical memory, but they are not merely history. They may express experience, but they are not merely psychological reports. They often function inside a community of practice, where language is bound to liturgy, prayer, discipline, moral formation, ritual performance, and shared expectation. To interpret such texts critically, one must therefore ask not only what a sentence says, but what kind of religious act the text performs within its language community (Gadamer, 1960 ; Ricoeur, 1976 ; Thiselton, 1992).

A critical hermeneutics of religious texts must therefore work on several levels at once. At the linguistic level, it asks what the words could mean within the relevant historical language. At the textual level, it asks how local meanings are organized by the movement of the whole. At the generic level, it asks whether the text is prayer, sermon, rule, vita, vision report, mystical instruction, doctrinal treatise, scriptural commentary, hymn, confession, or pedagogical sequence. At the contextual level, it asks how the text belongs to a speech community, institutional setting, ritual life, and broader historical world. At the authorial level, it asks how a singular voice uses inherited forms without being dissolved into them. These levels do not abolish circularity ; they regulate it (Hirsch, 1967 ; Ricoeur, 1976).

The religious character of such texts intensifies the problem of superstructure. Religious language is almost never merely private. It carries inherited symbols, scriptural echoes, doctrinal constraints, ritual associations, institutional permissions, and communal expectations. A text about God, Christ, grace, love, union, sin, or salvation speaks through forms already given before the individual author speaks. Yet the superstructure does not simply manufacture the religious or mystical experience it mediates. It gives that experience communicable form. The critical interpreter must therefore avoid two opposed mistakes : treating

religious testimony as immediate possession of the Divine, and treating religious testimony as nothing but the product of doctrine, institution, or language (Staal, 1975 ; McGinn, 1991).

For this reason, critical hermeneutics is especially attentive to the distinction between experience, report, interpretation, and authority. A religious text may report an experience, but the interpreter receives the report, not the experience itself. A community may authorize the report, but authorization does not by itself prove the experience. A doctrine may interpret the experience, but doctrine does not exhaust what was undergone. Conversely, no experience becomes historically available without some form of report, symbolization, memory, practice, or transmission. The task is therefore not to choose between experience and superstructure, but to determine how the former becomes available through the latter without being reduced to it (Staal, 1975 ; McGinn, 1991).

This also explains why objective interpretation, in the critical sense, is possible but limited. A reading of a religious text becomes more warranted when it is legitimate within the language, attentive to the whole, adequate to the genre, coherent in its reconstruction, sensitive to the author's singular voice, and open to correction by context and counter-reading. Such a reading is objective only in a critical sense : not because it possesses the meaning of the text as it is in itself, but because it is less arbitrary, better constrained, and more accountable than its rivals. Religious texts do not escape the norms of interpretation because they concern the Divine. Precisely because they concern the Divine, they require stricter demarcation between what is claimed, what is interpreted, what is warranted, and what remains beyond conceptual possession (Hirsch, 1967 ; Thiselton, 1992).

The critical evaluation of a religious text begins only after such a warranted interpretation has been attempted. Then the question shifts from meaning to significance. What can this religious text mean for us today ? How does its reconstructed meaning matter within a later inquiry ? What does it disclose about religious experience, mystical cognition, doctrinal mediation, institutional authority, or the transformation of consciousness ? Such significance must not replace meaning. It must remain answerable to the interpretation already established. Otherwise, the text becomes a mirror for the present reader. But if present significance is forbidden altogether, the text is turned into a museum object. Critical hermeneutics refuses both reductions (Hirsch, 1967 ; Ricoeur, 1976).

For the present study, this clarification is decisive. Beatrice's 7M is a religious text, but more specifically a mystical and pedagogical religious text. It does not merely state doctrines about love ; it gives ordered verbal form to a lived transformation of *minne*. It must therefore be read as a text whose language belongs to Middle Dutch, whose religious horizon is Cistercian and Christological, whose symbolism is bridal and affective, whose pedagogy is monastic, and whose governing object is mystical transformation. Critical hermeneutics of religious texts thus prepares the more specific hermeneutics of

mystical texts : the text is read critically as text, but always as a text through which religious experience seeks communicable form (Staal, 1975 ; McGinn, 1991 ; Thiselton, 1992).

1.4 Hermeneutics and Mysticismology

Up to this point, the term ‘mysticology’ has been used sparingly. It should now be defined more precisely. Mysticology is not a positive science that converts mystical experience into formal-empirical theory, nor a theology that receives mystical testimony as doctrine. It is the *critical* investigation of mystical experience, mystical cognition, and the symbolic, textual, practical, physiological, institutional, and metaphysical forms through which such experience becomes communicable. Its object is never the mystical experience as such in immediate possession, but the *mediated field* in which experience is reported, interpreted, disciplined, transmitted, and evaluated.

Staal’s *Exploring Mysticism* (1975) provides the first concrete methodological lever for the present inquiry. Its decisive value lies in the distinction between *substructure* and *superstructure*. The former names the claimed direct, lived dimension of mystical experience : what is undergone before it is doctrinally organized, ritually stabilized, or conceptually explained. The latter names the concepts, doctrines, symbols, practices, institutions, and linguistic forms through which that experience is interpreted, communicated, authorized, and transmitted. This distinction is indispensable for mysticology, but it must be critically guarded. The interpreter never possesses the substructure directly ; she approaches it only through superstructural traces. The task, therefore, is not to dissolve mystical experience into its superstructure, but to use the superstructure as the only available access to the experience it mediates.

Mysticology seeks to make mystical experience researchable without pretending to possess it immediately. The older formula *cognitio Dei experimentalis* (Bonaventure)⁴² may be retained as a theological marker for experiential knowledge of God, but in a critical register, it must be translated carefully : what becomes available to inquiry is the reported, remembered, practiced, embodied, and textualized claim to such experiential knowledge.

Mysticology also studies the mystically experiencing subject, but not as an isolated psychological individual. The mystic is approached as a subject of experience whose testimony is shaped by cognition, affect, discipline, body, language, doctrine, institution, and tradition. Following Staal, one may provisionally call a person a mystic if she has had mystical experiences over a period of time. Yet the distinction between a mystical episode and a mystical life must be preserved. A *single episode* may ground testimony ; a mystical life implies integration, discipline, repetition, transformation, and communicable formation.⁴³

§ 1 What is Mysticism ?

The present section, therefore, joins hermeneutics and mysticology. Hermeneutics asks how a mediated text can be interpreted responsibly ; mysticology asks what kind of experience, cognition, transformation, and superstructure is at stake when that text concerns mystical life. Their intersection is necessary for Beatrice. The 7M is not simply a theological treatise, not simply a psychological confession, and not simply a literary artifact. It is a mediated testimony of *minne* in which experience, doctrine, affect, pedagogy, Cistercian discipline, and vernacular language converge. Critical hermeneutics supplies the rules of interpretation ; mysticology specifies the distinctive object being interpreted : mystical experience as textually and institutionally mediated.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (modern academic consensus places the anonymous author's active period between 485 and 528 CE) gives the Christian tradition one of its decisive apophatic uses of *mystikos*. In the *Mystical Theology*, the term points to what is hidden, inaccessible, and approached only through negation, unknowing, and the stripping away of conceptual claims.⁴⁴ The 'radical other' is deemed a super-essential Trinity (Triarchy) but transcends the world as an ineffable, unknowable, dark, and hidden Oneness. The Dionysian line allows the mystic to speak of Divine manifestation while denying conceptual penetration of the Divine essence. Later Eastern theology will articulate this through the distinction between *essence* and *energies*, but the critical point is already clear : mystical experience may concern the Divine, yet it does not thereby become a conceptual possession of the Divine as such. In this Christian apophatic register, 'mystical' comes to mark the hiddenness and unknowability of the Divine essence. Later usage also extends the term to the lived experience of God's immanence.

In the present study, mysticism refers to exceptional experience of the Divine, the hidden, the ultimate, or the radically other, insofar as such experience is lived, interpreted, practiced, and expressed. Mysticology is the critical investigation of this field, with special attention to the relation between mystical experience and the superstructures that mediate, communicate, and sometimes constrain it.

A *refined participatory method* obliges us to delineate the boundaries of the 'research cell.' In light of the object of research — the distinctive mode of cognition and knowledge-production proper to mystics in general and to Beatrice of Nazareth in particular — the term 'mysticism' must be brought into close contact with its language community.

It should also be clear that mystical knowledge-production is not, by definition, identical with language production. Mystics who worked within a community and frequently employed language, however, constitute a fruitful object for hermeneutical investigation. Mystics and traditions marked by anti-verbal, aphoristic, apophatic, or paradoxical speech—Laozi, certain Desert Fathers, Zen *kōan* traditions—do not fall outside hermeneutics. They require a hermeneutic

adjusted to indirect discourse, silence, paradox, performative saying, and the deliberate frustration of conceptual grasp. What cannot be reconstructed from text alone is the lived practice that such discourse presupposes. Whether comparable forms of mystical cognition are present in them as well cannot be determined from text alone. Practice-based or participatory research may supply heuristic competence in such cases, but it does not abolish mediation. It may help the interpreter recognize spiritual exercises, attentional shifts, bodily disciplines, and transformations of self-relation ; it may not claim direct access to the historical mystic's experience. Non-verbal or deliberately anti-discursive mysticism emphasizes the non-discursive and the paradoxical (cf. the *kōan* or the tetralemma in Buddhism).⁴⁵

This definition also fixes the scope of the inquiry. Mysticism is not here treated as a universal essence floating above traditions, nor as a merely private state enclosed within the individual. It is approached as a *lived experience* entering communicable form. Mysticology asks how experience becomes report, how report becomes teaching, how teaching becomes tradition, and how tradition both preserves and constrains what it transmits.

§ 2 Structural Components

Whenever we speak of an 'experience,' we are obliged to observe the distinction between knower and known. A less operationally useful approach to mysticism is found in the religious phenomenologist Van der Leeuw (1938). He holds the view that the essential meaning of mysticism and religion is a mystery that reveals itself yet remains hidden. Others, like Russell (1918), see the presence of a contradiction in the superstructure as a hallmark of mysticism. Yet the critical study of mysticism is possible only if analogous critical rules apply to mystical and non-mystical experience alike : the object is distinctive, but the inquiry must not exempt itself from demarcation, evidence, argument, and correction.

Who experiences ?

This question cannot be answered by appealing to an empirical ego alone. If mysticology studies mystical experience and mystical cognition, then it must clarify the kind of subject capable of undergoing, remembering, ordering, and communicating such experience. The mystic is not merely a psychological individual who has unusual states, nor is she a disembodied transcendental point outside the body, memory, doctrine, language, and history. The subject of mystical experience must therefore be understood as a layered subject : formal, intentional, temporal, affective, psychically conditioned, embodied, and embedded in a lifeworld. This is why the genetico-cognitive model of *Regulae I* and the eightfold account of the transcendental ego in *Regulae II* are both needed.

In *Regulae I*, the seven modes of cognition were explained in terms of a genetico-cognitive model. Based on Piaget's studies, these modes were correlated with Kohlberg's moral development and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Here, the transcendental ego was formal and merely described as a community of relevant

sign-interpreters. The seven modes were organized into three stages : instinctual, rational, and intuitional (or meta-rational). The instinctual stage involves ante-rationality and is subdivided into mythical, pre-rational, and concrete operatoric. The rational stage encompasses the formal and critical modes of cognition. These five together define 'nominal' cognition. Based on transpersonal research, two more are added : creative and nondual cognition. It is these two that play a role in the experience of the 'higher states' of consciousness. In *Regulae II* (2025), the transcendental ego was 'filled in,' giving rise to eight aspects.

In *Regulae II*, the transcendental ego is no longer treated merely as the formal subject of knowledge, as it largely was in *Regulae I*, where it functioned as a sign-interpreter embedded in a communicative community. Because aesthetics concerns the observation and feeling of beauty, this formal subject must be given more *phenomenological thickness* : the subject of aesthetics does not merely validate propositions but observes, feels, attends, remembers, interprets, and expects intersubjective assent. This is why *Regulae II* reconstructs the transcendental ego as a *layered field* rather than as a single substance or hidden metaphysical entity. It is not an 'inner thing.' It is the *horizon of subjectivity* through which appearance, observation, feeling, meaning, and aesthetic judgment become possible.

The first four aspects establish the *basic architecture*.

First, the transcendental ego is Kant's *I Think* : the formal unity of apperception that must accompany representations and thereby secure the coherence of experience. Secondly, with Husserl, it becomes *intentionality* : not an enclosed point but a *living directedness* toward objects and horizons. Thirdly, it is a knowing presence : not only the *clarity that illuminates* an object, but also the *wider awareness* in which something can appear before being sharply defined. Fourthly, it is the hinge between perception and observation : perception is the normative placeholder for *necessary givenness*, whereas sensation is the unfolding of this givenness into the field of appearances ; observation then works within this field of sensate or mental appearing. This fourth aspect is decisive for aesthetics because perception only names the necessary givenness, whereas beauty belongs to the trained observation of the appearing aesthetic properties. Perception must not be qualified as raw, minimal, thin, early, or anything similar, because such adjectives treat it *as if it were a describable content within experience*. It is not a kind of appearance ; it is the normative placeholder for necessary givenness. Only sensation and observation can receive such phenomenological or methodological qualifications.

The next four aspects *deepen* this formal-intentional structure by showing that subjectivity is temporal, reflexive, psychic, and worldly.

Fifth, the transcendental ego is *temporality* and *historicity* : it is not a timeless point but a stream of primal impression, retention, and protention, sedimented by habits, memories, traditions, and inherited meanings. Sixth, it involves reflexive, non-intentional consciousness : not a thematic reflection upon an object, but the

tacit self-presence of consciousness, the silent *for-me* accompanying experience without turning itself into an object. Seventh, it is traversed by *psychic mechanism* : images, affects, automatisms, associations, and unconscious or pre-reflective forces condition experience in ways not fully transparent to intentional consciousness. Eighth, it is embedded in the *lifeworld* : the shared horizon of culture, language, history, embodiment, and intersubjectivity in which meaning is constituted and by which the constituting subject is itself shaped.

Taken together, these eight aspects prevent two opposed reductions.

Against formalism, the transcendental ego is not merely an empty Kantian function. Against psychologism, it is not merely the empirical personality, private biography, or stream of mental states. It is a layered horizon : formal as *I Think*, directed as intentionality, luminous as knowing presence, mediating as the hinge through which necessary givenness is not possessed as perception but appears only as sensation and can then be taken up by observation, temporal as retention and protention, reflexive as tacit self-presence, psychically conditioned by mechanisms that exceed transparency, and intersubjectively rooted in the lifeworld.

These eight aspects of the transcendental ego give the subjective scaffolding needed for critical hermeneutics. To interpret and criticize signs requires an observer, but not an arbitrary one ; it requires a layered subject capable of soft observation, temporal receptivity, reflexive presence, psychic depth, and lifeworld participation.

For Beatrice, this means that the experiencing subject is not simply ‘Beatrice the individual,’ nor an abstract soul outside history. It is the Cistercian woman formed by monastic rhythm, *lectio*, liturgy, obedience, bridal theology, Middle Dutch *minne*, and the institutional conditions under which female mystical authority could be preserved. Her experience must therefore be interpreted through the layered subject who undergoes, remembers, orders, and writes. This does not reduce her mystical life to context. It prevents the opposite error : treating her testimony as though it had escaped embodiment, language, discipline, psychic formation, and history.

What is experienced ?

The object of mystical experience was described by William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) as follows : “the feelings, acts & experiences of individual relation to whatever they may consider the divine.”⁴⁶ Vergote defines it as “the immediacy of a holy presence.”⁴⁷ Johnson speaks of the mystical experience as a confrontation with the “wholly other,”⁴⁸ the *totaliter aliter* of the Scholastics. It may be noted here that, according to Johnson, the object must always be understood personally, which contrasts with pantheistic or panentheistic superstructures. Indeed, think of impersonal determinations, such as “the ultimate,”⁴⁹ or “something or someone, going out above ordinary things.”⁵⁰ This going beyond ordinary things also gives rise to romantic determinations such

as “*Anschauung und Gefühle des Universums*.”⁵¹ Underhill (1970) writes of the experience as a sudden, intense, and joyful apprehension of God as immanent in the universe.⁵² It is the infusion of the sacred into the profane, an ‘immanent’ becoming or becoming public of the transcendent (hidden) principle, without losing transcendence. In the first stage, the totality is visualized, given sense through highly semantically charged signs. In the second, this totality is transcended, and with it all naming and conceptualization. In this sense (and probably this is what Van der Leeuw meant), the ‘heart’ or consummate station of mysticism entails the mystery, something that always remains hidden. Empirical factors, especially altered sensate organization and the relation between perception and sensation in ordinary-language usage, are found in Schachtel (1959)⁵³ and Deikman (1966).⁵⁴ With Mertens (1974), we read the claim that the concept of the universe in Schleiermacher’s determination must also be understood historically and socially.⁵⁵

These definitions do not settle the metaphysical status of the object of mystical experience. They map the language in which this object is reported : Divine presence, holy immediacy, the wholly other, the ultimate, immanent God, altered sensate organization, or an encounter with what exceeds ordinary experience. Mysticalogy must distinguish the report’s intentional object from the object as reality-as-such. The mystic may report Divine presence ; the interpreter may study how that reported presence is experienced, named, symbolized, embodied, remembered, practiced, and transmitted ; neither step gives conceptual possession of the Divine itself. The object of mystical experience is not denied, but critically located. It appears as the reported object of a transformed subject, mediated through language, doctrine, affect, practice, and tradition.

For Beatrice, the distinction between the reported intentional object of mystical experience and the object as reality-as-such is decisive. The object reported in the 7M is not a neutral religious experience in general, but *minne* : Holy Love as Divine, affective, Christological, pedagogical, and transformative. Yet *minne* must not be converted too quickly into a metaphysical substance, a psychological state, or a universal mystical essence. It is the intentional object and operative force of Beatrice’s mystical discourse, expressed through Middle Dutch language, Cistercian theology, bridal symbolism, monastic practice, and the vernacular ordering of experience. To ask what is experienced is not to seize Divine love as reality-as-such, but to ask how Divine love is reported, shaped, and made communicable within this mediated field, while preserving the distinction between the experience itself and the superstructure through which it becomes intelligible.

This distinction must be held without reduction. The superstructure does not eliminate the mystical experience ; it *mediates* it. Without language, doctrine, symbol, practice, memory, and communal recognition, the experience could not become text, teaching, or transmissible knowledge. Yet the fact that experience becomes communicable only through such forms does *not* mean that it is merely

produced by them. The critical task is double : to prevent the substructure from being naively treated as *unmediated possession* of the Divine, and to prevent the superstructure from *swallowing the experience* it interprets. For Beatrice, *minne* must be read precisely in this tension : as *lived mystical transformation* entering language, not as language replacing transformation.

This priority must remain explicit throughout the study. Superstructures are investigated only because mystical experience cannot otherwise be approached, named, compared, or interpreted with discipline ; they are not the final object of inquiry. The aim is *not* to become lost in doctrinal, institutional, linguistic, or symbolic systems for their own sake, but to use them as necessary hermeneutical instruments for returning to the *lived transformation they mediate*. In Beatrice, therefore, the decisive question is not primarily how Cistercian theology, bridal symbolism, or Middle Dutch *minne* function as systems, but how they make a concrete mystical experience of *minne* communicable without reducing it to those systems. The superstructure is indispensable as access ; it is secondary as object.

§ 3 Methodology

Staal rightly rejects the philosophy of language and linguistics as overarching disciplines for the study of mysticism. Yet this does not make them irrelevant. For a text such as Beatrice's 7M, philology and language remain indispensable ; they simply cannot explain the whole field of mystical experience by themselves.⁵⁶ Theological approaches are indispensable when mystical experience is expressed in doctrinal language, but in their confessional form, they may lapse into apologetics or polemic. They often protect the superstructure before examining the experience it claims to mediate. This becomes especially clear in cases where mystical experience is associated with biochemical induction. The polemics surrounding psychedelic mysticism (the use of entheogens to induce altered states of consciousness) abundantly demonstrate the difference between 'experience' (substructure) and its 'conceptualization' (superstructure).⁵⁷

The method must therefore be integrative without becoming syncretic. Philology, theology, phenomenology, sociology, psychology, physiology, and participatory practice can each illuminate part of the field, but none may claim sovereign authority over the whole. The critical task is to place each discipline in its proper register : philology reads the text ; theology clarifies doctrinal grammar ; phenomenology describes appearance and testimony ; sociology maps institutions and transmission ; psychology and physiology clarify affective, cognitive, and bodily conditions ; participatory familiarity may supply heuristic competence. Mysticism coordinates these registers without allowing any one of them to absorb mystical experience into its own explanatory scheme.

For example, some Christian authors pay little attention to psychedelic experience because they hold that an experience not grounded in faith, virtue, and ethical growth cannot count as an authentic experience of the Divine ; for some, it may even appear as demonic deception.

“Thus deceived come all those who wish to be redeemed from themselves by, for example, surrendering to the hot coat of vitalism, or by floating up in a psychedelic balloon, or by trying to sink into the ‘utter void’ ...”⁵⁸ Staal polemically diagnoses much Western theological treatment of mysticism as dogmatic, especially where doctrinal criteria decide in advance which experiences can count as authentic.⁵⁹

Thus, Augustine’s voluntaristic interiority method (which differs from the intellectual *conversio* peculiar to neo-Platonic thinkers) obliges him to conceive of the mystical experience as a relationship between God and a totally powerless human, doomed to supplication.⁶⁰ As Kolakowski depicts it, Augustine’s writings reveal a “cry for help.”⁶¹ The trio of guilt, penance, and humiliation fuels the Christian hope that God will compassionately extend His hand.

The question is not whether Christian humility is reducible to masochism. It is whether certain Christian superstructures of body-hatred, sexual repression, guilt, penance, abasement, and supplication can intensify forms of self-negation that later require critical examination.⁶²

Staal also criticizes phenomenological and sociological approaches, but their limits must be stated precisely. Phenomenology can describe structures of appearance and testimony, but may leave the question of validity underdeveloped. He concludes that religious phenomenology is always unsatisfactory and inadequate, “because it does not examine the validity of the phenomena being studied” and is often incorrect “due to erroneous, implicit value judgments.”⁶³

Sociology can map communities, institutions, authority, transmission, social practice, and patterns of interaction — deserts, caves, monasteries, beguinages, pilgrimages, and mendicant forms of life. This is indispensable for studying the superstructure of mysticism, but it may miss the phenomenon of interiorization. It explains the social organization of mystical life more readily than the transformation of consciousness mystics themselves regard as central.

Psychological and physiological approaches are likewise indispensable but insufficient. They can illuminate affect, dissociation, attention, bodily discipline, neural correlates, stress, fasting, pain, rhythm, and altered states. They cannot, by themselves, determine the meaning, truth-status, or spiritual structure of the mystical report.

In the 1960s, the EEG (electroencephalogram) was used to determine whether the physiological profiles of persons engaged in ‘spiritual exercises’ differed significantly from those of ordinary subjects.⁶⁴ It was found that meditation indeed creates a typical physiological complex (different brain patterns, skin resistance, heart rate, breathing, blood sugar levels, etc.). It was tempting to correlate higher states of consciousness with these physiological parameters.⁶⁵

Yet there was a difficulty. One could never infer anything about the content and structure of the state of consciousness solely from physiology. More information was needed, namely, the structure of subjectivity. However, the physiological

method could shed light on certain meditative practices. For example, flagellation should not be interpreted solely in terms of guilt or Freudian masochism. It may also be studied physiologically as a practice involving pain, stress, exhaustion, endorphin response, altered attention, and changes in bodily self-relation. Yet even such a physiological explanation remains partial. It may clarify the conditions under which consciousness is altered ; it does not determine the mystical meaning assigned to the practice.⁶⁶

Since “many mystics are rather imprecise with their language and not interested in texts,”⁶⁷ Beatrice of Nazareth offers the opposite case : a communicative mystic concerned with orderly, didactic discourse.

To study her work, mysticology must adapt the general program of critical hermeneutics to this specific object : a vernacular pedagogy of *minne* in which mystical experience, cognition, and instruction become textually communicable.

For this reason, Beatrice is an especially strong object for a critical hermeneutics joined to mysticology. She is not a silent mystic whose experience has vanished behind apophysis, nor merely a visionary whose images resist order. She is a communicative mystic who gives form to *minne* in an ordered, didactic, vernacular sequence.

Her text allows the interpreter to study mystical cognition at the intersection of experience, language, pedagogy, doctrine, affect, and institutional mediation. The task is not to reduce her *minne* to physiology, psychology, theology, or literary form, but to ask how these registers cooperate in making mystical experience communicable.

Critical hermeneutics supplies the discipline of reading ; mysticology supplies the discipline of approaching the mystical object without inflation or reduction. This is the methodological point at which hermeneutics and mysticology meet: the text is read as a text, but as one whose governing object is lived mystical transformation.

The epistemological architecture is now in place.

The inquiry can therefore turn to the Christian superstructures through which later mystics, including Beatrice, received the language, authority, symbols, and limits that made Divine experience intelligible.

Notes

1. Kunneman, H. : *Rondom Habermas*, 1985, pp. 32-39.
Habermas, J. : *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1984, pp. 64-72.
Koningsveld, H. and Mertens, J. : *Communicative and Strategic Acting*, 1986.
2. Kunneman, H. : *Op.cit.*, pp. 98-99 and 106.
3. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 163.

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4. Habermas, J. : *Wahrheitstheorien*, in : Fahrenbach, W. : *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion : Festschrift für Walter Schulz*, 1973, pp. 211-265.
 5. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 164.
 6. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 164.
 7. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 165.
 8. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 165.
 9. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 165.
 10. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 167. Central to this is not healing, a traditional psychoanalytic position, but growth, i.e., a change in one's own identity, which allows for more authentic, creative self-experience and self-expression.
 11. Kunneman, H. : *Ibidem*, p. 167.
 12. Harkianakis, S. : *Mysticism : The Direct Experience of the Divine*, 1999.
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 13. Staal, F. : *Superstructures*, in : Woods, R. : *Understanding Mysticism*, 1980, pp. 93-108.
 14. Hirsch, E.D. : *Validity in Interpretation*, 1967, p. 201.
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 - Ricœur, P. : *The Model of the Text : Meaningful Action Considered as Text*, 1971, pp. 529-555.
 - Searle, J.R. : *Speech Acts : An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 1970.
 15. "Second Canon. The meaning of every word in a given passage must be determined by its coexistence with the words surrounding it." – Bowie, A. : *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, 1988.
 16. Gadamer, G.F. : *Op.cit.*, p. 373.
 17. "Man speaks only as he responds to language. Language speaks. Its speaking speaks for us in what has been spoken." – Heidegger, M. : *Op.cit.*, 1959, p. 10.
 18. Hirsch, E.D. : *Op.cit.*, p. 255.

19. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 256.
20. Knorr-Cetina, K.D. : *The manufacture of knowledge : An essay on the constructivist and contextual nature of science*, 1981, pp. 138-139.
21. Hirsch, E.D. : *Op.cit.*, p. 203.
22. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 203.
23. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, pp. 203-204.
24. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 180.
25. Hirsch, E.D. : *Objective Interpretation*, in Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 236.
26. Saussure, F. de : *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1931.
27. Hirsch, E.D. : *Op.cit.*, p. 236, my italics.
28. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 236.
29. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 237.
30. This concept comes from Husserl : “horizon (...) may be defined as a system of typical expectation and probabilities (...) derived from the explicit meanings present to consciousness.” – Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 221.
31. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 237.
32. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 237.
33. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 238, my italics.
34. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 238.
35. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 238.
36. Hirsch, E.D. : *Ibidem*, p. 238.
37. Staal, F. : *Het wetenschappelijk onderzoek van de mystiek*, 1978, p. 164.
38. In this regard, Staal asserts the following :
 1. The study of mysticism must be done first of all from a critical experimental standpoint (p. 157).
 2. This position implies a receptivity, meaning that “A field worker who wants to learn the language of some tribe must make the decision when to stop listening, gathering information, asking questions, and conducting interviews with informants, to postulate grammatical rules.” (p. 157)
 3. The study of the internal, subjective aspects of mysticism implies that one possesses “some of this kind of knowledge” as a researcher, since otherwise one would proceed like a blind person investigating eyesight (p. 150).
 4. The external factors (behavior, physiology, etc.) can be examined by non-mystics, though.

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39. Hirsch, E.D. : *Op.cit.*, p. 210.
40. Swiggers, P. : *Frege's On Meaning and Reference*, 1984.
41. Staal, F. : *On sense and nonsense in philosophy, religion, and science*, 1986, p. 83, 91, and 99.
- Staal, F. : *Het wetenschappelijk onderzoek van de mystiek*, 1978.
42. Bonaventure, G. : *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book III, Dist. 35, Q.1.
43. Staal, F. : *Ibidem*, 1978, pp. 37-39 and p. 49.
43. Areopagita, D. : *Pseudo-Dionysius : The Complete Works*, 1987.
44. "The religious meaning of a thing is that which no other wider or deeper meaning can follow. It is the meaning of everything. It is the last word. This meaning is never understood ; this word is never uttered. Both are always beyond us. The last meaning is a mystery, which is always revealed anew and yet always remains hidden." – Waardenburg, J.D.J. : *L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident*, 1961, p. 318, n° 3.
- In this regard, Staal notes :
- "In general, irrational assertions come precisely from the pens of theologians and philosophers and not mystics. (...) Mystics are not interested in doctrines."– Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, p. 35.
45. That thus mysticism and logic should be contrasted can be found in : Russell, B. : *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London, 1918, and "This has created even more confusion." – Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, p. 67.
46. James, W. : *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1982, p. 31.
47. Vergote, A. : *Psychology of Religion*, 1967, p. 43.
48. Johnson, P.E. : *Psychology of Religion*, 1975, pp. 57 and 69.
49. Boos-Nunning, K. : *Dimensionen der Religiosität*, 1972, p. 46.
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50. Clark, W. : *Chemical Ecstasy. Psychedelic drugs and religion*, 1969, p. 22.
51. Mertens, H. : *Religion as experience of reality*, 1974, p. 128.
52. Underhill, E. : *Mysticism. A study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness*, 1970, pp. 111-113.
53. Schachtel, E.G. : *Metamorphosis*, 1959.
54. Deikman, A. : *De-automatization and the mystic experience*, 1966.
55. Mertens, H. : *Art.cit.*, p. 128.

56. Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, 1986, pp. 30-40.
57. Félice, de, Ph. : *Poisons Sacrés*, 1936.
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58. Mommaers, P. : *What is mysticism ?*, 1977, p. 28.
59. Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, 1978, pp. 30-43.
60. Kolakowski, L. : *Main Currents of Marxism*, 1978, p. 18.
61. Kolakowski, L. : *Ibidem*, p. 18.
62. Tannahill, R. : *De Tweede Drijfveer : Geschiedenis van de Sexualiteit*, 1982, p. 143 and pp. 341-345.
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63. Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, 1978, p. 113.
64. Staal, F. : *Ibidem*, p. 126.
65. Vroon, P. : *Consciousness, hersenen en gedrag*, 1976, chapter 5.
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66. Heigl, P. : *Op.cit.*, 1983.

67. Staal, F. : *Op.cit.*, 1978, p. 9.